

TONIC

The Journal of the
ROBERT SIMPSON SOCIETY

Volume 3, No.2

Spring 1988

EDITORIAL	JCS	1
SUMMER SCHOOL		3
THE SIXTH SYMPHONY	RS	4
THE SEVENTH SYMPHONY	RS	5
THE NINTH SYMPHONY	Lionel Pike	7
AN EXPRESSION OF ENERGY ..	Stephen Johnson	14
NEW SIMPSON MASTERWORK	Eric Wilson	17
RECORD REVIEWS		20
SIMPSON ANTAGONISTES		22

TONIC ISSN 0260-7425
Published by the Robert Simpson Society

All opinions expressed in signed contributions to TONIC belong to the writers concerned, and in no way reflect the policy of the Society or of its Officers. Copyright in all signed contributions to TONIC belongs to the writers concerned.

TONIC is issued free to members of the Robert Simpson Society. Extra copies, back numbers and non-members copies are available at 50p each plus postage. All proceeds from such sales will go into the Society's Projects Fund. All correspondence concerning TONIC should be sent to the Editor.

THE ROBERT SIMPSON SOCIETY

Membership rates per annum

1988 - Individual	£7 (\$10)	Joint	£10 (\$15)	Under 25	£4 (\$6)
1989 - Individual	£8 (\$16)	Joint	£12 (\$24)	Under 25	£4 (\$6)

Application for membership and other enquiries should be sent to John and Sylvia Brooks, 3 Engel Park. LONDON NW7 2HE

EDITORIAL

Christine Skinner

Once more TONIC has managed to astound the committee by being beset with problems. Not least among these has been Martin Anderson's move to Paris, effectively leaving the ship in my rather inexperienced hands. We certainly miss his jovial and provocative contributions at meetings and concerts, and wish him well in his new post.

Much has happened since the last edition went to press: perhaps the most significant is the issue of no fewer than two new records, with another waiting in the wings. (Many thanks to all those who contributed so generously to the recording fund.) All the recordings are on the Hyperion label and details can be found on p. 6 with reviews on p.20. The bad news for those who have not yet invested in CD equipment is that the black disc, or LP, seems to be becoming obsolete. Indeed all the new releases are available on CD or cassette only; and so some of us are saving hard!

As you will perceive, this edition has been designed to provide background reading for some of the recordings which are now available. This will continue in the Autumn edition with Stephen Johnson's long-promised article on the Ninth Symphony (first published in *The Musical Times* in April 1987), and Lionel Pike's discussion of the Eighth Quartet. (This seems a good opportunity to remind members that the Society can provide some scores and recordings at discount prices: details are available from John and Sylvia Brooks.)

There has been a bumper crop of live performances recently, with the symphonies featuring very prominently. On 2nd September 1987 the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Vernon Handley, performed the Sixth and Seventh Symphonies at a BBC Invitation Concert prior to recording them later that week; the London premiere of the Seventh Symphony was given on 24th April 1988 by the Thames Sinfonia, conducted by Matthew Taylor (an RSS member); and Saturday 14th May 1988 saw a performance of the Fifth Symphony by the Y.M.S.O. under James Blair at St. John's Smith Square.

In the realm of Chamber Music we have good reason to be grateful to the Coull String Quartet who champion RS's music, not only throughout Britain, but also on their travels abroad. At Newsted Abbey, on 6th June 1988, they gave the first performance of the Twelfth Quartet. (A review of this concert will appear in the next TONIC.) Two other first performances

recently have been in very different genres. Firstly, on 27th February 1988, at Warwick Arts Centre, the Desford Colliery Dowty Band premiered the *Introduction and Allegro on a Bass* by Max Reger. This was later recorded and broadcast by the BBC, and is discussed in the article by Eric Wilson on p.17. Then on Monday 25th April Christopher Bowers-Broadbent gave the first performance of the fiendishly difficult organ piece *Eppur si muove*, which was broadcast live on Radio 3. It is marvellous that there have been so many performances: long may they continue!

Having enjoyed a feast of performances the diary for the coming months looks decidedly bare. As yet only the first performance of the String Quintet at St. John's Smith Square on April 17th 1989 is fixed (Coull Quartet plus one!). However, with the prospect of a broadcast of the String Trio (1987) from Bristol; the Third Quartet by the Delme; and possible repeats of the symphonies we cannot grumble.

RS is at the moment busy with the Tenth Symphony, which is to be dedicated to Vernon Handley. The first movement, which is an Allegro, is finished, and the Scherzo is well on its way. (Apparently this latter is all *pianissimo*!) In October he will be amongst us again, lecturing on *Fidelio* at Great Missenden; and returning in February for Schubert's Piano Sonatas. Details can be found on p.3.

Sadly our hard working Secretaries, John and Sylvia Brooks gave notice at the AGM that they felt they would have to step down from their posts in the near future. Without their energy and efficiency you would not receive this, or any other missive from the Society, and it goes without saying that we are immensely grateful for the dedication, determination, and foresight that they contribute - not to mention the long hours and sleepless nights! Obviously it would be better if there were a good overlap period so that the new incumbent(s) could get to grips with the detailed workings of the RSS. John and Sylvia are a tremendous team and it would be a great relief to know that all their dedicated hard work will be safeguarded for the future. Please contact them direct for further information.

Members may be interested to know that Graham Melville-Mason, one of our Committee Members, has been elected Chairman of the Dvorak Society. We offer our congratulations to him, and also to our own Chairman, Lionel Pike, on his election as Dean of the Faculty of Music at London University.

Finally, if you have not yet ordered your copy of the RSS Cookbook *The Four Seasons* - with some interesting Simpsonic contributions which are definitely NOT culinary - please send your order direct to me in Warwick, enclosing a cheque (payable to the Robert Simpson Society) for £1.50 per book, including post & packing. Orders for Christmas 1988 must be received by 24th October.

