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EDITORIAL

Christine Skinner

Once more apologies are due for the rather tardy production of TONIC. However, this time it was entirely my fault since I decided to move house last summer and preparations for the current issue were delayed since the proofs spent several months in store with Pickfords! However, I hope that this bumper issue will do something to make amends.

As promised this edition includes the transcriptions of two Radio 3 interviews with RS - one being the discussion with Malcolm MacDonald on Quartet No.5, and the other with Gillian White concerning the Ninth Symphony. In addition there is Lionel Pike's article on the Sixth Symphony, which also originated as a talk (in this case given to students at London University), and an article about the Seventh Symphony from a conductor's viewpoint by Matthew Taylor. On the stocks for future editions there are articles about the Second Symphony by Matthew Taylor, who has conducted the work, and Lionel Pike who discusses it with special regard to archival material. There is also the possibility of transcribing some of the lectures given by RS at last year's Summer School in Ireland, which was greatly appreciated by those who were able to attend.

The observant will notice that both the Review section and the Simpson Antagonistes section are missing from this edition. Please could any reviews of performances or recordings which you have collected be sent to Dr. Lionel Pike for the archives at R.H.B.N.C. Copies can then be sent to RS for his scrapbook too! (It would be very helpful if cuttings could be clearly marked with the name of the newspaper/magazine and date of the review.) If you have any "antagonistic Simpsonisms" for future editions could you send them to the new Editor John Pickard. Dr. Pickard has recently completed his Doctoral Thesis on RS's Symphonies, and is himself a composer as well a lecturer at the University of North Wales in Bangor.

THE SIXTH SYMPHONY

Lionel Pike [1]

RS finished his Sixth Symphony in March 1977: it had been commissioned by the London Philharmonic Orchestra with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain, and it was the London Philharmonic who gave the first performance, just afterwards, under Sir Charles Groves, in a concert broadcast live on Radio 3. The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra recorded the work in 1987, and warmed up for the recording sessions at a BBC Invitation Concert, conducted by Vernon Handley, on 2nd September 1987. The recording was issued in 1988, and it made a great hit with the very prestigious journal, *The Gramophone*: in its edition of December 1988 no less than three critics included this record (which also contains RS's Seventh Symphony) in the *Critics' Choice* section, in which each of the regular panel of contributors nominated the six best records of the year. David Fanning called it 'boundlessly energetic'; Stephen Johnson said '"The momentum of a planet in its orbit" [is] a quality shared by Robert Simpson's Sixth Symphony'; and Robert Layton described RS as 'a true symphonist with the breadth of vision and command of architecture so rare in our age'. That was extremely encouraging for those of us who have been trying to push Bob's music, so I thought I would make it an excuse for talking to you about one of the Symphonies on this record. I might even persuade you to go out and buy it.

This symphony, which is in one large movement, is dedicated to the distinguished gynaecologist Professor Ian Craft; he it was who suggested to the composer the idea of a symphony whose growth from initial melodic germs might parallel the living development of a fertilized cell. (Ian Craft, of course, now owns the manuscript score of the work, although there is photocopy of it in the RSS Archives; it has not yet been published). The idea appealed to RS, for the kind of symphony that grows by logical stages has always been his ideal: moreover, he has always agreed strongly with Nielsen's view that music is the 'sound of life'. The concepts of energy and rhythmic movement have played a large part in Robert Simpson's music and thinking throughout his life; and the composers who have interested him deeply, and about whose music he has written - Beethoven, Bruckner, Nielsen, Sibelius, Havergal Brian - are all symphonists of this 'logical growth' type.

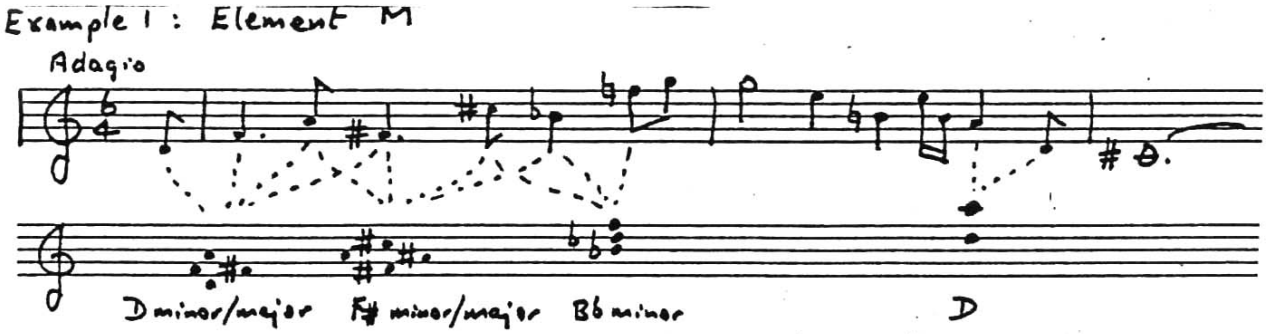
This symphony, then, is programmatic up to a point: two musical cells at the opening combine, and their combination

gives rise to a process of evolution; there is a central climax which one might liken to the moment of birth, which is even preceded by 'contractions'. Yet the listener need not remember such a programme, or indeed let it concern him at all; nor need he know about the programme to enjoy the music and follow its evolving logic. More important is the creation of life and energy from two small cells - one motile, the other static - that combine in the opening few bars.

The symphony, viewed on the largest level, falls into two large sections, balanced around the great central climax which represents the moment of birth. But in order to help you understand the structure of the piece (and in spite of the composer's objection that this is unnecessary) I am going to divide the work into four sections. These are: Introduction; First movement proper; Slow movement; and Scherzo-Finale.

INTRODUCTION

What I call the Introduction is very much more than that term implies, for - short as it is - it lays bare the material from which the whole work is built. The two elements both complement each other, and also interact: together they build into the whole symphony. The motile element (I shall assume it is the male element, and call it M) is the opening second violin line, which consists very largely of minor thirds: it is stated in a single melodic line that is largely made up of leaps.

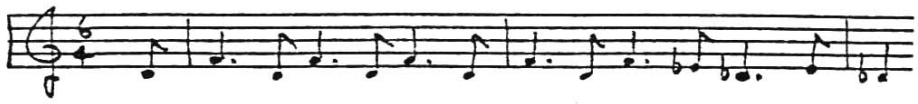


The first four notes belong to a triad of D minor/major; the A and F# of this implied triad overlap with notes 3-6 of the melodic line, which state F# minor/major; notes 5-7 belong to the triad of B♭ minor; the whole line then returns to D minor/major. The line, then, is made up of minor thirds which suggest triads (each of which, of course, fill out the interval of a fifth): and there are direct leaps of a fifth as well. So there is melodic motion in this line; but there

is also tonal motion, for the implied shift of triads takes us round a complete circle of major thirds, from D at the start, to F#, then to B♭, and back to D, as shown in Example 1 above.

