TONIC

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EDITORIAL

John Pickard

This is the first issue of TONIC to appear under my editorship and I suppose it is only appropriate to begin with what appears to be our signature tune: an apology for its delay! Sadly, life as a University Fellow rarely allows for such luxuries as getting one's own non-academic work done. One empathises with Sisyphus - but he never had to mark examination scripts.

Nevertheless, here, at last, is Vol. 4 No.1 in all its glory. The first change you will have noticed is the new improved art-work on the cover and the second is (I hope) the superior standard of printing (including typeset music examples). Before grateful members deluge the Editor with letters of congratulation, cheques, offers of marriage etc. I feel it only fair to point out that these massive improvements are the splendid work of Philip Maund, who is on the staff at Rosehill Music (publishers of most of RS's brass music, together with other works). To him and to Peter Wilson of Rosehill, who provided the facilities, may I express the Society's gratitude.

This particular issue is mainly devoted to the study of a single work - the Second Symphony - and it is envisaged that this will be the first of a number of issues whose aim will be to focus on study of one particular piece. This will lend the issue greater coherence as well as providing a valuable repository of secondary source material for anyone interested in learning more about individual works. The main contributions, though written quite independently, are to some extent complimentary. Lionel Pike has provided a fascinating account of how critics (or to use RS's term: 'cretics') have variously interpreted and misinterpreted this work over the thirty-five years of its existence. My piece, on the other hand, is more straightforwardly analytical (though I hope not too indigestible!). For those wishing to follow it in detail, it is worth pointing out that a copy of the Lengnick study score would be worth having to hand.

The issue also includes an article by RS from *The Listener* (an edition from 1968) in which RS discusses the problems of conducting one's own music with special reference to the Second Symphony which he himself had conducted with the New Philharmonia in 1963 (a tape of which still survives). We hope that this article, together with its counterparts, will provide stimulating reading in anticipation of the first commercial recording of the symphony (along with No.4) which Hyperion are undertaking in early August with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Vernon Handley. If you simply cannot wait until the disc is released to find out how they negotiate the treacherous opening (see RS's article) it is worth remembering that members are invited to a private run-through of both works at the Winter Gardens, Bournemouth on 31 July - just before the recording sessions. In the meantime, Hyperion's recording of Symphony No.10 should be out soon and their disc of the complete brass band music is now available.

Finally, although he must be tired of hearing it by now, this editorial would not be complete without a belated, but heartfelt 70th birthday greeting to RS on behalf of every member of the Society. Happy birthday Bob - and many of them.

Lengnick

Robert Simpson

ORCHESTRAL:

Symphony No.1
Symphony No.2
Symphony No.3
Symphony No.4
Symphony No.5
Symphony No.6
Symphony No.10
Symphony No.11
Violin Concerto
Pianoforte Concerto
Allegro Deciso for String Orchestra

BRASS:

Canzona for Brass

CHAMBER MUSIC:

String Quartet No.1
String Quartet No.2
String Quartet No.3
String Quartet No.4
String Quartet No.5
String Quartet No.6
String Quartet No.7
String Quartet No.12
String Quartet No.13
String Quartet No.14
Trio for Clarinet, 'cello and Piano
Clarinet Quintet (Clarinet and String Quartet)
Horn Quartet (Horn, Violin, 'cello and Piano)
Violin Sonata
Viola Quintet
String Trio
Sonata for Two Pianos

PIANO SOLOS:

Variations and Finale on a theme of Haydn
Sonata
Variations on a theme by Beethoven

CHORAL:

Media Morte in Vita Sumus
(Motet for SATB, Brass and Timpani)

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SYMPHONY NO.2

Allegro grazioso
Largo cantabile
Non troppo allegro, ma con brio

This symphony was composed for Anthony Bernard and the London Chamber Orchestra and is therefore written for a classical orchestra of two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings—the same combination as, for instance, in Beethoven's First Symphony. The trumpets are the high D instruments and advantage is taken of the modern chromatic timpani, which are especially prominent in the last movement. The work is in the key of B major/minor, with G and E flat playing crucial intermediate roles; in the first movement, which begins actively but mysteriously, the first stage culminates in E flat and the final climax is in G, before the music subsides into the shadowy B minor in which it began.

The slow movement, a set of thirteen variations on a theme given out by unharmonised violas, is entirely dominated by the keys of E flat and G, the theme itself swinging slowly from one tonality to the other, so that each variation does the same. The middle variations are all pianissimo and form a kind of still heart to this sometimes disturbed movement. A little coda brings the music to a gentle close in E flat.

The finale, energetic and defiant, returns to the order of tonalities of the first movement, the first stage running into E flat and the recapitulation occurring in G. The coda restores B major with much incident and ends abruptly as soon as matters are settled.

Robert Simpson

SIMPSON'S SECOND SYMPHONY: The View from the Archives

Lionel Pike

I HAVE it on good authority that members of the society go to sleep when I make any attempt at analysing Bob's music, so I thought, for once, that I would take a somewhat different tack and tell you what the RS archives say about this piece. This means examining the manuscript score, of course, but also looking at the newspaper reports and criticisms. Perhaps it is unfair to drag up effusions of critics made on a single hearing of the work, written - in some cases - in a hurry so as to meet a newspaper editor's deadline. You may think that this makes them too easy a target, and that it is unfair to take as evidence comments on a complex new work made only for immediate consumption - comments which the critic himself probably assumed would be ephemeral. I make no apology, since nearly all of them take an *ex cathedra* stance, and such unconsidered - even, in some cases, malicious - reports can do immense damage to an artist. Moreover, the few really high-class and discerning critics - Hugh Ottaway, Edmund Rubbra, Anthony Milner - stand so far above the general mediocrity (and in some cases downright incompetance) that it is well worth giving them credit for it. But there is a tendency for admirers of RS to assume that all critics who speak well of him are *ipso facto* intelligent, and that the more damning ones are *ipso facto* charlatans; I shall try to avoid falling into this trap. Some of them vary in their appreciation, and some are honest enough to admit mistakes and revise their opinions (such revisions are almost invariably in Bob's favour).

It is too easy a sport, though, putting the critics side by side in the dock like this. I once bought Paul Foot's book, *The Politics of Harold Wilson*, because it had on its cover two quotations from *Hansard*: one was 'I myself have always deprecated appeals to the Dunkirk spirit as an answer to our problems... 26 July 1961', and the other was 'I believe that the spirit of Dunkirk will carry us through to success... 12 December 1964'.[1] It is really all too easy to set music critics off against each other in a similar fashion. They cannot, for instance, even agree about whether the Second Symphony is popular: in 1967 K.W. Dommett of the *Birmingham Post* described the work as 'popular',[2] while ten years earlier J.F. Waterhouse of the same paper had quite serious doubts about it,[3] and Arthur Jacobs - who should have known better - had this quite unforgivable passage in the *Evening Standard*:

> A trumpet hangs amid the pullovers in a fashionable Cheltenham shop window with the legend: "Hitting the high notes in knitwear". After 12 years... the town has at last attuned itself to its own annual Festival of British Contemporary Music.
> Audiences are the biggest ever. Among the packed house last night for Sir John Barbirolli and the Hallé Orchestra was a 25-year-old Miss Irene Lundberg, from Lapland. She is one of 24 Swedish schoolteachers visiting Cheltenham for an English course.
> "My village, Overrissjo, has only 100 inhabitants, and the nearest big town is 20 Swedish miles away - that's 120 English miles. So I never hear symphony concerts except on the radio," she said.
> Last night's new work was the Symphony no.2 by Robert Simpson of the BBC. One well-shaped movement is flanked by two that are insistent but unexciting. I doubt if it will reach Lapland, even on the radio.[4]

No doubt Arthur Jacobs imagined he was being extremely funny; he was clearly trying to get his own back for a disagreement with RS in the correspondance columns of *The Listener* two months previously. Such irrelevancies had been dragged in in the name of criticism of RS's music before: Noel Goodwin's review of a performance of the First Symphony contained the phrase 'Stocky Robert Simpson - with a huge red tie like an extra tongue hanging out like a tepid welcome...';[5] had Bob been female, no doubt his vital statistics would have been included as well. It is no wonder Bob wrote to the *Guardian* (2 February 1967), 'Sir, - I would dearly like the opportunity to house-train a few music critics'.[6]

But there are other disagreements between critics. There was one about symphonic growth. The anonymous *Sunday Times* critic in 1962 observed that 'the tonal scheme appears to be insisting too much on its logic, and the climaxes have the air of having been carefully planned and placed, then underlined, rather than of spontaneous growth'.[7] By contrast, Wilfred Mellers said, 'The music is all growth...',[8] and Anthony Milner said, 'Simpson is obviously a composer who thinks naturally in symphonic forms and develops them with great individuality';[9] Peter Heyworth likewise observed, 'the form he evolves grows directly out of his musical argument'.[10] Even the overall feeling is differently perceived: was Bob an 'angry young man', or was he not? A.K.H. [Holland?] said the work gave the impression of being by one of our 'angry young men',[11] whereas Dyneley Hussey said, 'It is eminently serious, and for that we may be grateful in a world of angry young men and frivolous entertainment'.[12] We might at least expect of our critics that they would know the difference between good and bad orchestration - that *is* pretty basic, after all; but even this causes them to come up with opposing views, though most admit that RS is able to make a phenomenal amount of noise from a Beethoven-sized orchestra - Bob had said that he wanted 'to see how powerful a sound I can make'[13] - and one would think that this alone would bear witness to a first-rate technique of composition and orchestration. Colin Mason confidently announced that, 'It's weakness is the orchestration, which is unimaginative and not always skilful';[14] but C.R. in the *Bristol Evening Post*, said, 'it was a powerful, economic and brilliantly orchestrated work which produced some shattering sounds from a relatively small body of players'.[15] As it happens, Bob himself admitted to a difficulty in the scoring in his article, 'On Conducting Oneself in Public', in *The Listener*:

> I discovered, for example, that the beginning of my Second Symphony, where muted second violins are divided between B and A sharp in soft dissonance, was wonderfully easy to write down but enormously difficult to perform properly. How, when you give the beat, can you and all the players be sure that the two notes will be exactly equal in sound? They must be, or the opening loses its point.[16]

The Second Symphony was written for an orchestra the same size as that required by Beethoven's Seventh Symphony; its dedication 'To Anthony and Mary Bernard' reflects the fact that it was written for the London Chamber Orchestra, whose conductor was Anthony Bernard. It was written in 1955 and 1956, and first performed by the Hallé Orchestra at the Cheltenham Festival on 16 July 1957; by this time Bob had already written his book on Nielsen and started his campaign to widen the public's appreciation of him. Perhaps as a way of giving the reader some background information about a young composer (Bob was 35 when he wrote the piece), but often - it seems - because critics were stuck for some line to take, many correspondents latched onto the Nielsen connection. One certainly gets tired of reading, 'Robert Simpson, the well-known authority on Nielsen...', and Bob himself must have got even more fed up with the suggestion that his music is like Nielsen's: Desmond Shawe-Taylor said as much when he wrote, 'Robert Simpson must be tired of having the style of the Danish master traced in everything he writes'.[17] A far-sighted critic can put the matter nicely into perspective:

It professes no programme, but anyone who believes that music is one way of knowing and speaking about those currents in our sentient, cognitive, or emotional lives which are not to be expressed in words, would have no difficulty in recognizing in its three compact movements the kind of general ideas such as growth, power and impetus which Carl Nielsen made the subject of his symphonies.[18]

That - from *The Times* of 17 July 1957, and thus anonymous as were all *Times* reports in those days (perhaps it is by William Mann?) - shows a sophisticated knowledge of Nielsen as well as a thorough grasp of RS. One person, however, found the influence of Sibelius,[19] while Ernest Bradbury said, 'His latest symphony... shows that the Nielsen influence has not to any appreciable extent permeated his own very individual musical thought'.[20] For the sake of completeness I should add that one critic found the influence of Shostakovich, and one of Bartók.

Now all that is very well, but RS does have other interests. I gather that he thinks Beethoven is quite good. Edward Lockspeiser noticed this, for he wrote,

Each of the movements rings true, point after point being built up into a convincing musical discourse. I think one can detect the models of structure by which Dr Simpson has been so happily inspired. They are the great spans of development in middle-period Beethoven.[21]

This, it seems to me, is much nearer the mark; listen, for example, to this passage from Bob's own writings:

It seems to me that Beethoven in this symphony [the Seventh] strongly anticipates the so-called 'progressive tonality' of Nielsen; in the first movement F and C are notable foreigners to the tonic A, in the *Allegretto* they are more easily related to the prevailing A minor, and in the scherzo F major is strong enough to take over, the first change of key being to A, which is now itself so much a foreigner that it can behave only as the dominant of D, into which key the trio inevitably falls. After all this, only the greatest vehemence can restore A - hence the tremendous insistent energy of the finale.[22]

Although that is only a footnote to someone else's chapter, it cuts through all the verbiage and clutter that we so often find in analyses, and expresses *exactly* what Beethoven's Seventh Symphony is all about. (I would like to say that my remarks are not intended as any slight on the excellent chapter to which Bob has added the footnote.) Beethoven was moving regularly to distant key areas in order to widen the tonal canvas of his music. Brahms used similar relationships: the movements of his First Symphony are based on the tonics C, E, A flat and C minor moving to major. So did two of RS's favourite symphonists of a later time: Sibelius' Second Symphony has a D tonic that is affected by F sharp and B flat, and Nielsen based the movements of his Second Symphony (*The Four Temperaments*) on B minor, G, E flat minor, and D major moving to A major.

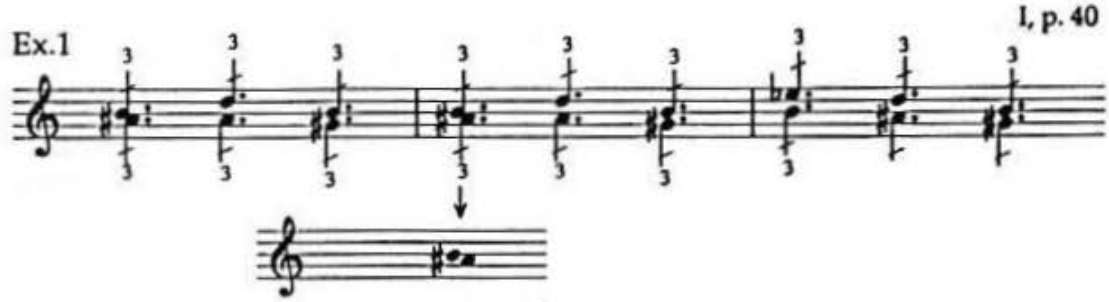
In his own Second Symphony, RS has chosen such a scheme. B is the central pitch (and key), and round it are arranged symmetrically E flat (a major third above it) and G (a major third below it); moreover, there is also a major third separating these two satellite keys. Clearly the major third is destined to play a decisive part: according to Dyneley Hussey,[23] this represents an 'adhering to traditional tonal relationships', though in fact there are very few works that behave tonally in the way this one does. I'd like to quote Hugh Ottaway at some length here:

There are some, I know, who regard these matters of tonal structure as of little importance compared, say, with themes and texture - and I am not referring to the 'pure' chromaticists! It is often remarked that the trained musician, let alone the general listener, is in the main unable to follow the tonal argument without a score; in other words, it is a thing for the eye, not the ear, and therefore of little moment except as a kind of puzzle. This is really rather naïve, for it assumes that only that which is consciously assimilated and, as it were, mentally tabulated is valid artistic experience. One might just as well maintain that melody is unimportant unless one can name its notes or intervals.

How very prosaic! Clearly the *musical effect* of organised tonal conflict leaves its mark, as the grouping of notes to form a melody leaves its mark, in direct proportion to the listener's aural and imaginative acuteness. Whether or not the listener masters the tonal argument *intellectually* is another matter. If he does, his interest is certainly sharpened, though it may possibly be that his imaginative response to other elements is thereby somewhat blunted.[24]

The key of B can be major or minor, and only when it is *major* does D sharp (or E flat) also occur as part of it. B veers between major and minor, in fact, and some themes take both D sharp and D natural on board:

Ex.1 I, p. 40



As you can see from the example, the semitone is an important element of the work, too: it derives from piling up thirds so that you reach A sharp from a tonic B (B, D sharp, F sharp, A sharp - the shortfall is of a semitone, as you can see from Example 4, upper stave). You will often hear the semitone used in a dissonance of this kind, and also used melodically; but in addition it can be used to move between the major and minor thirds.

How does one emphasize this tonal scheme of keys a third apart? How, we might ask, would Beethoven have done it? There are, perhaps, two answers. One way is to use an instrument known to play only certain pitches, just as in Classical times the timpani normally only played the tonic and dominant. The audience therefore *knew* what pitch the timpani were sounding, so the composer could use them to signal returns to the tonic. Beethoven does it in a humorous way:

[Here bars 150-165 of the Finale of Beethoven's Eighth Symphony were played.]

(The slight oddity here is that Beethoven tunes the timpani to the tonic in octaves rather than to the tonic and dominant.) RS uses chromatic timpani, so the ear can no longer rely on them to identify any one pitch with absolute certainty. Yet, all the same, the initial entries of the timpani in his Second Symphony are of significance because they emphasize the key area (or notes) in an unmistakable fashion.

[Here Simpson's Second Symphony, first movement, Figure 2 to 4 bars after Figure 4 was played.]