SUMMER SCHOOL

Next Summer RS has kindly offered to hold a music summer school for members, lasting a week or more, at his home in Co. Kerry. Although lunch would be provided through a communal fund, accommodation will have to be in local hotels, guest houses or self-catering cottages. Obviously this area of Ireland is a great tourist attraction, and so accommodation for next year is already booking up quickly - not to mention the Simpsons' diary! At the moment the proposed month is September, but this can be altered if unsuitable. Would any members who are interested please get in touch with the Secretaries as soon as possible, and certainly before 31st July 1988, stating: (a) Months available (Please choose from July, August, September, October) (b) Length of time preferred; and (c) type of accommodation required i.e. Hotel, Guest House, Self-catering Cottage.

Missenden Abbey Weekends



OCTOBER 7th - 9th 1988

Beethoven *Fidelio* - Dr. Robert Simpson

FEBRUARY 17th - 19th 1989

Schubert's Piano Sonatas - Dr. Robert Simpson

FOR FURTHER DETAILS PLEASE TELEPHONE 02406 4037 OR WRITE TO
MISSENDEN ABBEY WEEKENDS, MISSENDEN ABBEY, GREAT MISSENDEN,
BUCKS. HP16 0BD

THE SIXTH SYMPHONY (1977)

Robert Simpson

This symphony, in one large movement, was commissioned by the London Philharmonic Orchestra with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain. Its character is the result of a suggestion by its dedicatee, the distinguished gynaecologist Ian Craft, who proposed a symphony that might be compared to the growth of a living creature from a fertilised germ. Such an idea is so close to the essence of one kind of symphonic music that there is no need for programmatic description; the growth of the music should be enough. Since the creature that made the symphony passes for a member of the species, we may as well suppose (and that was Professor Craft's optimistic notion) that its subject is human - but since it was composed without any very clear recollection of the earliest stages it is supposed to depict, it could presumably apply equally to almost any form of life. About halfway through the symphony there is a great upheaval we might liken to a kind of birth, contractions and all, repeated spasms at shortening frequency culminating in a sense of release. So perhaps we might say the creature is born alive and active after a period of gestation - viviparous rather than oviparous! The laying (or the hatching) of an egg cannot be ruled out entirely, though an egg of such apparent proportions would probably have inconvenienced a brontosaurus.

Naturally enough the basic germ matter is found at the beginning. It is of course two germs, and they combine. The motile one (made mainly of minor thirds - second violins) swims towards the static one, a little cluster of notes spanning a major third (strings - three notes sounding together) with two extra notes entering a fourth either side of it (first bass clarinet, then oboe). This group is really a succession of fifths coiled in on itself (like a DNA molecule perhaps? - it certainly results in many special differentiations as the cell proliferates). Muted horns add one cell to the other. Then everything slowly grows, and anything not strictly evolved from the basic fertilised cell may be regarded as nourishment quickly absorbed. You ARE what you eat! One of the remarkable qualities of life is the enormous force in its imperceptible growth - we are all familiar with the way a growing tree can split a rock. So this 'antenatal' part of the symphony has something formidable in it, until the central crisis.

After that, we could say, the conscious, mobile individual emerges. It is not as yet fully formed; as an infant it is at first dependent - so the next stage is gentle, uncertain, exploratory. But there is an accelerating gain in freedom and

energy, both physical and mental, and the symphony ends in full vigour - in the prime of life, so to speak, when at length a clear tonality is evolved (D). This pseudo-programme is no more than an account of the music itself. Nielsen acutely remarked that music is 'the sound of life'; here is an attempt to take him at his word, without abandoning for illustration's sake the purely musical integrity he valued above all things.

THE SEVENTH SYMPHONY (1977)

Robert Simpson

The one-movement Seventh Symphony is scored for the same classical orchestra as the Second: that is the instrumentation, for example, of Haydn's last symphony, though a greater weight of strings is needed to balance some rather forcible wind and timpani writing. It was composed between June and October 1977 and is dedicated to Hans and Milein Keller.

The slow opening section begins with an assertive unison bass theme; there is sustained inner tension, with moments of stillness. This is not an introduction. After some time it moves into a fast tempo that eventually drives into a high-powered fugato, keeping up a fortissimo for several minutes. This reaches a tense climax that gives way to a new slow phase, marked Adagio, a period of much quiet, with two brief intensifications. At length a muttering rhythm brings about a new Allegro, in which the motives undergo more change; this is a finale, but its end is perhaps unexpected - a fierce storm abates abruptly at its height, scattered fragments vanish, and nothing but a bare mezzo piano C# stares us in the face.

For anyone wishing to know, it can be added that the symphony is an intense and concentrated study of the intervals contained in the opening unison bass theme. The first interval to be heard is a straightforward rising fifth. The remaining notes of the theme, if played crudely together, would form an ugly dissonance of five adjacent semitones. But this is treated as consisting of a major third enclosing a major second, both enclosing a central note; these intervals can be spread in many ways to produce a considerable variety of harmonic effects. They are not treated as a 'cluster' with the central note some kind of bogus 'tonic'. The important fact for the ear is that any musical idea will produce resonances which depend on the intervals it contains. This is the origin of everything in this work.

hyperion

HYPERION RECORDS LTD 107 THE ENGINE HOUSE, 49 GREENWICH HIGH ROAD, LONDON SE10 8JL
Correspondence: PO BOX 25, LONDON SE9 1AX
Telephone 01-692 5500 Telex 892650

ROBERT SIMPSON
on record

Symphony No 6 Symphony No 7
ROYAL LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
VERNON HANDLEY conductor
CD CDA66280 Cassette KA66280

"Surely about the most imposing symphonic cycle in progress by
any living composer" (*The Independent*)

String Quartet No 7 String Quartet No 8
DELME STRING QUARTET
LP A66117

String Quartet No 9
DELME STRING QUARTET
LP A66127

String Quartet No 10 String Quartet No 11
COULL STRING QUARTET
CD CDA66225 Cassette KA66225
"Superbly focused readings, recorded with utmost presence"
(*The Independent*)

coming soon

Symphony No 9
BOURNEMOUTH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
VERNON HANDLEY conductor
CD CDA66299 Cassette KA66299

from Britain's Brightest Record Label

THE NINTH SYMPHONY (1985-6).