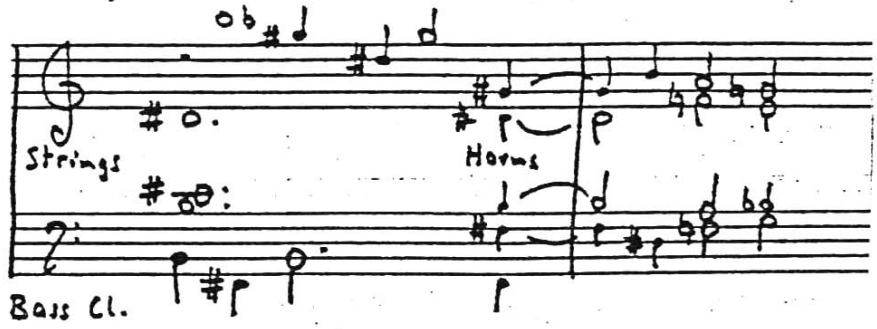
This line, just as a matter of interest, is a revision of the original shape: at the first performance it was as shown in Example 1a. You'll notice that there is less sense of tonal movement about it, and that it reminds one strongly of Nielsen: the second version is a great improvement from both points of view.

Example 1a: Original version



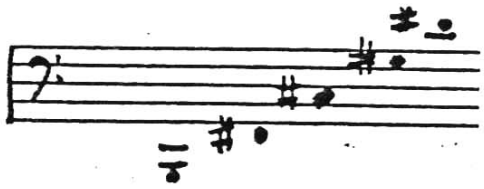
The opening line, then, is built of thirds, with an inbuilt sense of motion. By contrast, the second element is more or less static; I shall assume it is the female element and call it F. It is at first built up gradually from semitone figures; they become the chord shown in Example 2.

Example 2: Element F



The elements here are a 'cluster' chord consisting of a major third (B-D#) which has a major second (C#) sounding between the root and the third, but with the fourth below the cluster (bass clarinet) and also the fourth above the cluster (oboe) added. (I added the horn parts at the end of Example 2 in order to refer back to them later - ignore them for the moment). The notes of this chord, if laid out in another way, are a series of rising fifths (B-F#-C#-G#-D#) as shown in Example 2a.

Example 2a:

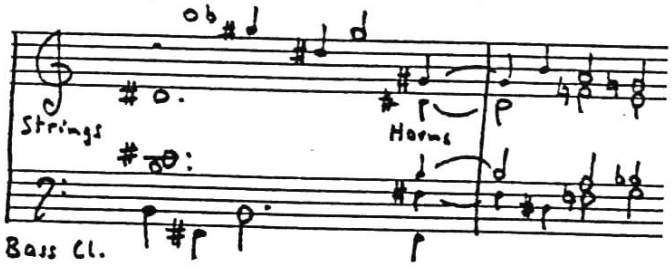


These could equally be a series of descending fourths, of course. As the composer has vividly put it, 'This group is really a succession of fifths coiled in upon itself (like a DNA molecule perhaps? - it certainly results in many special differentiations as the cell proliferates)'.

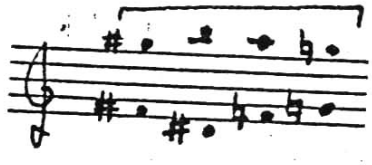
Dissimilar as Elements M and F are, they are not unrelated: both of them contain certain features which are echoed in the other. The fourths in Element F are a complement to the fifths of Element M, of which they are inversions; in a similar way, the cluster chord built within a major third is a complement both to the minor thirds of element M (i.e. they are both thirds of one sort or the other) and to the element of 'major-sounding' triads and implied tonal shifts of a major third that occur in Example 1. Element F, additionally, contains minor thirds (characteristic of Element M) between G# and B, F# and D#: and it only requires the bass clarinet and oboe to play their second notes an octave higher for the fifth (a feature of Element M) to be very plain.

I must draw your attention to two other elements which play a part in the work. Firstly, there is a series of upward rushing scales - they start life as a set of rising tetrachords, and thence develop into complete scales - which sound against a mysterious chord (with a cymbal roll played with a metal beater in the background). Secondly, there is a pendant to Element F, expanding the F-A-F# idea of Element M in retrograde, in which a series of chords harmonises the line G#-B-A-G natural (the bass moving in an exact inversion of that figure): the two middle parts are also mirror reflections. (You can see this in the horn parts from Example 2 - Example 3 below shows this again and Example 3a makes the inversion clear).

Example 3:



Example 3a:



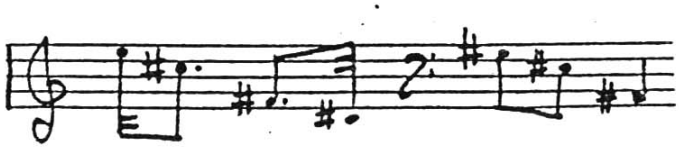
This last, of course, includes both the minor and the major third in the melodic (and thus also in the bass) line; and it starts with the cluster chord of Element F, and opens out from that point. As the composer has said of this little pendant phrase, 'Muted horns add one cell to the other' - that is, Elements M and F are joined in this pendant. At the second appearance this pendant to Element F is stated simultaneously in two versions a fifth apart - a logical outcome of using a chord for Element F that is itself built on superimposed fifths. This is part of a process of using the fifth (instead of the more normal octave) as the interval of doubling in RS's works (also found in the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, and many later works, for example).

Much of the 'Introduction' embodies melodic inversions - many of them quite exact: this is in addition to the use of the fourth as the obvious inversion of the fifth. By the use of melodic inversions the musical material is given a different and yet complementary nature - a different and yet complementary nature such as corresponds to that of male and female - or perhaps more to the symmetry of biological structures. Male and female don't exist separately when combined, but form a new individual which might be either male or female. The attraction of like and yet different elements is traceable in the first half of the symphony only (with one exception which I shall dicuss later): such inversions cease to be a part of the composer's purpose after the great upheaval that we may think of as the moment of birth (bar 368), when the two complementary elements have done their work and evolved into a third and independent being.

FIRST MOVEMENT PROPER

What we might call the 'first movement proper' gets under way with a theme built largely of downward leaps (minor thirds and fifths) shown in Example 4.

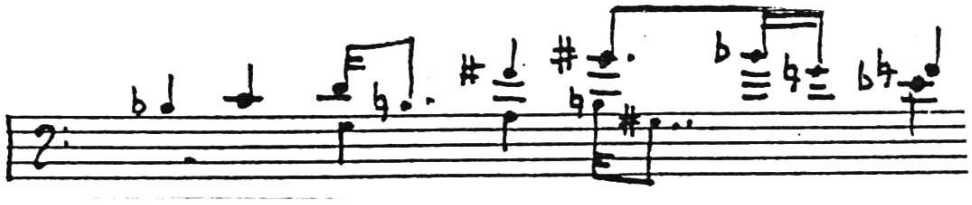
Example 4:



A background chord spreads out the clusters of Element F in three different interlocking versions - this chord simply sustains the separate notes of the descending figure, which then make a chord. The leaping element very frequently becomes a series of descending fifths - this is none other

than the Element F chord spread out and its constituent notes sounded in descending order. This leaping theme is almost immediately countered by a much more stepwise passage in which the melodic material, which is clearly derived from bars 1-2 (the tune begins as a retrograde of the horn part in bar 5 as shown in Example 5a), is announced in splendidly Bach-like canonic passage; again there is an element of the complementary here, for the contrapuntal lines are identical, like the multiplication of identical cells, yet at any given point their activities differ (See Example 5).