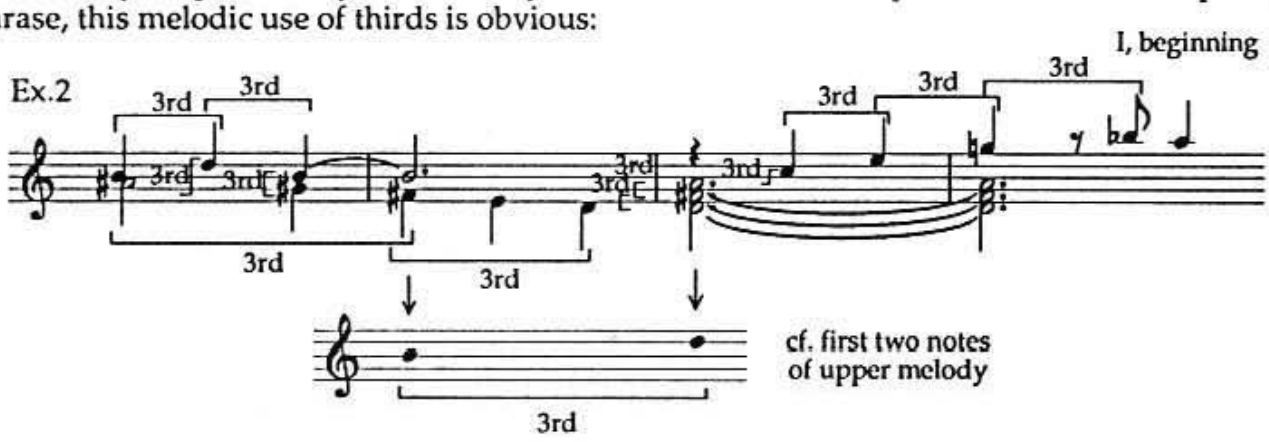
(Incidentally, sometimes a special orchestral colour is used to signpost a new key area: E flat is signalled at Figure 1 by a luscious woodwind chord, the bassoon playing its highest 'safe' note.) Secondly, as we heard from Bob himself, power and high-spiritedness is evident in Beethoven's Seventh Symphony; its purpose is to emphasize certain structural points. In the same way, the Finale of RS's Second Symphony uses power and high-spiritedness. The point of this was often missed by the critics: Colin Mason, for example, is only one of several who found that 'when he uses the full orchestra, as he does much too liberally in the first movement and almost incessantly in the last, the sound is too thick[,] too loud and monotonous...'[25] Lest you are inclined to take this at its face value, let me just play you a little of the opening: you will hear the lush woodwind chord of E flat that I mentioned just now - and the timpani emphasizing G.

[Here Simpson's Second Symphony, first movement, from the beginning to just after Figure 3 was played]

Now I happen to think that that is an extraordinarily beautiful opening - not bombastic, not overscored. In 1962 the work was played again in a Cheltenham Festival concert, for it was the first work chosen to be repeated in a new policy of giving a further hearing to music originally premiered there and of specially high quality. After this performance Noel Goodwin described the opening as 'forceful',[26] which seems rather wide of the mark. Others, however, instinctively saw the quality of the work. Anthony Milner said it was 'a truly stirring and exciting experience.... Simpson is obviously a composer who thinks naturally in symphonic forms and develops them with great individuality'.[27] Edmund Rubbra, who, like Anthony Milner, had the advantage of bringing a composer's mind to the discussion of the work, provides us with the real essence:

Nothing is more indicative of the composer's intellectual methods than the seemingly casual but artful opening of the Second Symphony. There is no attempt to claim the listener's attention by arresting gestures. On the contrary. But the slow germination reveals that, far from being just a starting-point, this is the seed from which all three movements of the symphony grow. Not only does this beginning indicate the main tonal centres, B major-minor, E flat and G, but also the cornerstone of the melodic structure: the interval of a third, which is clearly stated in the opening phrases but is subtly present as well in the major-third interval that separates the main tonal centres from each other. Moreover, the minor second clash of B and A sharp with which the symphony opens, and which by an enharmonic change to C flat and B flat could foreshadow the important centre of E flat, is used in later development as an acid antidote to the relative sweetness of the melodic thirds. The opening two bars contain only whole tones, and in the remarkable climax of the first movement there is an enormous harmonic development of this whole-tone fragment, firmly anchored, however, on E flat.[28]

As you will be aware, Rubbra had an instinctive grasp of what Bob was doing, and a keen understanding, and ear for, musical structures. He realized that the use of keys a third apart goes hand-in-hand with melodic material based on thirds (though the excellent programme notes provided by Hugh Ottaway would in any case have led him to this point). If we take the opening phrase, this melodic use of thirds is obvious:



This use of the melodic third, and also of plateaux of tonality a third apart constitute features that would have suggested the influence of Nielsen to most commentators. The opening is really a microcosm of the whole work: the first minim beat has a melodic minor third (B - D), and a harmonic major third (A sharp - D); the first beat *could* be the major and minor third of G (with the fifth added as D appears); and A sharp could be the dominant of E flat (though that possibility only emerges later).

A work conceived around three keys provides a problem as far as the retransition - that is, the preparation for the recapitulation - is concerned. Beethoven had to face this problem in the Finale of his second 'Rasumovsky' String Quartet, a piece whose tonic is E minor but which starts firmly in C major and keeps on veering back towards C. Which key is Beethoven to prepare for the

recapitulation? E minor is certainly prepared, and the exposition material returns in that key - but it turns out to be the second subject rather than the first, and it occurs in what proves to be still the development section. Only a little later does it emerge that Beethoven intends to prepare a further recapitulation - this time of the first subject in its original C major: this is the *real* recapitulation, and thus he omits the second subject in it, for that was brought back in the tonic earlier. It is a neat solution to a nice problem. But suppose you have three - rather than two - keys held in balance; how can you possibly decide which one to prepare? In Beethoven's Seventh Symphony there is no doubt in the first movement that A is really 'home', however much F and C enter the fray: thus there is never any doubt about A reappearing at the recapitulation. But if three keys are held more evenly in balance, which does one recapitulate? You can't prepare them all, and Bob has a nice solution to offer to the problem. Just before the first subject returns at Figure 21 (p. 27) E flat prepares the B minor opening of the first subject, though the preparation is interrupted at the last moment by a loud B natural, and then by a loud G. Ottaway correctly described the first movement as 'a latent sonata design',[29] but the music critic (William Mann?) writing in *The Times* of 17 July 1957 was too dogmatic about a structure which owes its spirit to sonata-allegro structures, but which treats them freely, when he described both the first and last movements as being in sonata form.[30]

The end of the first movement presents a conundrum: the second violins clearly prepare the E flat start of the slow movement, and the D in the first violins can also belong to E flat; A sharp - B - D, however, are part of B minor. (I shall play this shortly when I deal with the opening of the slow movement.) Both keys, then, are represented at the end of the first movement. Bob's note at this point in the score refers to this passage as an 'active pause', an idea that makes us recall his sophisticated understanding of Classical rhythm: Beethoven, for example, uses little *ostinati* which act as pauses or brakes (as in the Scherzo of the Seventh Symphony), or he will emphasize a point of structural importance (a new key area, perhaps) by using a close canon or *ostinato* in it - a ploy he uses in the Finale of the Seventh Symphony. It would take too long to investigate the processes in the detail they deserve, but this is what Bob is doing in his own Second Symphony. The many commentators who criticized this feature - for example, the one who said 'Simpson is inclined to place too great reliance on the power of the *ostinato*...'[31] - missed this point. But I suppose we might say that to ask for a critique of a work like this is to examine critics rather than the composer. Few critics saw how complex the Symphony was, or how fresh - even modern - it was. C.R., in the *Bristol Evening Post*, got it right - as well as sticking his neck out - when he said,

> Last night's concert at Cheltenham, if it did nothing else, at least refuted the argument that to be truly modern in spirit and form, all music must perforce be based on duodecimal tone rows. We were, in fact, presented with an interesting demonstration of a work firmly rooted in tonality breathing a far more vigorously modern spirit than the atonality of Alban Berg's Violin Concerto.[32]

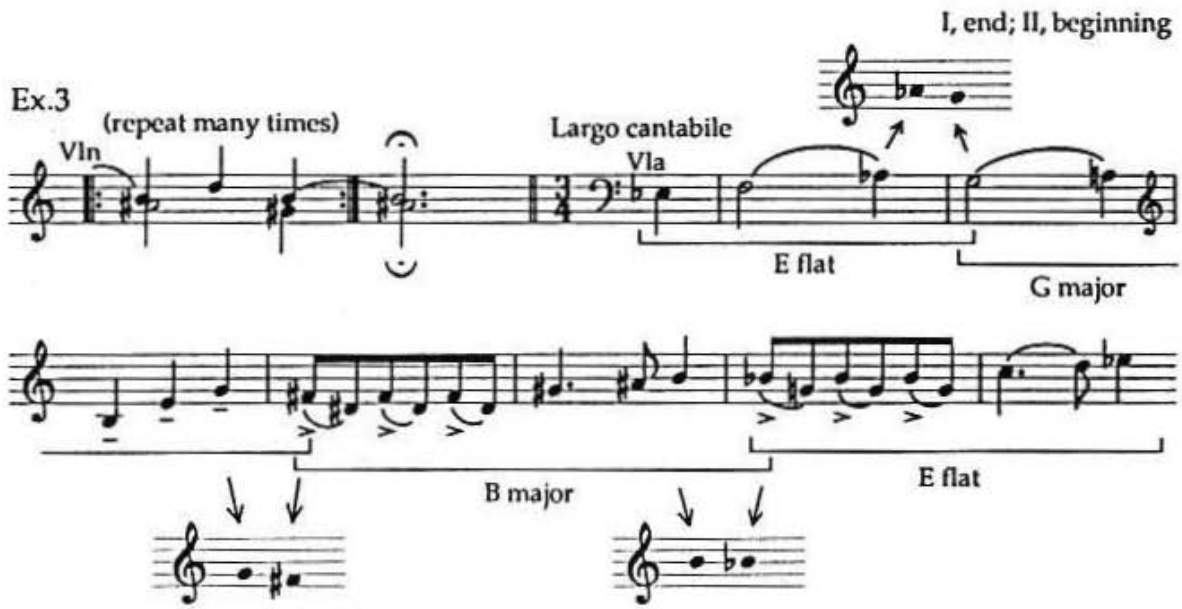
Before moving on to the second movement, let me tell you briefly about the manuscript copy. The manuscript full score has been used for performances - it is carefully marked up with leads for instruments, etc. - and it does not greatly differ from the published score. (There are many little differences and changes which I will not bother to enumerate.) Just after Figure 9 (p. 11 of the published score) the repeated notes in the second violins and violas have *staccato* marks added above them, along with the note, 'off the string'. The *Poco a poco accelerando* just after Figure 16 - and the subsequent indications added to the published score in a thinner handwriting than the rest - were added by Bob to the manuscript apparently as an afterthought. Just after Figure 16 Bob's note in fact reads *'Poco a poco accelerando al [20]'*. At Figure 25 Bob has added *'poco a poco più al...'*, then a line of dots as far as Figure 26, where he completes the phrase with *'Tempo I*

(giusto)'. Between Figures 36 and 37 the marking 'sostenuto (𝅗𝅥 = 𝅗𝅥 *del precedente)*' has the bracket crossed out in the manuscript.