Lionel Pike'

This Symphony, commissioned by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain and first performed by them on April 8th 1987 under Vernon Handley, is dedicated to the composer's wife Angela. While being true to himself, RS acknowledges the influence on it of several other composers with whom he has had a lifelong sympathy.

Throughout his life Simpson has been fascinated by two aspects of the music of the great Viennese classical composers: their handling of large-scale tonality, and their handling of rhythm. It has been his abiding ambition to recapture the sense of energy that Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven produced, and which has been largely lost since then. He wanted, for example, to discover what makes a Beethoven Adagio or Scherzo, or a Haydn Finale, so utterly characteristic rhythmically. As a means of exploring this he set himself various tasks. He wrote his First Symphony, for example, with a basic pulse throughout, upon which contrasting tempi are achieved by varying the pace of thought. This method is found in subsequent works, for example the second, seventh and eleventh string quartets, the second movement of the Third Symphony, and most of the Sixth. In these works tonality as it is generally understood is a potent force. In his later works Simpson has kept faith with the tonal resonances of intervals without adhering to conventional tonality. In the Ninth Symphony, for example, written thirty-five years after No. 1, no conventional 'key' can be discerned, but there is always a clear harmonic organisation, and again a single pulse pervades the whole. This work, much bigger than his First Symphony, is the largest piece ever written in a single tempo, taking nearly 50 minutes to perform. The pulse of $d = c.60$ is set at the beginning ($\frac{3}{2}$ eventually becoming $\frac{2}{2}$); it changes to $d = c.120$ for the Scherzo (in $\frac{3}{4}$) and returns to $d = c.60$ ($\frac{3}{2}$) for the end. This underlying pulse is, perhaps, 'the sound of life' in the sense of Nielsen's famous phrase. The work is continuous, though it falls basically into two large phases, each subdivided:

1. A long stretch of music in the manner of a chorale prelude, gradually gathering energy for the scherzo that forms its apex. The scherzo itself creates another climax, but cannot be thought of as a separate movement.

2. An Adagio, at first fugal, then building up to a great climax with a set of variations on a palindrome, followed by a peaceful coda.

Important features of the Symphony also derive from one of Simpson's other abiding interests: the music of J.S. Bach. Fugue is one of Bach's most characteristic devices: and, as often in Simpson's music, fugue and fugato play a part. In this Ninth Symphony, following its use in the immediately preceding organ work *Eppur si muove*, the composer has also used another characteristic Bach form, the chorale prelude. One of the fascinating things about this form is the double time-scale that exists between the slow progress of the chorale tune and the more agile counterpoint that enshrines it: the interconnection between the two poses a problem for a composer - both must maintain the hearer's interest and have sufficient feeling of 'moving onwards' to maintain that interest, and neither must completely swamp the other by usurping the foreground. The vast opening chorus of Bach's St Matthew Passion and the setting of *O Mensch beweine* at the end of Part 1 illustrate this perfectly, and both in addition have an epic grandeur that Simpson matches in this Symphony. Moreover, in some of the mature chorale preludes Bach derives his accompanying material from the chorale tune. Simpson, reversing this process, derives his long-note 'chorale' of the opening section of this symphony from the material of its accompaniment, which - like every note in the work - in turn grows logically from the first sound heard.

The symphony opens with a pedal. This represents the lowest plane of the various types of movement possible, though it is true that a semblance of motion is often given to the pedals in this work by enlivening them with fast repeated notes. The feeling of laying out an anchor that pedals give is worth remembering, and worth comparing with the static effect that is later occasionally produced by *ostinati* (whether of long or short note-values). There are no changes of pulse in the symphony: but this does not mean that there are no 'static' moments: the interaction of the static, the slow motion and the fast (with the various stages in between) is the essence of Simpson's handling of movement here.

The held opening D# pedal in the double basses, soon repeated in triplets that are much later to become the basic three-crotchets-in-a-bar pulse of the scherzo, is quietly surrounded by its two nearest neighbours, the semitones above and below it. The resulting shape, D#-D natural-E, is the germ from which everything in the Symphony grows (see 'a' in the Example below). For instance, this shape gives rise to a particular feature of the language of the Ninth Symphony - central pedals to which are added, like barnacles

to a ship's hull, statements of the notes a semitone on either side of it.

Example.

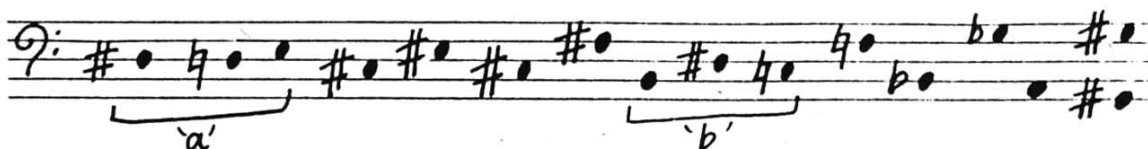


Figure 'a' is the start of a 'wedge' shape, a process of fanning outwards from a central point: often the initial note remains as a central pedal. As in Bach's 'Wedge' fugue, the simultaneous upward and downward lines, which encompass ever widening intervals like a fan opening, culminates eventually in an octave. In the first statement this octave is on G#, and by the time it has been reached, several important developments have occurred. Firstly, the upper part has risen by a fourth while the lower has dropped a fifth. Fifths and fourths are inversions of each other, and they - particularly the fourth - play a large part in the symphony. For instance, in the opening paragraph this 'wedge' already starts growing into new shapes, rising each time by a fourth with increased tension until all twelve pitches have been traversed; then the original D# is recovered. There are also clear beginnings of rising and falling scales that become important later. Both scales 'break back' once instead of maintaining a steady direction: the rising scale does this by using the intervals semitone twice (D#-E-F#; F#-G#-G#): the notes which straddle this 'break-back' (E-F#-F#) are an inversion of 'a'. The descending line, too, has a break-back that involves two statements of 'a', one in reversion (C#-B-C#), overlapping with one in inversion (B-C-B#). Thirdly, at 'b' in the example the implied harmony of a major third turning into a minor one by the process of shifting the bass up a semitone is an element of which much use is made.