Example 5:

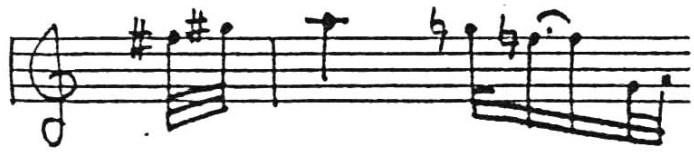


The onward-pushing motion of this passage, a motion set up by its rhythmic drive (though the pace is quite slow) and its steady passage through many keys, is stopped by a series of Element F chords (some of them uncoiled so as to form fifth-based chords); the wood-wind chirp away, each playing his own single note of these chords, for a time holding up the forward logic. When the counterpoint resumes, it is with retrograde versions of the foregoing counterpoint, both parts being very high this time, whereas the preceding canon had been in the middle and lower registers of the orchestra. The counterpoint thickens, but again its flow is obstructed by chords of Element F (as before, some are uncoiled in fifth-based chords) and its 'pendant'. On this occasion it is a little while before the forward motion manages to pick itself up again.

For a time, the static and motile elements combine, and they produce new off-shoots. Brass, playing sustained chords in the lower to middle ranges of the orchestra rather in the manner of a continuo, start each set of chords with the central cluster of Element F; simultaneously, the lower instruments, beginning with the bass clarinet, state a long tune while the upper woodwind and strings play an 'oom-pah' rhythm, soon replaced by rising tetrachords in semiquavers. These tetrachords are at first sounded alongside exact inversions of themselves - another instance of the use of

different but complementary material in this first half of the work. The tetrachords continue when the chords stop, and the chords are replaced by more counterpoint which is again based on the same material, not in canon, though the style is similar (see Example 6).

Example 6:



Material proliferates, and the chords from Element F are added intermittently, while the leaping theme that had opened the 'first movement proper' is also added. The result is a complete intermingling of ideas. As RS says, it 'is like cells constantly dividing and multiplying, becoming specialised, grouping...'

To all this, increasing tension and power is applied. As the composer has written, '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...'The chords of element F are more frequently doubled at the fifth; the oom-pahs turn into fast semitone trills (the semitone had in any case been a feature of the introduction to Element F at the beginning); and while the underlying pulse remains the same, by altering the time-signature the apparent speed increases. The rising scales from the opening now descend - yet another instance of melodic inversion - and tumble over one another in the strings as they do so.

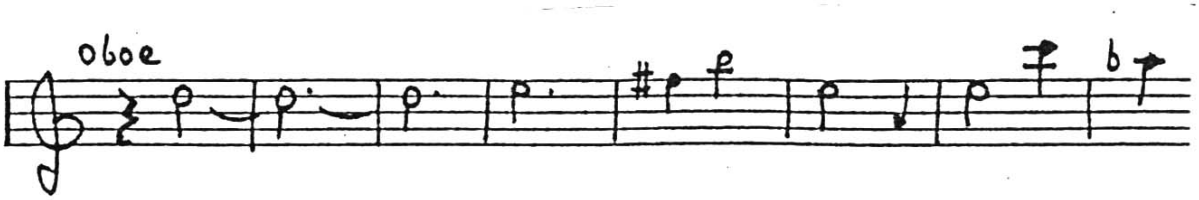
The bass parts, which are extremely fine throughout the work, are particularly noticeable just before the central climax. At bar 297 a pedal A starts (trilled with G# in bassoons, cellos and basses); and at regular intervals sounding against it there is a thunderous A and accompanying drum tattoo (forming 'contractions', as the composer suggests). These spasms occur more frequently, while an accelerando leads to a tumultuous passage in which the strings cover virtually their whole range in alternately soaring and plunging scales (inversions are used here in an obvious fashion for the last time), and a superb bass part descends purposefully into the depths, transforming the fast tetrachords of the earlier part of the symphony into slow tetrachords that seem to be striding downwards in seven-league boots. The chords

(ultimately derived from F) grind on and on getting ever higher, until at the moment when it would seem that searing dissonance could not possibly be taken any further, there is a General Pause and a violent fortissimo chord - the moment of birth has arrived. The composer has written of this passage, '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'.

SLOW MOVEMENT

RS has suggested to me that the music so far might be the longest up-beat in all music, although I have heard *Rheingold* described in that way. The symphony is really seamless - there are even very few silences except for this General Pause and a few short 'commas' - but there is an area of central relaxation, even if it is a misnomer to call it 'slow'. It begins immediately after the central 'birth', and it flows along in soft counterpoint largely based around minor thirds though with some major thirds and some fifths. It is, perhaps, a lullaby. The composer says of it, 'After the birth comes gradual co-ordination of the individual, at first uncertain, dependent. You can't expect a baby to follow the harmonies of a lullaby, only to be soothed and reassured by them! Only slowly is a sense of direction felt'. From the oboe line that begins this section (it is a rearrangement of the fifths of Element F, along with some of the thirds) the rest of the material of the 'slow movement' all derives (See Example 7).

Example 7:



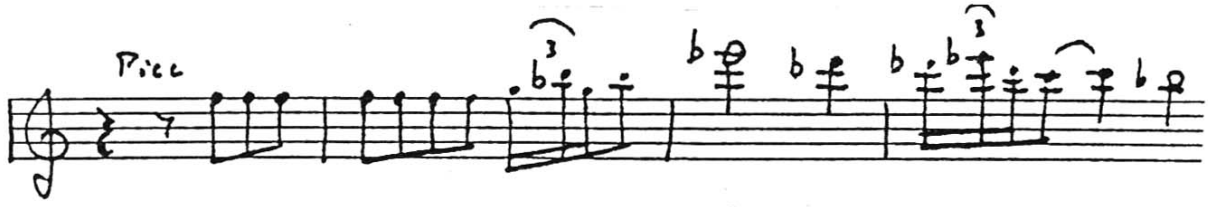
The chords that occur during this passage do nothing to interrupt the gentle flow - a flow that is partially due to the frequent presence of hemiola rhythms in one part or another, contrasting with the prevailing 3/4. At bar 489 a fugue begins; its subject opens with syncopated repeated notes, and is otherwise made up of a rising minor third and

rising fourth (See Example 8) - all elements that had been prominent in the 'first movement proper'.

Example 8:

Delicious woodwind cadences in thickly scored chords - rather like the sort of thing one sometimes comes across in Martinu - punctuate the various stages of this fugue, whose argument is almost entirely carried by the strings. After a time a second element is pitted against this material; it also has repeated notes, though not this time syncopated, and it refers back to the woodwind twitterings that occured just after the start of the 'Introduction'. It is, in addition, a clear development of the fugue subject, as Example 9 shows; but the whole is much more rhythmic in feel than the fugue subject at its first appearance.