The critics mostly praised the slow movement, and even those who were critical of the rest of the Symphony usually found this movement impressive. Bob tells me that none of them realized at first that it was a palindrome: 'I told Hugh Ottaway not to put it in the programme note for the first performance, but somebody spilled the beans later,' he said. The *Liverpool Post* critic thought it 'a set of grave variations which made an immediate impression'.[33] Peter Heyworth found the slow movement,

> the most satisfying part of the symphony. It has a calm, still opening of striking beauty, out of which a grave, imposing column of sound is raised into the air. A climax is followed by a subdued, fine-fingered central passage for the strings; then comes another climax from which the music gradually sinks down to a peaceful conclusion. This is clearly a bold and far from conventional pattern for a slow movement. For the keystone on which all rests is the central string passage. If that fails to register the two central climaxes become as pointless as two pillars supporting nothing but sky. In spite of its withdrawn and tranquil character, it does register and the final design is most satisfying, for the ear is given something akin to the effect made on the eye by two great Gothic pillars supporting the finest tracery of fan vaulting.[34]

That seems to me to be admirable, for the critic has ignored the technical process and discussed the music as if there were no palindromic background. For most ordinary readers that approach is, naturally, sensible. But the processes of composition are of interest to some, and so most critics had a stab at discussing the background. Most of them pointed out that the theme on which the variations are built revolves round E flat and G (this was what the programme note had said, so one can't blame them for that), though in fact it takes in B as well, revolving around all the three main key areas.



(Notice the use of the falling semitone to move between key areas - an element deriving from the opening B - A sharp clash of the first movement.) The *Times* critic astutely observed that the movement is a cross between *passacaglia* and variation form,[35] (you might object that *passacaglia* is a variation form) though Martin Cooper was rather wide of the mark in maintaining that it is based around 'an interval rather than a true theme',[36] and William C. Glockin was astute enough to observe,

The second movement is a theme and variations which employs the time-honoured device of reversal called 'cancrizans'; from its midpoint it turns around and goes backward to its beginning. The remarkable thing about the way the device works here is that the second half seems a perfectly good continuation of the variations - and the entire movement, regardless of devices, is full of lovely tunes and has a distinct emotional shape.[37]

The observation that the music feels as if it is moving forward even in the cancrizans portion is important and perceptive. (William Glockin knew of the palindrome - he was not writing of the first performance.) Of similar quality is a passage by Desmond Shawe-Taylor:

The central *Largo cantabile*... is a highly original and extremely beautiful movement. Though described as 'a set of continual variations', it makes rather the effect of a single finely-organized span of sound, with a central *pianissimo* section like some inner sanctuary where the sounds of the outer world (a phrase of four notes, either all the same, or including the rocking-to-and-fro minor third that is an important element in the movement) are heard more and more faintly; they cease; then return, as, like Tamino and Pamina, we emerge from the solemnity. It is a wonderful piece, and I am eager to hear it again.[38]

The *Sunday Times* critic found a similar description: '...a set of variations surrounding a central *pianissimo* section like some inner sanctuary whither the sounds of the other world (a repeated four-note phrase) can scarcely penetrate'.[39]

It is true that the movement begins and ends in E flat, though the other keys are given due weight and are not banished. The revolving of the three keys within the theme in such a way that none of them dominates the other is one of the devices essential to the balance of the music if it is to succeed in cancrizans form - for tonality is a goal-directed phenomenon, and its processes do not normally work in reverse. Tunes and rhythms, too, have to be thought out carefully if they are to be just as successful in the reverse as in the forward direction. There is much more to the whole business than simply writing a little phrase of four notes that goes, for instance, D - F - F - D. Felix Aprahamian got half-way there in his *Sunday Times* review of the first performance, but then fell into the trap of underestimating the problem:

Robert Simpson's Second Symphony offers... a remarkable *largo*. This is a set of continuous variations which, apart from a short coda, can be read from either end, the second half of the movement being an exact reflection of the first. The use of the mirror device - rare in tonal music because modulation is not a reversible process, frequent in atonal music, where backwards or forwards the sound is equally horrible - is here completely successful, for Simpson's musical pivots are single notes rather than harmonies; he juxtaposes, contracts and expands rather than modulates to propel his music on its conjunct path.[40]

Against this Bob has written, 'Well, well, so that's how it's done!'

As previously, I'll deal with the manuscript score of the second movement before passing on to the Finale. There are in fact only two things to note: the opening was originally not muted; and the tempo marking was ♩= 52, then ♩= 56 (both crossed out), before 40 was finally settled upon. Thus RS at first marked it faster than the speed finally chosen, then faster still, before deciding on an even slower speed than the one originally marked. The Finale initially had the tempo indication *'Allegro con brio* (♩ = 60): RS's footnote, 'NB If this movement lasts less than eight minutes, it is too fast. R.S.', was added to the slower of these two *tempi* as a warning to speed merchants. There are no other changes of substance.

Critics were unhappy about the quality of invention in the Finale. Desmond Shawe-Taylor, from whom I quoted an admirable passage already, said that 'in the recklessly overscored Finale the repeated rhythmic figuration becomes dangerously monotonous';[41] Noel Goodwin remarked that the work 'suffers... from insufficiently memorable material to sustain his argument';[42] and Mosco Carner said,

Simpson is inclined to place too great reliance on the power of the *ostinato* both to advance and clinch his arguments and he keeps the tension unrelieved for too long a stretch. This was particularly the case in the Finale which also in invention did not seem to me to reach quite the same level of the two preceding movements.[43]

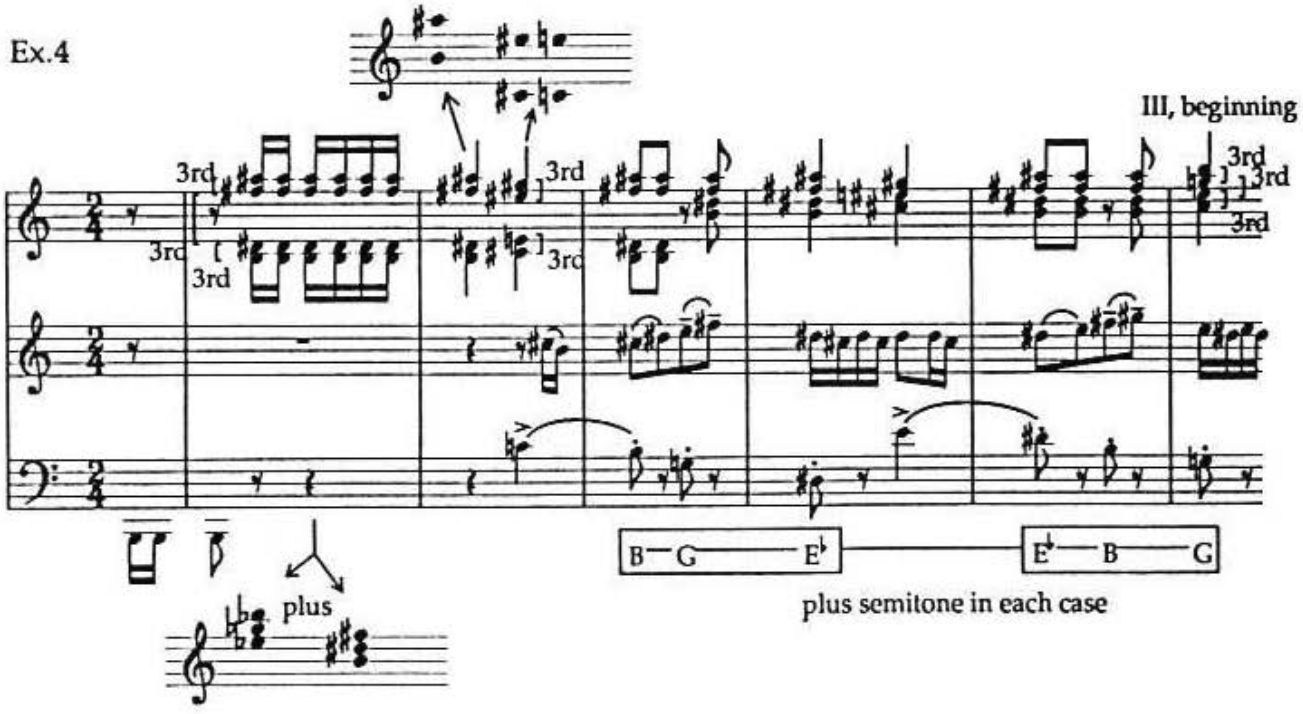
Another critic whom I have already quoted in admiration - Peter Heyworth - said,