The handling of motion and the development of thematic material from a tiny cell may sound dry and academic when expressed in prose: it is far from that in effect. One might compare Brahms's processes at the start of his Fourth Symphony: in both there are elements loosely connected with the passacaglia, and both composers give an inexorable sense of forward motion which is partly the result of handling rhythm, partly the result of the background of passacaglia, but also partly the result of the fascinating and subtle variations which both composers - each with a fertile contrapuntal mind - devise. In Simpson's case it results also from the steady progress of the planes of fourths. The result is akin to the gradual opening of the first bloom in a great garden which by gradual degrees blossoms entirely.

Against this steady unfolding of musical material, which includes the first of several fugatos in the Symphony, the brass announce the 'chorale' in long notes; each phrase of the chorale enters a fourth higher (or a fifth lower) than its predecessor. The brass have, however, been forestalled by the lower strings, who have already stated the chorale material a fourth below the first brass entry. There is a combination here of epic grandeur of the Bach kind and logical symphonic growth of the type we associate with Beethoven, and it reminds one strongly of the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony: there, too, one feels the influence of the Bach of the opening of the St Matthew Passion. That same epic grandeur can also be found in Bruckner, another of Simpson's abiding loves; indeed, towards the end of the opening chorale prelude he pays conscious homage by alluding to (not quoting!) the grand passage at letter F in all versions of the first movement of Bruckner's Third Symphony. The statements of the chorale follow the pattern of the opening 'wedges' in that they continue to enter at the fourth and give every sign that they will progress round the entire harmonic circle: but, in fact, only 11 notes of the scale are traversed, leaving the music short of the one last statement that would close the circle. It is eventually closed by an appearance of the chorale material (though at a somewhat faster speed) towards the end of the scherzo.

The monolithic size of this chorale prelude, with the in-built conflict of its double time-scale and the pent-up energy that it amasses, results in an extraordinary degree of tension and a great climax, which explodes into a fast scherzo whose power and speed place it in the line of the great Beethoven scherzi. The essence of this section is an outbreak of rampant energy, long pent-up, and the events fly by with exhilarating rapidity in an orchestral *tour de force*. The material is still based on the opening 'wedge'; specifically, chords are built up (or rather, significantly, they are built down) by descending fourths: this downward building reverses a process of building chords up by fourths which had happened soon after the start of the chorale prelude. Eventually all twelve notes are sounding, and the resulting chords are contrasted strongly with straightforward diatonic triads in the horns and trumpets. The 'wedge' shape is then used on many planes, which reverse the direction taken by the opening chorale prelude in that they always descend by a fourth: the central pitch is sustained each time so that a chord is built gradually as each new plane of fourths is added. Each new note sets off a new tonal plane for a fresh statement of the 'wedge' shape, and each is a bar shorter than its predecessor, so giving a sense of unstoppable forward motion: the process continues until all twelve notes are sounding. The headlong rush caused by missing out one bar with each fresh start increases the excitement. The 'wedge' formation is

omnipresent, and this accounts for the consistency of the movement: the rapidity of events makes detailed description impossible in a note such as this.

The chords of superimposed fourths, though in very long notes, have been static, and thus act like a multiple pedal, giving no indication of pulse. By contrast, the return to the 'long-note' chorale writing recalls the pace of the first section, and makes it possible for the mind to relate the two. We might compare the processes to the foreground and background of a painting: in the chorale prelude the slow motion fills the foreground, with fast triplets in the background, while in the scherzo the fast triplets take over the foreground; but the return of lines of the chorale begins to change the focus yet again. The process had been used by Sibelius in his Fifth Symphony, a work universally admired for its command of movement: Sibelius is another of those composers who have meant much to Robert Simpson throughout his life.

The second of the three great climaxes in the work results from all this riot of activity and the conflict between the various levels of motion. Gradually the 'long-note' writing of the chorale takes over the foreground so that there is a feeling of 'slowing down' (even though the pulse does not change). $\frac{3}{2}$ returns in a big striding passage that subsides mysteriously into the second phase of the work, an 'Adagio' which begins with a fugue for strings alone, starting ethereally high up in the first violins. The enormous build-up of forward motion which the scherzo has provided makes it possible for Simpson to continue in a quiet, slow vein for some time, the peace and beauty of this section balancing the tumultuous energy of the foregoing music. This fugue is reflective and relatively short: its subject moves inwards towards a central pitch, rather than fanning out from one, and this suggests retrograde motion, an idea already mooted several times in the Symphony.