Example 9:



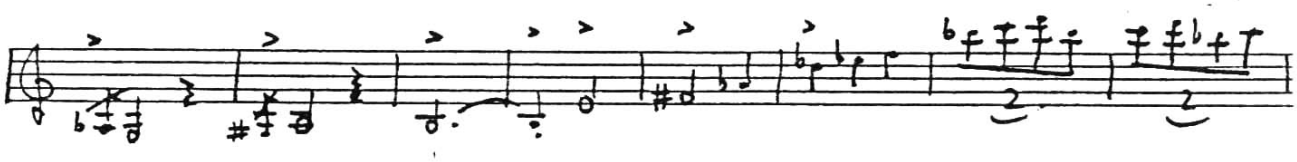
This section dissappears amid woodwind mutterings in triplets, and continued repeated notes taken from the fugue subject. The repeated notes make a link into the final section, and are accompanied by Element F chords, often doubled at the fifth, but increasingly frequently doubled at several intervals (a string chord from bar 592, for instance, has three versions of F added one to another until all three are sounding together: the second is a tritone below the first, the third a major sixth below the first). The chords are made from the final notes of each of the woodwind phrases.

SCHERZO/FINALE

The repeated notes that form the link now give the impetus for the Finale, a *moto perpetuo* not unlike the last movement of Schubert's 'Great C major' symphony in some ways. It is surely this that causes Stephen Johnson to compare the piece with Schubert's 'Great C major' in his quotation of Tovey's 'The momentum of a planet in it's orbit' that I mentioned at the start. RS says that this passage (the link from the 'slow movement' into the Scherzo/Finale and the beginning of the latter - bars 575-878) is one that he thinks of as being 'tetchy, unpredictable, characteristic of sometimes unbearable adolescence!'. Introductory triplet twitterings in the woodwind give way to a long tune in the second violins (doubled by the piccolo), a line that makes considerable use of minor thirds, but tails off into a slow 'trill' of a semitone. The tempo is the fast triple time that is so characteristic of Beethoven's Scherzos, though RS's is not really quite fast enough for a Beethoven Scherzo. But against this rising scales (taken from the Introduction) are used as a counterpoint, but in a contrasting duple rhythm. This duple versus triple conflict is a more vital development of the steady triple rhythm with underlying hemiola pulses which were used in the previous section. Various punctuations by the wood-wind chords continue, helping to link the 'slow movement' neatly with the Scherzo/Finale.

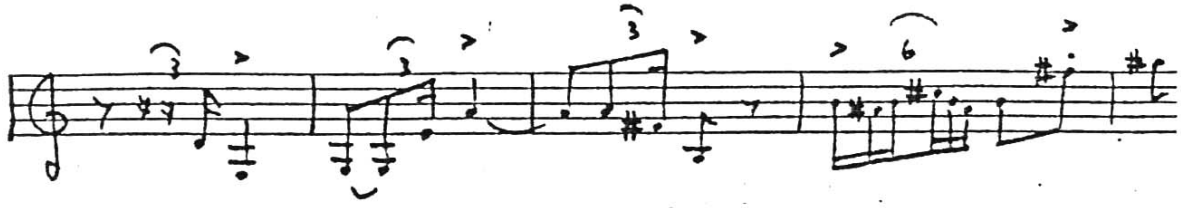
The contrast between duplet and triplet rhythms is an important feature of the Finale; you can hear it, where the rising scales are in duplets, the upper woodwind in triplets. It is used in the string tune in octaves at bar 789; this appears with great force and rhythmic vitality, and it tails off into 'oom-pah' rhythms which derive from the first movement, and which are interspersed with drum-like fourths (D-D-A/D-D-A etc) in triple time (see Example 10).

Example 10:



Eventually duple time takes over centre stage with a change to 2/4 at bar 855, and the triplets are then applied instead on the smaller scale; being very rapid indeed, they result in an immense increase in rhythmic vitality. The violins next begin a much faster, more vital, line (see Example 11) with many leaps (bar 896).

Example 11:



This passage also gives the change from triple macrorhythm to duple, at which point the fast triplets take over. The D major 6/3 triad here predicts the final outcome of the work.

The horns and trombones interrupt it from time to time with a series of sustained 'continuo-style' chords - an idea we have already encountered - in three parts, starting with Element F (the woodwind play staccato chords off-beat, shadowing the horns and trombones). Most of the chordal progressions strive upwards: but there is a development of the Element F chord in which a cluster with a second and minor (rather than major) third is used as the starting-point, and the subsequent chords descend. This is the only use of inversion that really makes itself plainly evident after the 'birth': the element of two opposites being complementary is no longer relevant in the independent creature that results from the joining of two different cells. The dotted rhythms (some with 'Scotch snap') used in the downward-leaping tune (doubled in octaves, with many fifths in the melodic line) are a vivid reminder of the start of the 'first movement proper', though much faster.

There are several climaxes (bar 1084 in particular), but the motion set up has a free-wheeling nature about it, and the triplet rhythm keeps it pulsating throughout. The composer keeps on screwing the tension tighter and tighter, with physical and mental energy growing by the minute. But, all in all, the tremendous vitality of the triplet figure, the intensification of the writing for brass, and the general increase in dynamic level (and dissonance) draw eventually to a huge final chord of D major - scored in a most individual way: 'in full vigour, in the prime of life, so to speak'. A final triplet rhythm returns us from A down to F# and D, reversing the opening figure of the symphony which has prepared this splendidly virile denouement.

1. This article is based on an open lecture given by Dr. Pike at Royal Holloway and Bedford New College (University of London).

THE SEVENTH SYMPHONY
A Conductor's Perspective

Matthew Taylor '

This symphony was composed in 1977, only a few months after the completion of the Sixth. RS had previously followed the Brahmsian principle of writing symphonies in pairs: the Fourth and the Fifth were completed within a year of each other and represent opposing sides of his musical personality at that time. The Fourth is big-hearted, friendly and positive, whereas the Fifth is tough, uncompromising and forcefully assertive, at least in its outer movements. The Sixth and the Seventh not only have strongly differing characters, but there is a noticeable shift in RS's musical language. In the Seventh we are suddenly confronted with a highly intense musical drama governed by the interaction of certain intervals, as opposed to the extended tonality that had been present in the Sixth. The difference can perhaps be shown most clearly by comparing the closing bars of both works. The Sixth drives purposefully towards the climax (a blazing D major tutti), whereas the Seventh concludes with a long sustained *mezzo piano* C sharp that seems to stretch out into infinity.

This facscination with the possiblities when working with intervals can been seen to come extent in the Fifth Symphony, which is the first of RS's major works not to conclude with a secure triadic stability. However, in the Seventh Symphony the musical argument is generated right from the start by the tensions felt by the use of certain conflicting intervals. In this case it is a melodic germ spanning a cluster of six adjacent notes (A, B flat, B natural, C, C sharp and D) that are subsequently combined to produce the following intervals: a major second in the low register of the bassoons (B - C sharp); a sustained major third on the flutes (B flat - D); and a distant repeated trumpet call (C). The 'missing note' (A) appears at the beginning of the next phrase.