About the last movement I am far less happy. As in his First Symphony Simpson again excludes the scherzo of the traditional pattern, or rather he seems to try to merge into a single movement the gaiety and *élan* that one associates with a scherzo with the imposing triumph of a finale. In the event this last movement seems to fall between the two stools. Lacking any very arresting idea, it has neither the exuberance on the one hand nor real cumulative power on the other.[44]

This is a rather odd passage in an otherwise very good critique. Firstly, I can see no reason why a scherzo should necessarily contain gaiety and *élan*: I can think of at least one by Tchiakovsky that has neither, and is none the worse for that, and I can think of a host by other composers. Secondly, I can see no reason why the music of a finale should necessarily be of an imposingly triumphant kind; some that are of this type merely descend to bombast. Thirdly, I have never heard Sibelius criticized for merging the Scherzo with other movements, as he does in several symphonies - rather he is praised for it: so why should Simpson be criticized for it? Fourthly, when a critic says that the Finale of Simpson's Second Symphony does not have exuberance, it makes the rest of us wonder whether he is talking about the same piece that we know, for it is quite difficult to think of a piece which is more exuberant.

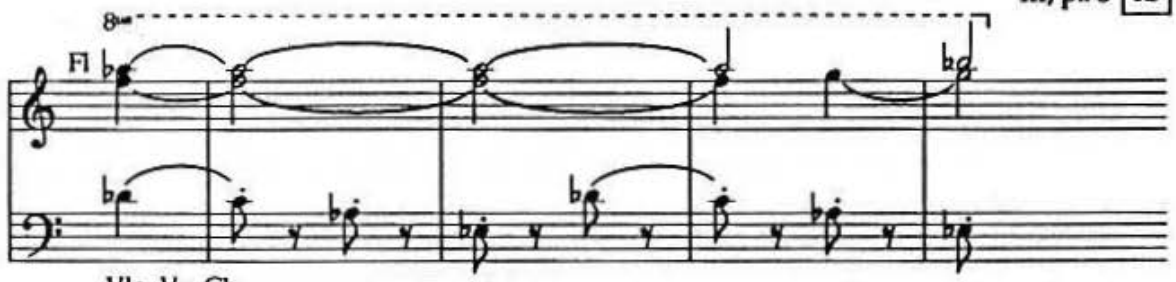
All of these criticisms of the Finale seem to me to derive from a misunderstanding of the piece. It may well be that the '*rondo*-type' theme in the first violins at the opening was taken to be of central importance: it isn't - or rather, the bass is of equal importance, and so are the chords that open the piece. The chords are based on superimposed thirds, and so include the B - A sharp clash that opened the first movement; this chord (see Example 4) has relevance to the keys of B major and E flat minor. The bass line is of far more importance than would at first appear: within the first eight notes it outlines the three main pitches (G, B and D sharp) twice, and it adds the falling semitone as well. It is a line of such quality that with very little alteration it becomes the subject of a *fugato* later in the movement (see Example 5).

Ex.4



Ex.5

III, p.78 [12]



Vla, Vc, Cb
(fugue subject)

There are three elements to this subject, and it may well be that the 'tune' is the least important; at any rate, all three elements are treated separately during the course of the Finale.

The power and the *ostinati* in this movement are there to make the same kind of points as is the powerful writing in the Finale of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony; and for me this allies the work far more with Beethoven than with Sibelius or Nielsen. For that reason I find a critic who insists on RS's place in the long tradition of symphonic writing particularly to my taste, and with him - Peter Heyworth - I end this talk, despite the detailed fault-finding with his views that I made above:

Of the new works that I have heard at this year's Cheltenham Festival of Contemporary British Music, Robert Simpson's Second Symphony is by far the most ambitious in scope and impressive in achievement. Some living composers give the impression of deciding to write a symphony more because they have in mind something on a long scale and find in this well-tried form both a *cachet* and a prop, rather than from any deep kinship between the nature of their thought and the form they select for it. Robert Simpson, however, is clearly a symphonist by musical nature. He takes a traditional mould, not out of passive respect for the past or because he needs a guide rope in large-scale musical organisation, but because his creative drive finds in it at once a challenge and a stimulus.[45]

[A Talk given to the Robert Simpson Society on 25 November 1989]

(Unless indicated otherwise, the footnote references are to the two scrapbooks which Robert Simpson compiled, and which are now in the Archives of the Robert Simpson Society. The roman figure I refers to the earlier scrapbook, and the arabic number here refers to the printed pagination. The roman figure II refers to the second scrapbook, and here the arabic numbering refers to the pencil pagination which was added to account for the large number of unmarked sheets at the beginning of the book, before the start of the printed pagination.)

[1]Paul Foot, *The Politics of Harold Wilson* (Harmondsworth, 1968). [2]II 60. [3]I 68. [4]I 68. [5]I 52. [6]II 44. [7]II 25. [8]II 25. [9]I 69. [10]I 69. [11]I 71. [12]I 71. [13]II 39. [14]I 68. [15]II 24. [16]II 15. [17]I 72. [18]I 67. [19]II 81. [20]I 69. [21]II 23. [22]*The Symphony*, edited by Robert Simpson, 2 vols. (Harmondsworth, 1966), I, 142, note.
[23]II 4. [24]I 76. [25]I 68. [26]II 25. [27]I 69. [28]II 87. [29]I 66, and also I 67. [30]I 67. [31]II 3.
[32]II 24 (The Berg Violin Concerto was also in the programme).
[33]I 71. [34]I 69. [35]I 67. [36]I 66. [37]II 61. [38]I 72. [39]II 25. [40]I 65. [41]I 72. [42]II 2. [43]I 72; see also II 3. [44]I 69. [45]I 69.

ROBERT SIMPSON'S 2nd SYMPHONY

John Pickard

Attention is frequently drawn to the enormous influence exerted on Robert Simpson's music by the work of the Classical masters - particularly Haydn and Beethoven. Their influence is absorbed at the deepest level and has nothing to do with grafting the gestures of Classical style onto the surface of the music. The listener who expects Simpson's music to speak with a voice belonging to any other time than our own will be disappointed.

But there is nothing 'neo' about Simpson's brand of Classicism. To his expansive and vigorous creative temperament the music of the age of Beethoven and Haydn is as new and alive now as it was the day it was written. That is why his music seems so fresh. He does not seek to pick, vulture-like, over the cadaver of a dead style (as so much music written in this century has done), because in Simpson's eyes the style never died in the first place. The strong sense of direction which any reasonably intelligent listener immediately discerns in Simpson's work stems from the fact that it always knows where it is going because it always knows where it came from.

Therefore it will be no surprise to learn that, when faced with the challenge of writing a symphony for an early-Beethoven sized orchestra (which has now happened three times: Nos. 2, 7 and 11), Simpson should on each occasion not only make each work radically different from the others in design but should also avoid writing a work which slavishly conforms to the formal conventions of the Classical period.

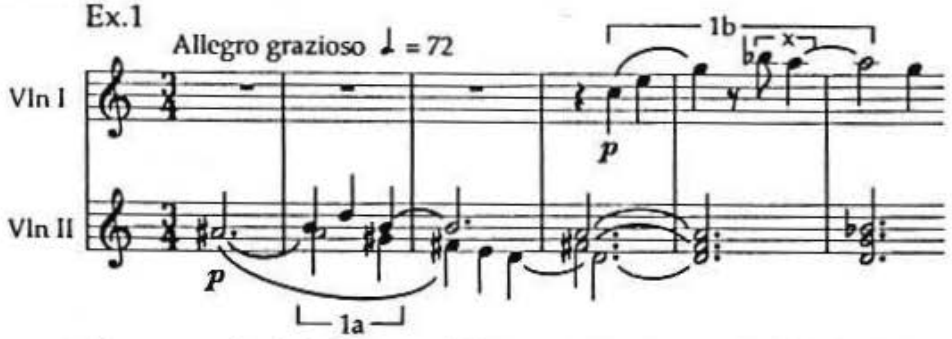
The Second Symphony is scored for double woodwind, two horns, two trumpets in D, timpani and strings. The high D trumpets add extra brilliance to the orchestral sound and their role (together with that of the horns) is obviously more thematic than in a Beethoven symphony as they are valve instruments with a full chromatic range. Similarly the timpani are chromatic and not restricted to just thumping out two notes.

Unlike the First Symphony, which was a three-in-one design, this work has three discrete movements, but it shares with the earlier work the tendency to integrate the structure with large-scale tonal processes. Simpson describes the work as being 'in the key of B major/minor, with G and Eb playing crucial intermediate roles.' The first movement begins in B, moves to Eb, returns to B, moves to G and returns again to B. Each tonal centre is a major third away from the other two, so each can behave similarly as a 'pivot'.

Whereas the First Symphony traced a kind of journey from A to Eb and back, the Second is more like a series of 'excursions' from one tonal region to another. This is particularly evident in the second movement, a theme and variations, in which each variation oscillates between Eb and G.