When the woodwind re-enter it is with the statement of a palindromic theme, which builds upon this idea of retrogrades: in the theme the 'wedge' shape widens to an octave and shuts again. Palindromes have fascinated Simpson since his first string quartet: the ear can identify the forward and backward winding of the material by noting two things - the use of octave leaps (a feature that it is quite easy for the ear to detect, and which looks back to a passage soon after the start of the work), and the 'fanning' effect which winds outwards and then coils back in upon itself again. The octave at the centre of the palindrome is always crossed by figure 'a', so that the semitones above and below are sounded against it. Three widely separated statements of the palindrome (which provides another form of chorale) loom mysteriously through the quiet counterpoint. After the third, the music becomes more lively, moving into

a pastoral passage full of woodwind twitterings: this rises in intensity, changing (in the composer's own words) to apparent menace as it falls to quiet again over a pedal E. In this massive ostinato-like decrescendo, the figuration tries to fan outwards, only to be continually dragged inwards time and again by a centrifugal pull, with strings, oboes and flutes trying to break away from the pedal E. They are caught in a closed circle, E^b-F (each a semitone away from the pedal) and D-F# (the beginning of the 'fanning-out' process). As the dynamic falls, the tension rises, and we are ready for the climb to the climax of the symphony. This is achieved through a series of five variations on the palindrome; the first three softly enlivened by "forest murmurs", and the whole series ascending from pianissimo to fortissimo. The composer has commented that, though very different in style, the effect is not unlike the characteristic build-up to the climax of a Bruckner Adagio.

The last palindrome, delivered loudly by the trombones, vividly recalls the style of the opening chorale prelude. Its power gives rise to a gradual increase in tension: the triplet rhythms of the scherzo are applied to a series of pedals which rise gradually by fourths, while against each pedal the opening 'wedge' is announced powerfully in dotted rhythms by the lower brass. The fast triplet foreground and the slower motion of the opening are now both in focus, and the combination makes for a passage of tremendous energy which works up to the third and last great climax of the work. Still the planes of rising fourths are evident, though by a touch of irony they now fall by fifths instead, a process made clear by the prominent F-E-C-B^b shape used (at appropriate pitches) at each change of plane. The final chord of this passage, which at first hearing one might easily take to be the end of the whole symphony, dissolves to leave a slow and quiet coda.

This Coda is based around the pitch E^b (later D#) with which the symphony had opened. A series of statements of the opening 'wedge', almost sounding like another fugue, begins, with the tonal planes now descending (rather than ascending) by a fourth. Rising scales are prominent, and the opening material of the work is also heard several times in canon at the fourth. The final pedal E^b/D# sounds against a rising string scale that, reaching from low in the cellos and double basses to the extreme heights of the violins, moves across it, traversing D and E^b, the semitones on either side, as it does so: the effect is of moving out of time into eternity. The D#, which had been low in the double basses at the start of the Symphony, ends by being extremely high in the second violins. At first it is harmonised with a B: but as so often earlier, this moves up to C, making the major third minor yet again. A series of fourths (or fifths) below the D# (A#, E# [=F], C), which are gradually added to

make up the final chord, show that this C is also logically connected with D# by a series of fourth steps.

This Symphony is not only a mighty study of musical motion, comparable to those we find in Beethoven and Sibelius: it is also a study of the power of a simple musical germ to generate enormous paragraphs of music. It is of immense directness and power, and enshrines all that is best in symphonic writing, while still remaining completely unified and individual. This Symphony is a giant written by a giant among symphonists.

1. I acknowledge with gratitude the enormous amount of help and guidance I have received from the composer in the preparation of this analysis. L.P.



Lionel Pike



The Pilgrim Way

Song Cycle for Mezzo Soprano and Piano

* Maxims of Saint Teresa

Song Cycle for Soprano and Piano to
Maxims and Sayings of
Saint Teresa of Avila

* Available as from August 1988

Lynwood Music:

Specialists in the music of A N D R E W D O W N E S
and several other contemporary composers.

All copies, leaflets, catalogue and price lists from:-

Lynwood Music,
2 Church Street, West Hagley, West Midlands, DY9 0NA.
Tel: 0562 886625

AN EXPRESSION OF ENERGY

Stephen Johnson

I remember very clearly the first time I heard RS's music. It was in 1974. I was in my first term at Leeds University, and music department activity was dominated by the Schoenberg centenary celebrations. In the midst of a seminar I suddenly found myself sneered for praising *The Essence of Bruckner* - 'Simpson? Doesn't he write *tonal symphonies*?' These were the days of the Round House Proms, and of Pierre Boulez's tenure at the BBC, and when copies of the periodical *Perspectives of New Music* could still provoke a heated discussion or two. Here we were honouring Schoenberg: the Moses of modernism, the pioneer of pantonality - no time to go bringing up hardened reactionaries like RS.

A few days later, a friendly postgraduate handed me an old mono LP of RS's First Symphony. 'You'll like this,' he said, and I did, though the way I took to it rather surprised me. There was nothing alluring or startlingly 'new' about the sounds, and the harmonies were frankly diatonic in a way that seemed to hark back to Sibelius, or to Nielsen - or even earlier. But before long it became clear that this was a composer with an altogether exceptional understanding of 'form as process' - and if that sounds dauntingly cerebral, let me assure you that wasn't how it *felt*. The further the symphony progressed, the stronger and more compelling became the sense of purpose. RS seemed to know exactly where he was going, and to be able to place his effects with such precision that they took on quite unexpected significance: a well-timed pedal point, a tiny flicker of recapitulation - simple enough in themselves, but almost invariably telling in context. Not that there weren't beautiful or arresting moments: the rapt string writing at the heart of the work, or the soaring counterpoint in the final pages - but in the end it was the sheer energy of the thing that held me in my seat. In the words of Tovey, 'we have the momentum of a planet in its orbit' (RS is understandably fond of that phrase).

With repeated hearings, more facets of RS's originality began to reveal themselves. On first acquaintance I'd thought I could make out three linked movements: a moderato, an adagio and an agile, high-powered finale. In fact there's really only one tempo in this symphony - an unchanging basic pulse within which the three sections create the *impression* of different speeds. This allows RS to pull off some splendid dramatic *coups*, as when the pounding rhythms of the finale are suddenly interrupted by the adagio's slow polyphony, now sounding out boldly on brass.