There are, however, structural similarities between the Sixth and Seventh Symphonies. Both represent the most individual, almost radical approach to symphonic design yet shown by RS. That is not to imply that either work is not organic, but both works do show the composer's furthest departure from the three or four movement symphonic archetype. The Seventh is in one continuous movement and plays for thirty minutes. Like some of Havergal Brian's symphonies the work can be seen to fall into several sections, with the main tempo indications as follows:

SOSTENUTO - ALLEGRO - INTENSIVO - ADAGIO - ALLEGRO

This implies that the work is in five sections, but on closer examination of the actual material the pattern alters somewhat.

The second ***Allegro*** (the longest of all the movements) is itself in two sections: the first fully scored and vigorous throughout, and the second (beginning in a quasi-improvisatory fashion, exploring the resonances of two major thirds separated by a fifth) subdued and reflective, until a crescendo is built at a later stage. Another view is to interpret the work as being divided into three broad spans, the first concluding at the end of the ***Intensivo*** movement (the first sustained climax of the Symphony), the second being the ***Adagio***, with the ***Finale-Allegro*** third. Some might even claim that the long *molto slentando* coda to the last ***Allegro***, where the music gradually disperses, can be thought of as a movement in its own right. Perhaps because its character is totally different from the driving energy of the ***Allegro***, although I think further evidence for this view is a little slender.

As with any other true symphonist, one of the overriding factors for the conductor in the Seventh is pacing. This certainly the case with RS's Seventh, where a feeling of growth, control of broad designs and expectancy has to be instilled into the orchestra from the start.

There is no better instance than the first ***Allegro*** section, which through its gradual evolution, even when dynamics are repressed, must nonetheless still possess a strong current and definite sense of direction.

The pulse broadens from 3/4 to 3/2 for the ***Intensivo***, a stern highly passionate fugato sustained *fortissimo* for its entire length. The power of this movement can only be fully realized if the players manage to keep the tone strong and full-blooded for all the contrapuntal entries. If this can be achieved successfully, which is by no means easy, then the result is one of the most impressive contrapuntal symphonic movements that has appeared this century. This must be the most intense of all RS's orchestral fugatos yet, and it looks forward to the slow movement of the Eighth Symphony which unfolds in a similar manner.

The ***Adagio*** provides the first point of repose and sustained lyrical writing in the Symphony, and one of the most moving passages in all RS's output. Much of the writing evokes a vast spaciousness, as tender wind melodies are contrasted with slow string harmonies and calm brass chorales. One member of the orchestra said that this movement seemed to recall standing out on a clear night gazing at the stars. Certainly this is an imaginative and astute parallel, particularly when one remembers that RS has a strong interest in astronomy! However, it is vital to stress that this is in every way human music, "quiet things in a bad world" as the composer describes it.

The ***Finale-Allegro*** begins imperceptibly from amongst these lines as a lively figure emerges on violins that is a modification of the original intervals presented at the opening of the work. By

now any listener acquainted with RS's work will realise that he is one of the very few contemporary composers who still possesses the ability to write a dynamic Beethovenian *allegro*: but whereas the Sixth Symphony concluded with a cumulative *moto-perpetuo* finale that has something of the rhythmic energy of the last movement of Schubert's Great C Major Symphony, the Seventh requires a far terser, more succinct finale, especially since there has already been a powerful *allegro* lasting more than ten minutes at an earlier stage in the symphony. The final climax, again derived from the initial intervals, presents a thunderous alternation of two fiercely dissonant chords, until after much strain the music collapses onto a bare unharmonized C sharp on violas and celli. After this, the orchestral activity is scattered into increasingly smaller fragments until just the note itself is left, "as if to stare you out" as RS puts it. What is crucial in these closing bars is to maintain a steady *mezzo piano* throughout, ensuring that the bows are changed at different places, and that there is no trace of vibrato.

So ends this remarkable symphony, which should be in the repertoire of every major orchestra and chamber orchestra in the country.

1. Matthew Taylor conducted the London Premiere of RS's Seventh Symphony in April 1988 with the Thames Sinfonia.

NINTH SYMPHONY

A transcript of RS's broadcast dicussion with Gillian White
(Music Weekly - 5th January 1988)

GILLIAN WHITE: Your Ninth Symphony lasts for nearly 50 minutes, and has connections, I believe, with your First Symphony.

RS. Yes, well the connection is nothing you could seize on in terms of themes or keys, or anything like that. The connection is simply that both these symphonies are written on a single consistent pulse. Each one has its own pulse which goes right through it from beginning to end, and all the changes of tempo are over this constant pulse. There are 35 years between these two symphonies, which might make it interesting to people to see how I've changed in those 35 years. Whether for better or for worse is up to them to decide, but at least it [No.9] is different, and No.1 arose from the fact that one of the things I was most anxious to try to do as a young composer then, (I was 25 or so), was that I wanted to somehow recapture or rediscover the energy of Classical music, which I felt was largely lost during the Romantic period. In modern times, of course, this energy it is almost lost altogether: very often music nowadays is completely static, and it **WAS** in 1951 when I wrote this symphony and I wanted to recapture some of the energy that we get from Beethoven, Mozart and Haydn.

One of the things I noticed about the Classical symphony was that it is in different movements in different tempi: you get a quick movement, and a slow movement, a Minuet, a Finale, and so on. In every symphony you get a selection of tempi so that it demonstrates what the composer can do in all these different tempi, and I wanted to find a way of doing that over one tempo so as to unify the whole symphony in terms of its control of pace. So, while the First Symphony, for instance, starts with a moderately paced section in which you get alternating *ffs* and *pps*, but all with a very steady and strict tempo, and during that time it moves from one key to another. It moves from the key of A to the Key of E flat. When we get to E flat the slow middle section starts, but that again is thrown over the original tempo in longer notes so that we are conscious, not of any great energy, but of slow contrapuntal music, which gradually finds its way back towards the key of A where the symphony eventually ends with a fast finale. This finale is again related in tempo to the other two movements, so that the whole

piece is a complete unity in that sense. At least, I hope it is, and I still think it is now after 35 years. I'm not ashamed of it. I think it is really as good a piece as I could have made at that time: I think I could do better nowadays, but that's another thing!

GW: I'd love to know what it was like as a younger man working with Adrian Boult. [The First Symphony was premiered and recorded by Boult.]

RS: Well, he was always marvellous you know. When I first joined the BBC he was conductor of the BBCSO and I used to ring him up and say, "Is there anything you would like to do in the next season, because I'm planning the programmes?", and he said, "Well, you're the producer. You just put it down and I'll conduct it.... It's your job!" I thought that was marvellous - the ideal radio conductor - anything you want he would do it, and he did his damndest to make it as right as he possibly could. A marvellous man to have in the radio. There has never been anyone like him since, I don't think.

GW: He was a very modest man, wasn't he?

RS: Oh, extremely so, and he did a wonderful recording of this symphony [No.1]. Even though this record was made in 1957, and it's an old mono, it still sounds fine, and the performance is extremely convincing and concentrated.