The opening *Allegro grazioso* begins softy with muted violins presenting the movement's basic material:[1]

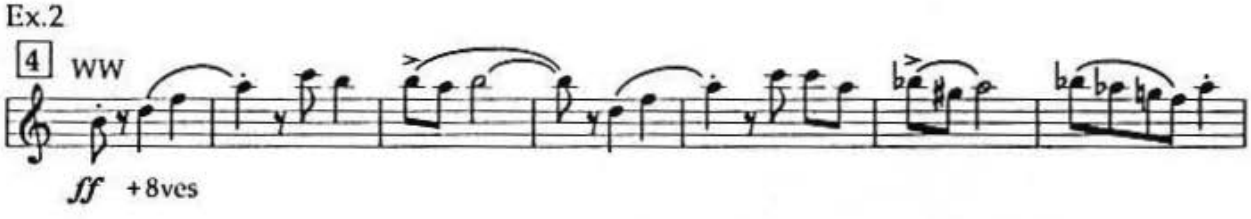
Ex.1



The two-part figure marked '1a' is crucially important and should be thought of as consisting of two equal parts rather than as 'tune plus accompaniment'. The figure has the quality of a restless and irregular sequence of suspensions and three intervals strike the ear in the first bar: minor second, major third, minor third. 1b will be seen to grow naturally out of these intervals and it manifests itself as an arpeggiated major triad culminating in a flattened seventh and a downward semitone figure - marked 'x' - which proves to have enormous generative power in its own right.

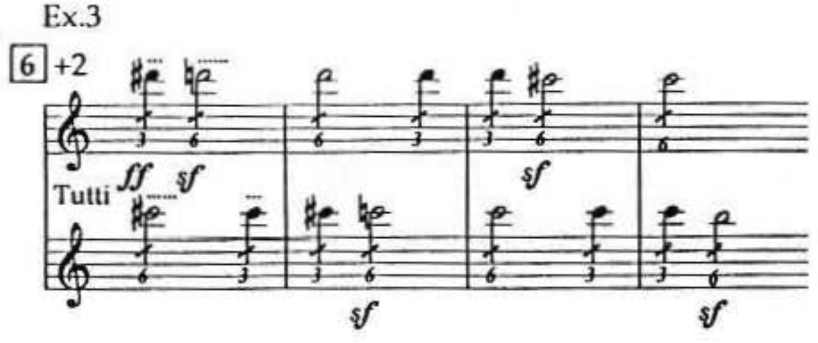
The music flows gently along for forty bars without emphasising any clear tonal centre until Fig.3 (Lengnick study score) where the violins accent an open-string G - a new and rather dramatic gesture reinforced one bar later by the entry of the timpani (on a low G) and the woodwind (imitative entries of 'x'). Against rushing string quavers, unison woodwind assert the key of B as the principal tonal centre in an expanded version of Ex.1b:

Ex.2



With the entry of the two trumpets who repeat octave D#s (i.e. Eb), the woodwind become 'stuck' on a figure derived from the last bar of Ex.2 and give the impression of doggedly trying to insist on the key of B. The trumpet line is constantly dragged down the B major scale - D#, C#, B - but each time returns to its initial D# thereby emphasising the third degree of the B major scale rather than its root. The woodwind insist on their own figuration, repeating it nine times, like someone who hopes to win a lost argument by out-talking the other person. Meanwhile, the strings continue their energetic quaver movement, unaffected by the evident conflict between trumpets and woodwind. This remarkable build-up of tension-through-stasis eventually results in a fierce climax, whose string of dissonant 'suspensions' can be traced back to Ex.1a:

Ex.3



As this climax subsides the trumpets grimly sustain a major third (B, D#) with a *fff* timpani roll reinforcing the B. This assertion of B as the root of the chord is important at this stage, as the tendency of this opening paragraph has been to emphasise the major third (D#) rather than the root and D# is, of course, enharmonic Eb - one of the 'intermediate' tonal centres of the symphony. The D# / Eb emphasis is now counterbalanced by the first violins who play an intense melody which initially emphasises G:

Ex.4

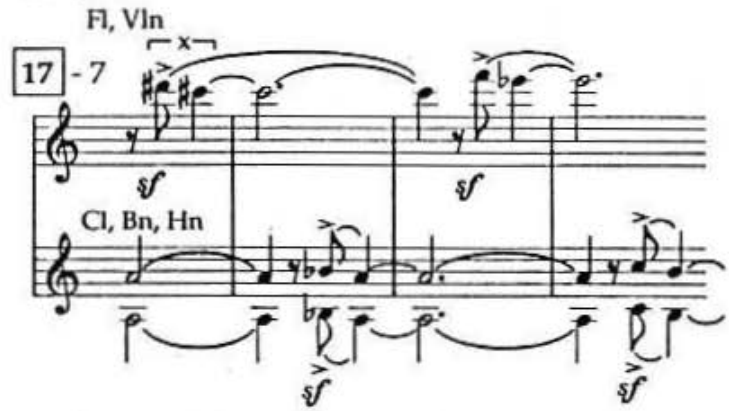
Examination of this melody quickly reveals that its basic intervals are derived from Ex.1a: it will be better heard that its third, fourth and sixth bars are derived from 'x' and that the fifth bar is from Ex.1a. It is important to remember that the music is growing organically and that this implies constant change and development of the basic material - not merely repetition. This is what makes Simpson's music so difficult to describe verbally, and rightly so; one cannot neatly categorise his musical ideas and expect them to remain impervious to change simply for the benefit of the musical analyst!

Ex.4 is treated as a four-part fugal exposition for strings with entries successively a fifth lower, so that they move through G, C, F and Bb. But after the fourth entry of the subject, what promises to be an extended contrapuntal passage comes to a halt (third bar of Fig.8) on a dissonant major seventh, capped by another *ff* sustained major third (F and A), this time on flutes and horns, and a tritone away from the trumpets' major third which initiated the fugato. First violins and violas attempt to reassert Ex.4 in stretto (centred upon the 'intermediate' Eb and B respectively), but the attempt peters out: clearly, if anything productive is to come of Ex.4 another approach is necessary.

From the sixth bar of Fig.9 the first violins softly reintroduce Ex.3, this time beginning on D, and this has a positive effect, instigating a fine athletic passage in which Ex.3 is expanded against a repeated quaver accompaniment. This is soon joined by Ex.1b on woodwinds (still softly), by Ex.1a, curiously scored for low bassoons, and by the 'cellos taking over the violins' new, extended version of Ex.3. Tonally, this passage is exploratory, but a crescendo urges the music, momentarily, into B minor at Fig.13 (reinforced by timpani) and a fortissimo version of Ex.1a. An angry exchange ensues between Ex.1a and a figure derived from the triplets in the fourth bar of Fig.7. At length, Ex.1 returns at its original pitch with fortissimo timpani hammering out repeated quaver Bs (two bars before Fig.16), together with stretto-like entries of Ex.1b on trumpets (beginning on G#) and woodwind (beginning on E) - i.e. a major third apart, reflecting the overall tonal scheme of the work.

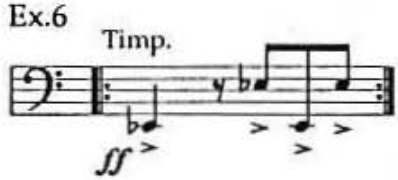
Figure 'x' is now introduced and initiates a remarkable 54-bar passage in which violins and woodwind obsessively repeat 'x' in imitation through a sequence of gradually rising and falling scales:

Ex.5



Beneath this figure, lower strings, oboes and trumpets reinforce the harmony, whilst the timpani play repeated octave Ebs - the constant fortissimo dynamic adding to the sense of relentlessness. Another passage of obsessive repetition has already appeared in this movement and repetition of this kind is indeed a characteristic of the symphony. Though such passages are often to be found in Simpson's later symphonies, No.2 contains the most extreme examples. Throughout the passage a *poco a poco accelerando* drives the music forward until it explodes in a shattering climax marked ***fff*** and *Molto vivace, furioso* with the timpani and basses, still on an Eb pedal, repeating a new rhythmic pattern:

Ex.6

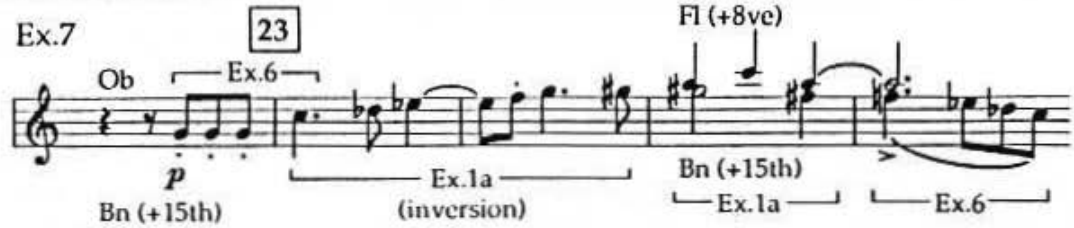


Above this, the rest of the orchestra repeats material from the previous climax (Ex.3) (cf. Fig.6/ Fig.20), this time beginning on G, a major third higher than before. The climax eventually subsides leaving the trumpets, holding a *pp* bare fifth in Eb, to conclude the first half of the movement.