As before, the basic pulse remains the same, but the tension created by the apparent clash of tempos is enormous - brass holding doggedly to adagio, strings and timpani still insisting on allegro. Eventually allegro wins - *E pur si muove!*

Getting to know more RS was a problem: little was broadcast and recordings were few, but as more and more pieces came my way I began to see how he had progressed since that remarkable first effort. It was pretty much as I expected: no evidence of a desire to keep up with the times, no compromising with fashion. Rather, there was all the time a concern to explore new possibilities: a movement cast in the form of a gigantic palindrome; another rising steadily from adagio to exultant prestissimo - and suddenly falling back again to original stillness; a symphony in which movement turns out to be a magnificent illusion - at the back of it all an unyielding, eerily dissonant string chord. Paradoxically, as RS's reputation as a 'tonal symphonist' grew, so his harmonic language became far less obviously diatonic. The Nielsenesque key-conflicts of the First Symphony were gradually replaced by something else - a kind of argument based on the germinating power of intervals. Open the score of the Fifth Symphony at any page and you'd be hard put to identify a 'key' in anything like the classical sense, and yet particular notes or chords continue to exact considerable polar attraction - tugging disruptively at the harmonic fabric, or impelling the music forward in step-like rising and falling patterns.

I also found myself intrigued by RS's attitude to line. Hans Keller once remarked (in these pages [*The Listener*], I think) that RS is one of the very few English composers not to find his linear inspiration in song; and while 'melodic' is not a word that springs readily to mind in association with RS's music, there's no denying the compelling power of his lines, whether they move with athletic rapidity or mysterious deliberation. RS's apparent belief in line as an expression of energy echoes Blake's 'great and golden rule': that 'the more distinct, sharp and wirey' the leading lines, 'the more perfect the work of art'. For RS too, it's the purposefulness of the line that gives it its energy - its vitality. Blake again - 'Leave out this line and you leave out life itself', and now we're close to the heart of RS's philosophy of music. Like Nielsen, RS believes that music is 'the sound of life' - it's a very positive attitude, though as superpowers continue to arm themselves for Armageddon, RS has been less inclined to share the Scandinavian symphonist's belief that life is 'inextinguishable'.

What of RS's reputation nowadays? The intellectual climate has changed a good deal since the mid-Seventies. Now we have neo-romanticism, the rise of the American minimalists and populists, and in this country the revival of interest in 'brazen romantics' like Arnold Bax and George Lloyd. Composers now talk nervously of 'communication', of 'melodies' - even of

tonality. Has all this helped RS? Not really. Recordings appear more frequently these days; and critics are generally more complimentary, acknowledging the unusual formal strengths of his music - even, in one case, drawing comparison with radical formalist movements of the Fifties and Sixties. But music-lovers who hail Lloyd's symphonies for their 'accessibility' and 'tunefulness' are unlikely to warm to RS.

Take the recently composed Ninth Symphony. Here there are no mock-heroics, no big tunes, no comforting evocations of a long-dead musical vernacular. What this music offers is very different. The sonorities can be hard or astringent, the harmonies harshly dissonant, the action violent, but, just as strongly as in the First Symphony, there's a deeply involving sense of purpose at the heart of it all - 'I mean [a] tendency to remove, one by one, disrupting or distracting elements, to seem to uncover at length a last stratum of calm contemplative thought'. That's from *The Essence of Bruckner*, but with these words RS could have been describing his own Ninth Symphony. Perhaps his 'conscious tribute' to Bruckner in the first movement is an acknowledgement of spiritual kinship. Whatever, the Ninth Symphony reaches its goal - its 'last stratum of calm contemplative thought' - with the inevitability of a great Brucknerian coda. Could I be more specific? Not without getting bogged down in complicated verbal analyses, and there have already been enough technicalities. As the composer says, 'without human contact music is nothing; listen for that first - the rest is mere map-reading'.

1. RS *The Ninth Symphony* (1986) TONIC Vol.3 No.1 p.7

Originally published in *The Listener* on 31st December 1987.
Reprinted by permission.

NEW SIMPSON MASTERWORK

Eric Wilson

That RS is one of this country's finest living composers there can be no doubt. That he has written for brass band on four occasions is not only a matter of great pride but of some wonder, for each work stands out as a highlight in the repertoire. Indeed many authorities regard *Energy* and *Volcano* as landmarks in the development of brass music.

The latest band piece is the *Introduction and Allegro on a Bass* by Max Reger, written in the latter half of 1986 at the request of Howard Snell, then musical director of the Desford Colliery Dowty Band, who commissioned the work with assistance from East Midlands Arts. The work is dedicated to Peter Wilson.

The rather lengthy title gives some clues to the identity of the piece. The bass in question is taken from Reger's *Fantasia and fugue in D minor* Op. 135b, where it is part of a gigantic ritenuto. RS treats it, after a slow introduction, as an allegro throughout; altering Reger's compound time signature to . and flattening one note of it to make it more combinable with a string of rising fourths which grow from the last notes of the bass. These fourths accompany the Reger bass rather like the counter-subject in a fugue and are an important element in the composition.

The composer's assertion that Reger's opus 135b *Fantasia* is "one of the greatest organ works since Bach" will in part explain his decision to use it as a basis for composition. Even the briefest glance at the bass will show what musical possibilities it offers. RS taps his source freely and extensively in his own highly personal style. During the climax of the work Reger's own treatment (described by RS as 'magnificent') of the bass is used, yet it appears to have grown out of what has gone before rather than the opposite, such is RS's skill. The bass is not heard complete until the start of the Allegro where it acts as a fugato-type theme. The slow introduction is based on cleverly woven fragments of it which gradually take shape in various ways until it is time to present the whole theme.