GW: Is there any particular anecdote that you remember about it that the listener might be interested in hearing now?

RS: The only external thing that concerned the symphony was that I wrote it and then I had to produce what they call an exercise for the Doctor of Music degree at Durham, and I'd just finished this symphony and although it wasn't exactly an academic sort of piece I thought I'd send it and see whether they'd swallow it - and they did!

GW: We've already heard how you were thinking about re-energising music when you wrote your First Symphony. You were looking back to your masters Haydn and Beethoven for inspiration, but in the meantime 35 years has passed and we come to the Ninth Symphony. How did this come about? Why did you look back again once more?

RS: Well, I wasn't really looking back you see. I think I've always been interested in this question of recovering Classical energy to try to restore it in music to create the feeling that we have muscles, you know. We've got two arms and two legs each, and we move around in a muscular way. This is a natural thing, and it seems to be important that music reflects it and provides a way of illustrating life. (I rather agree with Nielsen about

this.) All this time in other symphonies I've done the same thing: not necessarily by unifying them by a single pulse, but by trying to write proper allegros proper adagios and so on which do actually have contrasted tempi, and which create this feeling akin to Classical music.

After all this time when I came to write No.9 I suddenly felt that now is the time perhaps to explore again this question of a constant pulse throughout a complete work. I had done it in other works: the Second Quartet for example - a long time ago (not long after the First Symphony), and the second movement of the Third Symphony, which starts slow and gets faster and faster over a single pulse, accumulating energy as it goes on. Now I wanted to try to see what I could do on a really big scale - a really vast scale - on one tempo.

So No.9 is not constructed like a Classical Symphony - it goes back further in fact, to Bach - and the first part of it is like a huge chorale prelude with counterpoint going on with long massive lines in the brass, like the lines of a chorale in a chorale prelude. They are not a chorale, but they are based on the intervals which you heard right at the very beginning of the symphony. In fact, the whole symphony is derived from a set of intervals which we hear right at the very start - in the first few bars. You hear the music opening out very mysteriously and quietly from a central note which you hear on the double basses right at the beginning, and around that note intervals fan outwards and they form a set of intervals which is then used throughout the symphony without any difference. They are transformed in all sorts of ways, but they are never left - they are never abandonned - and so the whole symphony is constructed from them.

That is very different from the Classical tonalities that I was using in No.1. In No.1 we started in one key, we went to another key in the middle, and came back to the first key. In this case we can't speak of keys at all, although we can speak of pitches. We can speak, for instance, of how the first set of intervals leads us upwards a fourth and when you repeat that from that point it goes upwards another fourth, and it starts by going through a whole series of fourths until it's traversed all twelve of them. Now, that's not twelve-note music, and it's not tonal Classical music either, it's something different from both. If you like it's a serial use of intervals - instead of a serial use of single notes such as we find in Schoenberg. So the whole symphony is derived from that process, although I wouldn't advise the listener to try to follow it - it should create a natural feeling of continuity. If you follow it you may feel that

the symphony is growing - that it is unfolding itself gradually until eventually throughout this first section, which is a long part lasting about 20 minutes or so, it builds up to a massive climax and bursts into energy. That energy is in a triple time, which is the same speed as the soft triplets we heard right at the very beginning of the symphony. At the beginning of the symphony the double basses have:

and that is the tempo of the Scherzo when it comes. In fact the Scherzo is the climax of the first part of the symphony, and it sort of lets itself fly - lets itself go in all sorts of directions. Hair-raising things happen in the orchestra; terrifying for the conductor and frightful for everyone concerned! Then, when that reaches its climax, we get the slow section, which is also based on the same set of intervals and which drifts at first in a contrapuntal way like a fugue.

Next we get a set of variations occurring in the middle of it, which is based on the set of intervals - the same intervals - but this time going forwards and backwards, and forming a palindrome. There are six variations on a palindrome which gradually build up to a big climax - a massive climax - before the symphony eventually dies away in a quiet coda.

This climb to the last climax is rather Brucknerian I suppose, and that's another influence on this symphony. Bruckner has always been one of my great loves, and I think for the first time in my life I've been conscious of an actual influence of his music on mine. In fact in the first part of the symphony, towards the climax, before the Scherzo, anyone who knows his Bruckner really well will recognise something. I won't tell you what it is, but you will recognise it if you really know your Bruckner! I hope it won't sound just like one of those crude quotations: it isn't that. It's a tribute to Bruckner, but it is based on a recognisable passage from a Bruckner symphony.

GW: The work is also a tribute to your wife I think. It is dedicated to Angela, isn't it?

RS: Indeed yes, but she deserves something far better than that.

GW: There is a record coming out, isn't there?

RS: Yes. Tod Handley is going to record it with the Bournemouth Orchestra in February, and I'm very much looking forward to it because he's the ideal conductor for it. Since Adrian Boult there has not been anyone who can compare with him for doing new works. He always comes to the first rehearsal knowing the work by heart, and he has always got constructive, creative ideas about it, and that is marvellous for a composer; so much better than having a conductor with his nose buried in the score, just wagging the stick and not having a clue about what the thing means or feels like or anything. Tod knows what it feels like: he understands what you are trying to do, and he has his way, his own ideas, of trying to help you get there.

GW: Of course there is another connection with the First Symphony, because Tod Handley was a pupil of Adrian Boult, wasn't he?

RS: He was, and he also shares my admiration for Adrian. We have so much in common musically and in that way too.

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SIMPSON'S RASOUMOVSKYS

Three discussions on the Fourth, fifth and Sixth String Quartets

Part II: String Quartet No.5

MALCOLM McDONALD: Now that we're going to talk about your 5th String Quartet, which is the one which bears an apprehensible relationship to the second of the Beethoven Rasoumovsky Quartets, I'd like to ask you to think about it, **not** in relation to the second Beethoven Rasoumovsky Quartet, but in relation to your Fourth Quartet, and your Sixth Quartet. I do this because it's a quite often expressed view that the Rasoumovsky Quartets have more in common with each other than simply a common opus number, and that in some sense they form a self-consistent and mutually reacting or interacting group of works: at least, to a much greater extent than say the opus 18 quartets of Beethoven do. I have even heard it said occasionally that in some sense they are one gigantic work in three enormous movements. Although you probably wouldn't want to go as far as that, I think I've seen you say somewhere that the second Rasoumovsky is, on many levels, a reaction from the sensibility of the first Rasoumovsky Quartet, and I wondered how you might view these three quartets as a group reacting against one another as the Rasoumovsky Quartets might do.

RS: Yes, I think there's a lot in that. In fact, of course, whenever one writes any work following another work, one tends to have some kind of reaction against the previous one, or from it, not necessarily against it, but you obviously want to do something different. Inevitably, if you follow up No.4 with No.5 you're going to make No.5 as different from No.4 as you can. No composer easily sets out to imitate himself, not if he's really trying to find new directions all the time.