Tonally speaking, the music appears to have swung from B to Eb. However, despite the force of the climax just described, Eb cannot really be said to have replaced B as the main tonal centre, devoid as this climax is of any real thematic content and relying instead on rhythmic ostinato as a means of propulsion.

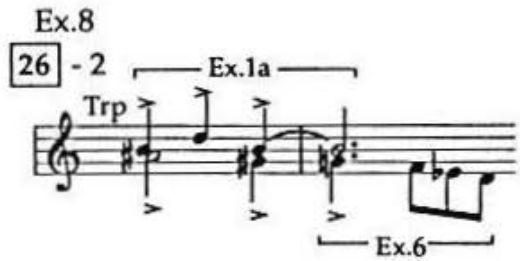
Thus Eb, as a tonal centre, is easily dislodged when, with the timpani still softly repeating Ex.6, the trumpets' Eb fifth is answered by a low B natural in the bassoons and a low G in the 'cellos and 'basses - in other words, the roots of all three main tonal centres are simultaneously present. The whole process now appears to begin again, with violins softly playing the opening (Ex.1a) as though nothing has happened. After five bars violas and 'cellos join them in imitation and, anticipated by the trumpets, the woodwind introduce a new idea which is both a derivative of Ex.6 and a free inversion of the descending lower part of Ex.1 immediately followed by the original version of Ex.1a:

Ex.7



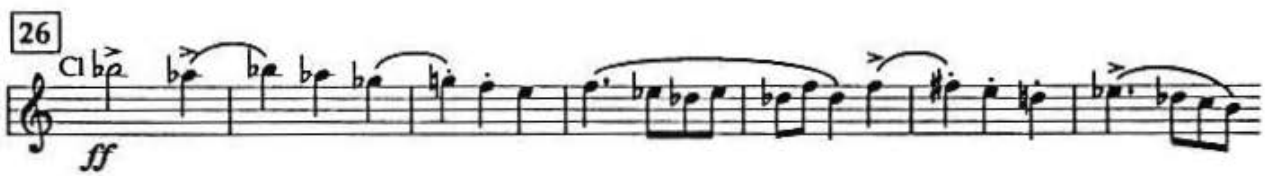
By now (10th and 11th bars of Fig.22), the strings are playing a sequential figure in two-part canon at one bar's distance - violins against violas and 'cellos - and this soon becomes a unison line, descending in four-bar sequences. Against this, woodwind and horn try out Ex.7, beginning on various pitches, before joining with the strings (now including double basses) to suggest G minor (only the notes G, A and Bb are used). Four stark chords on the woodwind, each of one bar's duration, move towards an Eb major chord in first inversion, against which the trumpets play Ex.1a at the original pitch but with a new lower part whose rhythmic detail (2nd bar) is derived from Ex.7 via Ex.6:

Ex.8



It is this new lower part which forms the basis of a wild clarinet solo:

Ex.9



The figure is imitated by the flutes whilst the clarinet plays Ex.4 in counterpoint. In fact, this passage is a fugato, with Ex.4 (the subject of a corresponding fugato in the movement's first half) now functioning as a countersubject. The four fugal entries of Ex.9 are progressively a semitone higher (though displaced by octaves) and, with the entry of the fourth voice (bassoons with pizzicato 'cellos and 'basses), the third voice has the Ex.4 countersubject, whilst the first voice adds Ex.1b in a striking contrapuntal display. Moreover, this idea reconciles at a single masterly stroke the inherent tension between the concepts of organic growth and of literal recapitulation of material.

It will be remembered that the first fugato was a reaction against a B/Eb conflict in which the woodwind became 'stuck' in a repeated figure centred around B, whilst the trumpets insisted on D# (Eb). This second fugato is the other way round: it provokes a repeat of the conflict, though now the tonal pivot has swung the other way and the dispute is between G (woodwind) and B (trumpets). However, on this occasion the argument is briefer and there is an additional element: the strings join in with a fierce canonic idea (again sequential) and move with the wind instruments towards a convulsive crescendo centred on B (Fig.30). The strings play Ex.4 in octaves and timpani hammer out repeated Gs. This provokes Ex.3 in the trumpets over a low G timpani roll, whilst the strings refer to Ex.7 and the woodwind to Ex.1a: all by way of preparation for the movement's second great climax. Beginning on G, woodwind and strings play Ex.3 in contrary motion (woodwind descending), whilst the brass and timpani attempt to maintain a figure implying G major/minor - brass playing the upper voice of Ex.1a, timpani playing the rhythm of Ex.6 on repeated Gs. At length the woodwind join in the Ex.6 rhythm and this results in a powerful gesture comprising a single bar of rhythmic unison in G major, a bar's silence and

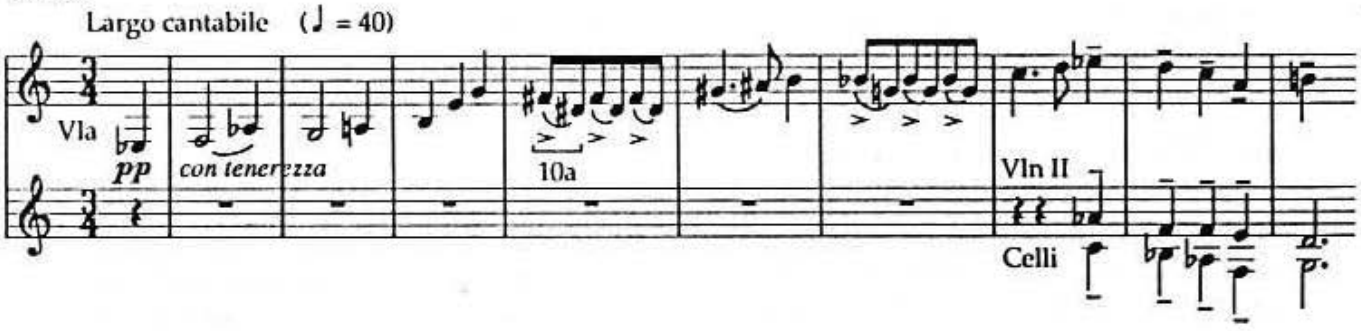
a fortissimo statement of Ex.1a centred around B minor/major (thereby touching on D#[Eb]). This is repeated and, in the most intense moment so far, octave Gs are reiterated by the whole orchestra to the rhythm of Ex.6, before trumpets and timpani momentarily direct the tonality towards Eb minor through a rapid diminuendo.

The last two pages of the movement are at two thirds of the original speed: the precedent for this being the hemiola rhythm of Ex.6 which proved so powerful that it tended to turn the prevailing 3/4 metre into a slower 6/8 (e.g. Fig.20). The violins gently state Ex.1, now firmly in B major, whilst woodwind quietly insist on an Eb major triad. The violins return to Ex.1a, repeating the first bar hypnotically, hardly disturbed by the V-I G major cadence on two flutes and one bassoon which slips regretfully to G minor. Finally, Ex.1a disappears into the distance repeated as many times as the conductor wishes, *al niente*, in what the composer describes as an 'active pause'.

It has already been noted that Simpson describes the keys of G and Eb as 'intermediary' to the basic B major/minor tonality of the symphony. In the central movement, a theme with thirteen variations marked *Largo cantabile*, it is appropriate that the 'intermediate' keys, Eb and G, should take over as the main tonal centres.

The theme is stated by the unaccompanied violas, enriched in the final bar by the second violins and 'cellos:

Ex.10



This theme begins in Eb and ends in G, taking in B major on the way (Ex.10a) and each variation follows this scheme, until the end of Variation VI, which overlaps with Variation VII on a G major chord. After that, everything moves into reverse, because the movement is a palindrome: the same backwards as forwards.

The most famous musical palindrome is perhaps the *Minuetto al roverso* from Haydn's Symphony No.47 in G (which also appears in the A major Piano Sonata Hob.26). In fact Simpson has used this very palindrome as the basis of his own palindromic variations in the Haydn Variations for piano (1947) and in the Ninth String Quartet (1982). He also uses palindromes in certain passages of the First String Quartet and the Ninth Symphony and jokingly claims that they save time when composing ('... you just write the first half and copy it out backwards...'). Sadly, if the music is going to be any good, it is a rather more complex business than that and, in discussing Simpson's use of palindrome, Lionel Pike has pointed out that if one plays, for example, the slow movement of Haydn's 'Emperor' Quartet backwards it comes out sounding like a bad Victorian hymn-tune.

Concerning the fact that the theme and subsequent variations all modulate Simpson acknowledges a debt to Nielsen's Piano Variations Op.40, each of which modulates between B minor and G minor. He also mentions a precursor of the modulating variation idea which is to be found in Dvorak's Sextet in A major. Characteristically, Simpson wonders what Beethoven would have made of the idea of modulating variations ('Suppose Diabelli had written a modulating waltz!').