The slow introduction is mysterious and deliberate. The low brass make the first statement (Ex.1), - the first five notes of Reger's germinal bass, the horns quickly following suit. Tension is created by the shifting chromaticism and contrasting dynamics. Mighty chordal 'pyramids' grow from the basses upwards *fortissimo*, but the volume is not sustained long as there are *pianissimo* interjections creating an air of pregnant instability.

Soon the texture changes. Over sustained lines muted cornets weave arabesques derived from the bass (Ex.2), as is almost everything in this work. Euphonium and baritone have their say too.

A more strident version of the bass (Ex.3), which we may almost call a theme by now (but not quite) is heard in trombones, euphonium and basses, and is taken up by cornets and baritones *fortissimo*. The tumult subsides and trombones announce a chorale-like derivation of the bass which is developed in a series of ascending transpositions (Ex.4).

RS's link to the allegro section is worthy of note. Whilst the rest of the band hold a sustained chord, the euphonium and basses, assisted by the timpani, interject with 'shot' notes which, though the tempo is slow, imply a quicker triple metre so that the change to *doppio movimento*, four bars before the allegro proper, is imperceptible except for the *accelerando*, which takes the speed up to . = c.60.

The low brass announce the allegro theme (Ex.5) (for such it now is) continuing it with a succession of rising perfect fourths as the cornets take up the theme a tone lower. The fast moving 'one-in-a-bar' tempo lends a sense of energy and forward moving direction. The cornets take up a new idea of which the interval of a semitone is a feature (Ex.6). This appears in various guises throughout this section and the semitone is much in evidence, often in undulating figures.

The image contains six musical examples, each on a single staff. Ex.1 is in 2/4 time, starting with a piano (p) dynamic and a crescendo leading to a fortissimo (f) dynamic. Ex.2 is in 2/4 time, starting with a pianissimo (pp) dynamic. Ex.3 is in 2/4 time, starting with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. Ex.4 is in 2/4 time, starting with a pianissimo (pp) dynamic. Ex.5 is in 2/4 time, starting with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. Ex.6 is in 2/4 time, starting with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic.



Max Reger, Op 135b. Pedal part from bar 103 of the Fugue.



There is much in the way of motivic development and the various elements appear in combination. The muted cornet arabesques of the Introduction are recalled but now marked staccato in a manner which recalls *The Four Temperaments* (Ex.7). These triplet arabesques are followed by another of RS's favourite devises; a dove-tailed flourish rising through the band. Here each triplet derives, predictably by now, from the seminal theme. There is much interplay with themes being cast round the ensemble, and the timpani have their say.

The semitone - never far away - rears its head again with muted cornets and euphoniums, respectively staccato and legato, introducing a motif which is used at some length in the energetic build up to the work's conclusion. Gradually RS's score fills up in a quasi Rossini crescendo toward Reger's treatment of the bass which has provided such a rich fund of ideas.

Even in the final bars we are not allowed to forget the semitone. Below a succession of fifths euphonium and basses remind us, even refusing to resolve until the very last note. Lasting some 17 minutes, this work represents another valuable addition to the band repertoire from a composer of real worth.

Originally published in *The British Bandsman* on Saturday 13 February 1988.
Reprinted by permission.

STOP PRESS

THIS WORK WILL BE PERFORMED AS PART OF THE CITY OF LONDON FESTIVAL BY THE BRITANNIA BUILDING SOCIETY FODEN BAND CONDUCTED BY HOWARD SNELL ON 14th JULY 1988.

RECORD REVIEWS

The following reviews were printed in the *Gramophone* in June 1988; and are reproduced here with permission.

Symphonies - No. 6 (1977); No. 7 (1977)
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Vernon Handley
Hyperion Cassette KA66280 CD CDA66280

It has taken ten years for Simpson's Sixth and Seventh Symphonies to find their way onto record; the imposing Ninth should be with us later in the year; but until the poetic and witty Second, the massive Fourth and the breathtaking Fifth join them (and, it might be said, until certain publishers buck their ideas up) the full extent of his achievement as a symphonist will still be less widely known than it should be.

A year ago one might almost have regretted the appearance of this recording ahead of those earlier symphonies. The first performances had shown many characteristic and admirable qualities, but there was a suspicion of some tentativeness, a lowering of sights even, after the explosive Fifth Symphony. One should have guessed that closer acquaintance and more expert performance would show this to be more a matter of concentration of ideas and of conscious change of direction. The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Vernon Handley (who incidentally has conducted superb performances of the Second Symphony) show the Sixth to be a work of immense inner power, and if the Seventh is a more cryptic statement this recording certainly brings it into clearer focus than before.

Whereas Tippett (in the same year, curiously) wrote a birth-to-death symphony (his Fourth) Simpson's Sixth shifts the process one stage back - from conception to prime of life. Intense expectancy gives way to a memorable downward-stalking unison figure, the fertilised seed, which becomes the most active force in the early stages of the work. From here to the irresistible energy of the final pages Simpson's control of musical momentum can only be marvelled at; and if you don't marvel at it, that may be because you are worrying about the apparent restriction on colour and lyricism, and thus missing the point.

As yet the final D major outcome still refuses to register as a natural outcome, though presumably there is any amount of logical justification for it. The neutral, non-triadic conclusion to the Seventh rings truer, though in this work the processes before it are more inscrutable - not in the technical

sense, but simply in terms of what the techniques are driving at. But anyone who has puzzled over, and then clicked with, say, Sibelius' Fourth or Shostakovich's Fifteenth, will know how dangerous it is to jump to conclusions. And even if the click never happens, one probable masterpiece is surely enough to be getting on with - already the Sixth Symphony repeatedly tempts me away from other pressing duties.