Obviously Beethoven in the Rasoumovskys was consciously, I think, extending the scope of the string quartet medium. He was doing things on a scale which had never been attempted before with a string quartet; only remotely attempted before comparably in Mozart's string quintets, I suppose. If you take the Mozart C major Quintet - that's on a very big scale indeed, and it may very well be that he was thinking of something like that, and for the first time making string quartets even bigger than

that.

Now comes the question of contrasting the three works. In the first case, the F major Quartet has a certain forthrightness and solidity, and a certain serenity I suppose, even if you include the rather elegaic slow movement. The piece has a certain solidity and grandeur about it, and ends up with a sort of arcadian feeling of joy and happiness. In contrast to that the E minor is nervous and intense, and it seeks serenity out of a state of nervousness - as we can see in the Adagio, which reacts very strongly against this nervous, impulsive, tense 1st movement. Then the rest of the quartet tends to explore the semitonal relationships which had come up in the 1st movement, and in the last movement turns them into a kind of humour. The use of C major in the last movement acts as a foil to the E minor, and it keeps on coming back.

Actually, as I was thinking in terms of the Rasoumovskys all the time, and thinking of what Beethoven had intended to do, or trying to find out from the inside what was happening in these works, I was also conscious of trying to create another piece which was a contrast to the previous one in perhaps a similar way, in that in No.5 there is a certain nervous intensity which one won't find in No.4. The slow movement is also a search for calmness and serenity, just as Beethoven's is, and the last two movements have a certain humour in them - I think. They are not completely without humour, and the last movement is a very fierce exploration of the C major / E minor conflict that you find in Beethoven's finale. But, in the Beethoven it is humourous: he gets this tune starting in C and then going on in E minor, and every time the thing comes back it's C major - and it's prepared on the dominant of C major - and it's as if he can't escape it. It's as if this damned C major keeps coming back, and the last time he says with a kind of twinkle, "For God's sake - not that again!", and then scurries off with a *piu allegro* in E minor, and sticks to that, and before it can come back he stops. This is a superb joke.

I didn't intend my thing as that kind of joke at all, but at the same time I wanted C major to continually come back so you get this feeling of something going round and round. In the case of this finale it's like a wind going - like a great wind, and it continually blows C major past your face, but you don't think of it as any kind of a joke, and, unlike Beethoven's, it ends quietly. It peters out and disappears into thin air; the wind just drops and disappears into thin air. It could be going on somewhere else, I supppose, but that's what it's like.

Another difference which I think is worth mentioning,

because people won't notice it straight away, is in the 3rd movement. Now, in the Allegretto (the 3rd movement) Beethoven makes the Trio come back twice. You get the Allegretto (the Scherzo, if you like) - the Trio - then the Scherzo again - and the Trio a second time - and last of all the Scherzo again. And Beethoven's Trio is the one that's based on the Russian tune. Now, I wasn't going to be so slavish as to use Russian tunes in all these three quartets. I couldn't think of any anyway, and nobody had commissioned them from me so I wasn't being paid for writing quartets on Russian tunes. On the other hand I couldn't resist doing something similar in a way by having a simple tune and also treating it in counterpoint that didn't work - like Beethoven did with his Russian tune just for a joke. He made all the counterpoint 'not work' so it all sounds rather comical, and yet at the same time marvellously poetic. On the other hand I chickened out of the idea of literally repeating the Trio and Scherzo like Beethoven does. I thought to myself, I can't really do that kind of thing now. I suppose I ought to have the courage to try and do it, but in fact I didn't.

Now, instead I hit on another idea, which struck me at the time as rather a good idea, and that was to make this Trio into a crescendo, so that by the time it reached ***ff*** the the original delicate Scherzo came back in the middle ***ff***. When the Trio came back for the second time it was a diminuendo, so that that led back to a ***p*** and the original Scherzo in a piano at the end. So the whole movement is sort of a crescendo and a diminuendo, like an arch, and this seemed to me to solve my problem. I don't know what Beethoven would think of it - he would probably laugh.

MM: Now, this crescendo / diminuendo in the Scherzo also comes across as a very powerful development of the Scherzo and Trio material at the same time, although it's occupying the same space where the literal repeat comes in the Beethoven.

RS: It's not a literal repetition. It is, in fact, a development.

MM: Yes, and the material gets caught up in a sort of blizzard of triplet figuration, which in many ways also anticipates the Finale, doesn't it?

RS: Yes. The Finale, of course, is based on triplets, but much faster. The tune at the beginning of the Trio is really like a folk-tune, although it skips about a bit for a folk-tune. In fact, I can't imagine folk singers quite skipping around in this way, but it's a simple tune, and it's treated like a fugue - just like Beethoven does - a kind of a crude fugue anyway. When the middle part comes back it's ***ff*** by the time this thing has built up

to it, and the next time the Trio comes back it's diminuendo.

MM: You were talking about the repeats in Beethoven's Scherzo and Trio, and how, in that particular instance, you "chickened out", as you put it, of actually having a literal repeat. Of course, in the 1st movement of this quartet you did not 'chicken out' at all because Beethoven in the Second Rasoumovsky, almost uniquely as far as I know, directs that not only the exposition of the 1st movement should be repeated, but also the whole of the development and the recapitulation should also be repeated.

I've heard many performances, as no doubt you have, in which either or both of these repeats are omitted for reasons that I don't totally understand, and I was amused to note that in your 1st movement instead of putting repeat marks you have in fact written out every single note again, producing a 1st movement which, on paper at any rate, is absolutely immense, but obviously giving prospective performers no excuse at all for omitting any repeat.

RS: It is a challenge to them, in fact, to cut it!

MM: I wondered about it because it goes by default that repeats are something that we've somehow 'moved out of' in musical history and that they're something which you're already not very sure whether you should use in Beethoven, and in later 19th century composers it's very rare I think nowadays to hear the repeats for instance in the Brahms symphonies. Of course in twentieth century music we seem to have reached a situation where either composers are entirely bent on continuous development without a shade of literal repetition, or entirely static music, in which the material makes just as little sense the first time you play it, and so there's not much point in repeating it! I wondered really what you saw the function of the repeat as being, both in the Rasoumovskys and also now in the mid-twentieth century in your own quartets.

RS: Well, you see the whole argument against repeats (which regards repeats as a sort of tautology, if you like) is the false idea that music is meant to convey information, and that once a piece of information has been conveyed that's that, and there's no need to convey it again. Now this is a load of nonsense. Of course music doesn't convey information: music conveys form. In fact if we repeat something it means that we want it to make an effect as a repeat and not merely to convey information twice. Beethoven has special reasons, always, for repeats, whether it's the ordinary repeat of the

exposition, or whether it's something special, like the repeat of the whole development and recapitulation in the E minor quartet. One of the things that I tried to find out in studying these works was the reason for this.

Every case is different. One has to look at every case quite differently, and one reason why Beethoven repeats, in this instance, the whole of the development and recapitulation is a sequence of keys which I can't go into now because it would be much too complex. Briefly, when he goes back to the beginning we get one effect. When he repeats the exposition then goes on to the development we get another effect. When he gets back to the end of the recapitulation and goes back to the beginning of the development again we get another sequence of keys, which in fact balances what happened before. Or at least it threatens to balance what happened before, and then does something different. The real balance comes when he gets to the end of the recapitulation for the second time, and then goes on to the coda, when we get a sequence of keys in thirds just as we had at the beginning of the development. That is what he wants to convey, and without this repeat this effect is lost, because it's only by once breaking it up and surprising the listener by something unexpected that he's able to make the expected thing happen the second time, and there is the real stroke of genius .

So, in making this double repeat myself, I devised something of a similar nature. I don't say it's a stroke of genius, but I do say that it means something and that it's important, and I hope it will demonstrate what I learned from the Beethoven. I leave the listener to find out for himself what that is because to explain it now would need a lot of music examples and a long lecture on details which I'm sure nobody wants to hear just now!

MM: You mentioned earlier also Beethoven's semitonal relationships in this movement, and indeed other movements of the quartet, and also the fact that many of the themes show concern with semitonal figuration and, of course, this happens in your quartet.

I think it's quite remarkable, and a great tribute to you that I have found in studying these quartets of yours that so many of your themes recall to mind specific characteristics of Beethoven's themes without in themselves sounding in any way Beethovenian, but rather mature Simpson.

RS: That's reassuring!

MM: I wonder in fact if you've gone about the construction of the themes specifically to do this: in fact, to give

reminiscences of the actual Beethovenian procedures within the actual melodic lines.

RS: I think that very often starting off one tends to be much more similar to the model than when one goes on. For instance if you take the opening of the F major [discussed in TONIC Vol.1 No.4], that is very similar to the opening of the Beethoven F major in the fact that you have a 'cello theme rising up from under some repeated notes on the other instruments. We have the same sort of similarity here - a sharp ejaculation at the beginning, and then a soft answer, and then the soft answer a semitone higher and so on. The whole thing begins in the same textural way, but of course as it goes on the material begins to dictate its own terms and so we get differences. Again, in the slow movement of this I think the parallel between this slow movement and Beethoven's slow movement would be perfectly obvious in the way it begins and the way it continues in some ways. There are, of course, certain respects in which my movement has to go in a different way simply because the material and the language are different.

I've already described how the 3rd movement is different, and that was conscious. In the case of the last movement - because I wanted it to be an extremely strong finale to the entire work, in a way that Beethoven didn't intend - that had to develop differently. It even had to start differently!

It might be a good idea if you listen to the beginning of the Beethoven with its C major start, then going on in E minor... [Opening of Beethoven Played] ... Now, my finale starts off with an absolute whirlwind in C major, and this ***fortissimo*** suddenly ceases, leaving the two violins playing ***pianissimo*** in E minor, as if they'd been in the background all the time, and this dichotemy between the two tonalities persists very much through the movement. It's an absolute whirlwind of a piece: they go at it furiously for quite a long time - 840 bars! - by which time the quartet is fit to drop, I think... [Opening of RS Quartet Played] ... It's diabolically difficult to play, and I must confess that I was absolutely staggered by the way in which the Gabrieli Quartet were able to play it at that speed. I didn't really think it was possible.

MM: We've been talking about the conflict or contest between C and E in this movement. I wondered if the overall tonal argument of the quartet wasn't in some ways very similar this time to the argument of the Fourth Quartet [discussed in TONIC Vol.1 No.4], in that Beethoven's ambiguity between D and F in the Finale of the Fourth Quartet gave you the idea both of intensifying that into a kind of contest in the finale, and retrospectively to embody some

of that ambiguity in the previous movements of your Fourth Quartet. In the second Rasoumovsky Beethoven's C and E equivocation is in some senses and outcome of various Neapolitan relationships etc. that have been happening in the previous movements. I think you did say, at one stage, that your finale again was an intensification of Beethoven's tonal conflict. I wondered if this was a general intensification throughout the work, more or less along the lines of the Fourth Quartet?

RS: I think it may be, but it was less necessary to intensify it throughout the whole work than in the case of the F major because in this case Beethoven has developed it very strongly right through the whole quartet. The basic difference, I suppose, is that whereas he ends it with a joke - a kind of sublime joke - I, being a lesser mortal, end it seriously with an aggressive sort of whirlwind. I suppose it would have been greater of me if I had been able to find a joke to end it, but I wasn't able to do so.

Diary of performances

Saturday 30th June, at 7.30 pm. First London performance of RS **Piano Trio** by the Terroni Trio, at Barnet College Hall, Wood Street, Barnet, Herts (nearest underground station High Barnet). The concert also includes trios by Beethoven, Brahms, and works by Elgar and Bridge. Admission by programme £2.50 (£2 concessions) from Barnet College 081-440 6321.

Friday 6th July sees the first performance of RS new work for brass band 'Vortex', by the Yorkshire Imperial Metals Band, conducted by Geoffrey Brand. The concert will be held at Leeds Town Hall as part of the Leeds Festival.

The 1990 Cheltenham Festival includes two works by RS -

Saturday 14th July, at 7.30 p.m. The Vanbrugh Quartet play **Quartet no. 7**. The concert also includes the Haydn Quartet, Opus 76 no. 3, in C, and Janacek's Quartet no. 2, 'Intimate Letters'.

Thursday 19th July, at 7.30 pm. The Cambrian Brass give the world premiere of the **Brass Quintet (Prelude, Fugue and Scherzo)**.

Monday - Wednesday 23rd, 24th and 25th July. RS's **10th and 12th Quartets** will be featured in a series of concerts on Bornholm Island, which lies between Sweden and Poland. They will be played by the Coull Quartet. RS will be giving a talk on his 9th Symphony.

Thursday 9th August, at 7.30 p.m. the **5th Symphony** will be performed at a Promenade concert at the Royal Albert Hall, by Andrew Davis, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra. (Tickets, £3.50 - £12 available now by post, and by telephone (071-823 9998) from 11 June. For further details see Prom prospectus)

Three lunchtime concerts in this year's Cardiff Festival feature string quartets by RS.

Tuesday 18th September, - **Quartet no. 7**
Thursday 27th September, **Quartet no. 2**
Tuesday 2nd October, the first performance of **Quartet no. 13.**
All these performances are given by the Delme Quartet, and begin at 1.05 p.m. in the St David's Hall. Tickets are avaialble now by telephone - 0222 371236 (or 0222 235900, credit cards)

Wednesday 26th September, at 8.00 p.m. the RS **10th Quartet ('For Peace')** will be performed by the Coull Quartet, in the Purcell Room, at a concert by 'Musicians Against Nuclear Arms'. Also included will be the Dvorak 'American' Quartet, Opus 96 and the Beethoven Quartet in F minor, Opus 95. It is hoped that RS will be present, signing copies of the recent CD in the foyer.

Wednesday 16th January 1991. World premiere of **Symphony number 10.** Vernon Handley will conduct the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, at the Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool.

Wednesday 30th January 1991, at 7 30 pm. London premiere of **Symphony number 10.** Same artists, as part of a Royal Philharmonic Society Concert. It will be played in the Royal Festival Hall.

Saturday 9th February 1991, Vernon Handley, conducts the **9th Symphony**, with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland.

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