Hyperion's natural-sounding recording is just what Simpson's music needs, though I dare say a degree more ambience would not have hurt it either. On CD 12 tracks for each symphony provide a useful adjunct to Lionel Pike's helpful and well-informed notes. - DAVID J. FANNING

String Quartets No. 10, "For Peace" (1983); No. 11 (1984)
Coull Quartet
Hyperion Cassette KA66225 CD CDA66225

Newcomers to Simpson are advised to go straight to Hyperion's Sixth and Seventh Symphonies disc: the direct and splendidly bracing Sixth would make an ideal introduction. This is perhaps more for those who know their Simpson - who know that his music doesn't always reveal its riches on first hearing. While neither quartet impresses me quite so much as the brilliant Ninth or the mysterious and compelling Seventh (at least not yet), I've found that after only a few hearings they've both begun to establish a strong character of their own - especially the Tenth whose title *For Peace* is reflected not in any crudely pictorial manner, but (as Simpson once remarked of Bruckner) in the way it seems "to uncover at length a last stratum of calm contemplative thought". What surprises and delights the listener is the unexpected touch of gentle humour in the closing pages - "Haydnesque", as Lionel Pike's inset-note justly observes.

Both quartets are read with authority and considerable vitality by the Coull Quartet, who gave the first performances in each case. It's good to have a disc of new music in which the performers have had time to get thoroughly acquainted with the works. Good recordings too - atmospheric but with the quartet image clear and well-staged. One small grumble: the tracking on my disc is different from that indicated in the booklet (six tracks instead of ten), rendering the cueing in Pike's notes redundant. A pity, but I don't want to end on a downbeat. Hyperion deserve the warmest congratulations for having taken to the pulpit on behalf of one of British music's great, and still woefully undervalued, originals.
STEPHEN JOHNSON

SIMPSON ANTAGONISTES

"Webern has certainly had no influence on me at all, except the negative one of indicating to me in wonderfully precise terms exactly what I don't want to do"

'Against Lipsius', in *The Listener* on 24th June 1971.

"A composer must always create expectations and then defeat them with something better."

Missenden Abbey Lecture in March 1988

"Method for preparation of BARBEQUED CRITIC:

Catch critic; best time at concert interval, on way to telephone review of second half.

After thoroughly hammering (not painful as this species has few nerve-endings) lay critic on foolproof newspaper, preferably his own.

Roll up, tie firmly, plunge into boiling oil.

If squelchy sounds resembling George Lloyd Webber come from saucepan, allow to boil dry.

Combine marinade ingredients, and marinate critic in this for at least two weeks to tenderize.

Cut critic into 12-note rows, hang on double bars, and then cook over hot barbeque.

Serve with cauliflower and nightshade polonaise and garnish with finely chopped o(pi)nions."

The author gratefully acknowledged the assistance of his wife in the preparation of this contribution to *The Four Seasons Cookbook* - R.S.S. 1987

THE ROBERT SIMPSON SOCIETY

President: Professor Vagn Holmboe
Vice Presidents: Professor David Gillett,
Dr. Vernon Handley, John McCabe,
John Ogdon, Ronald Smith,
Ronald Stevenson.

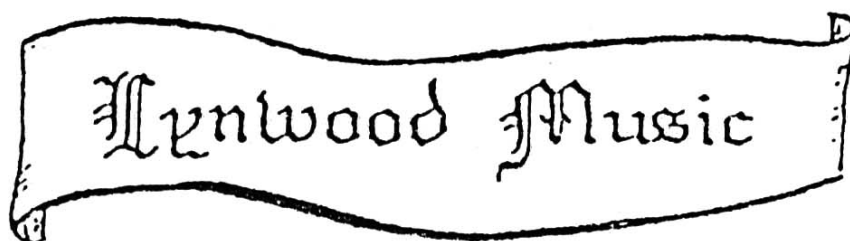
COMMITTEE 1987/88

Chairman: Dr. LIONEL PIKE, 34 Alderside Walk,
Englefield Green, Surrey TW20 OEX
Vice Chairman: R.L. EDWARDS, 52 Priory Street, Colchester,
Essex CO1 2QB
Acting Joint Secretaries: JOHN and SYLVIA BROOKS,
3 Engel Park, London NW7 2HE
MICHAEL GEORGE, Chapter Cottage, 4 Salem Terrace,
Gwaelod-y-Garth, Cardiff CF4 8HX
Treasurer: JOHN E. YOUNG, 154 Kirkham Street, London SE18 2EN
Editors, TONIC: MARTIN J. ANDERSON, * * * ,
Paris!
CHRISTINE SKINNER, 6 Charles Court,
Charles Street, WARWICK CV34 5LE.
Assistant Editor: MIKE HALL, Flat 6, 49 Lewisham Way,
London SE13 7PL
Minutes Secretary: Mrs. PAMELA BACON, Maplewood, 52 Foxdell Way,
Chalfont St. Peter, Bucks. SL9 0PN

Members

KEITH BENNETT
214 Gilbert House, Barbican, London EC2Y 8BD
EDWARD CLARK
222 Somerset Road, London SW19 5JE
Rev. BRIAN DUKE
Merchant Taylors School, Sandy Lodge, Northwood,
Middlesex HA6 2HT
RAYMOND FEW
Chantry House, Vicarage Lane, Horley, Surrey
Professor DAVID GILLET
Heronsmead, Abbotsbrook, Bourne End. Bucks. SL8 5QS
GRAHAM MELVILLE-MASON
69 Grasmere Road, London N10 8DH
PHILLIP POTTER
40 Rydale Road, Sherwood, Nottingham NG5 3GS
ROY SPARKES
8 Thirlmere Close, Frindsbury, Strood, Kent ME2 4PA

P U B L I C A T I O N S F R O M : -



Robert Simpson



* Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano 1984

* Sonata for Violin and Piano 1985



Available as from August 1988

Lynwood Music:

Specialists in the music of A N D R E W D O W N E S
and several other contemporary composers.

All copies, leaflets, catalogue and price lists from:-

Lynwood Music,
2 Church Street, West Hagley, West Midlands, DY9 0NA.
Tel: 0562 886625