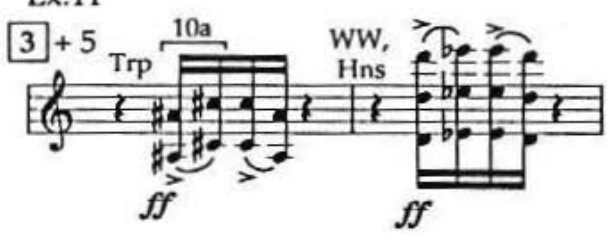
Simpson's theme moves upwards through two octaves (Eb to Eb) and falls back a major third to end on B (now acting as the third of G major) and it will be seen that the dominating interval is that of the minor third - most noticeably in the rocking quaver figuration (Ex.10a) of bars 4 and 6. Two important points should be noted here: (1) the figuration comes from the very first bar of the movement (though it is a Simpson 'fingerprint' in any case); (2) because the figure is reiterated it will act as a clear 'aural signpost' when played backwards.

Variation I then transfers the melody to the 1st violins and places it in a harmonic context, with 2nd violins, violas and 'cellos providing the harmony.

Variation II takes fragments of the theme and uses them as the basis for imitative figures between oboe 1 and horn 1 (mainly using bars 3 and 4, together with Ex.10a backwards) and joined by trumpets for the last three bars. This is supported by two-part writing for high violins, joined in the final bars by violas and 'cellos.

Variation III begins on the woodwind - the head of the theme in octaves on clarinet 1 and bassoon 1. A rapid crescendo introduces an important semiquaver motif - clearly derived from the treatment of Ex.10a as something which is easily recognisable, forwards or backwards:

Ex.11

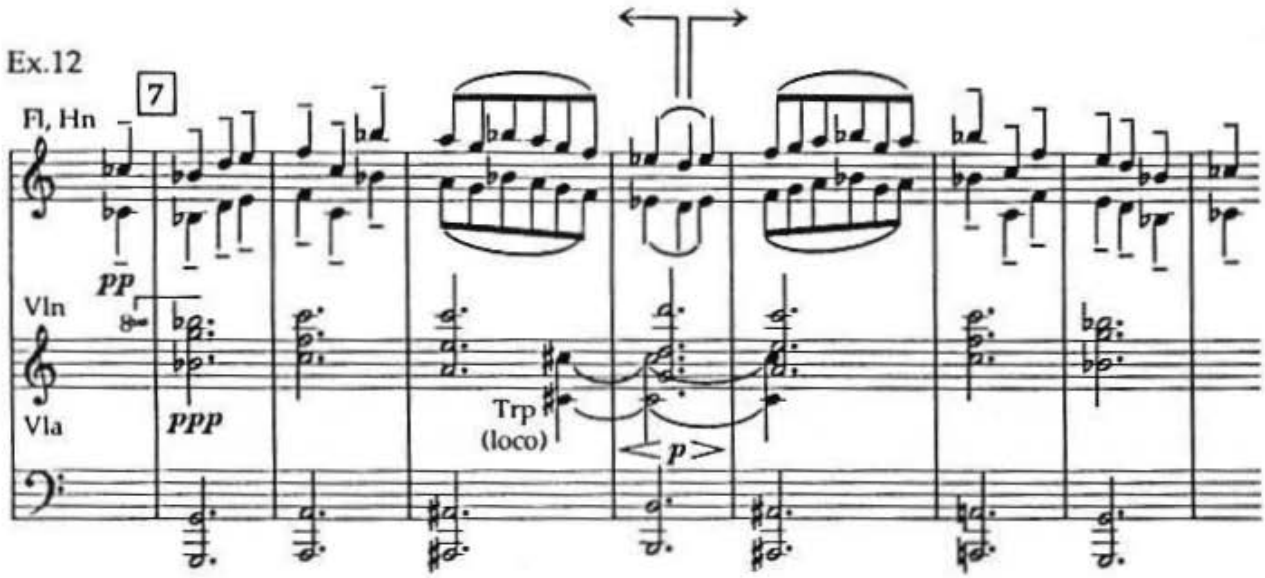


This figure is, of course, a tiny palindrome in itself, so it will sound the same on the 'return journey' (Var.XI).

Development of this figure, in its semitonal transformation (see 2nd bar of Ex.11), follows in Variation IV with violins and violas in three-part imitiative counterpoint over the original version of the theme, now scored for lower strings and bassoons. This prompts another crescendo and Variation V is a sustained fortissimo.

This variation is also the longest and is based upon Ex.10a and its diminution in Ex.11. These figures move menacingly through the horns and trumpets with timpani reinforcing Ex.11, before receding into the hushed and mysterious Variation VI.

Here, against a background of soft, sustained chords (wide-spaced triads, mainly in first inversion which trace the harmonic outline of Ex.10) wind instruments pick out isolated pitches, repeating them in the four semiquaver pattern of Ex.11. The atmosphere is hushed and tense and the variation moves seamlessly into the next - the point where the palindrome turns:



From the middle of the fourth bar of Ex.12 the 'return journey' begins, with the tonality of each variation now progressing in reverse - G to Eb - whilst Exs.10a and 11 function as 'marker posts'. It is worth reflecting that everything has been achieved with such care - climaxes built and quitted with such smoothness, harmony handled with such unobtrusive mastery, lines invested with such architectural strength - that the fact that it works equally well when played backwards seems to be the least important aspect. The palindrome in this case is not a mere intellectual conceit, but absolutely basic to the success of the movement as an aesthetically satisfying span of music.

At the end, rather than just letting the movement die away on unaccompanied violas (the theme played backwards constituting the thirteenth variation), the palindrome is broken by the addition of a five-bar coda in which the strings bring the music to rest on an Eb major chord whilst the first clarinet recalls Ex.10a before descending through the notes B natural, A, G -the last note sustained as the third of Eb major. In addition to acting as a reminder of the Eb/G relationship explored in this movement, the foreign note of B natural draws the ear back towards the other crucial tonal region of this symphony.

Of the finale, Simpson has said that: 'It restores the original tonic with the first stage running into Eb and the recapitulation occuring in G. An eventful coda is needed to bring back B major; when this is effected the movement finishes abruptly with no more ado'. In other words, it broadly runs the same tonal course as the first movement, again with powerful climaxes in Eb and G.

Two immediately notable aspects of this movement are the relatively steady tempo marking of ♩ = 56 (together with the note on the score that 'if the movement lasts less than 8 minutes it is too fast')[2] and the fact that a fairly clear sonata design is vastly expanded through the addition of a large coda - itself constituting no less than a third of the movement's 519 bars' duration.

To deal with the first point: it is of crucial importance to the formal balance of this symphony that the finale, for all its robust good-humour, should not appear too lightweight. Its muscularity could be said to be that of the heavyweight prize-fighter rather than the Olympic gymnast. Musically, its precursor is the finale of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. Not only are both driven by the same obsessive rhythm, but the earthy vigour of both movements can easily be undermined in a performance which is inattentive to matters of tempo and articulation.

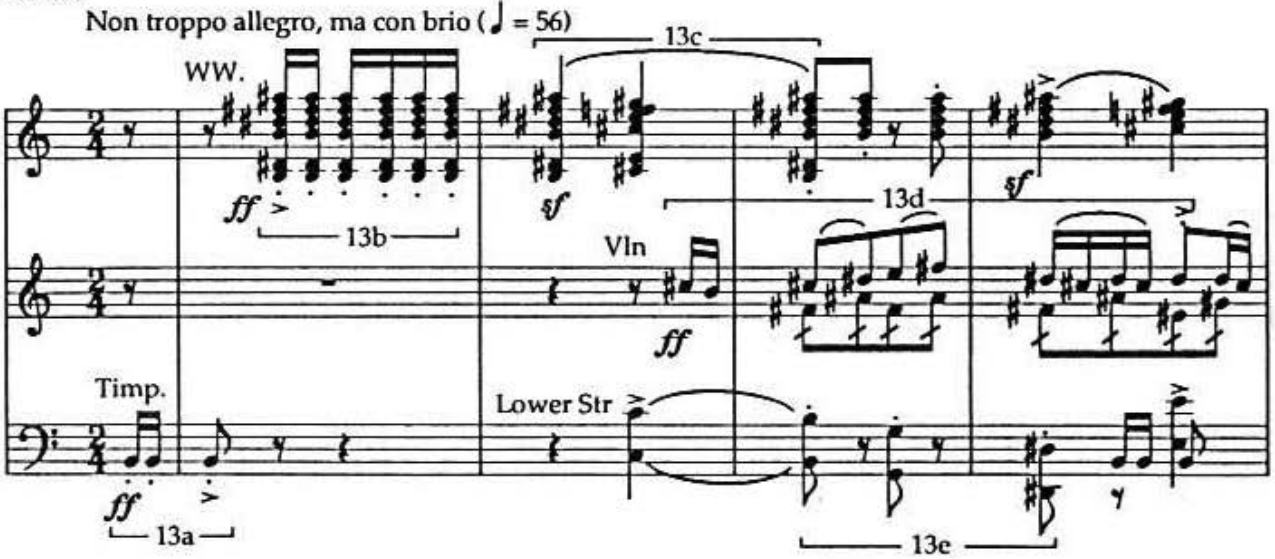
Simpson has provided an excellent description of the effect of the finale of Beethoven's Seventh in his BBC music guide to the Beethoven symphonies and it is a description which could equally be applied to his own Second Symphony:

> ... this dramatic new use of tonality creates a limitless source of energy. But the whole thing is so schematic as to produce a deep-laid sense of something fundamentally static, a feeling of gigantic circular motion, accentuated by the key-structure, the system of repeats and the unified concentration upon rhythm. The energy is somehow mysteriously contained.

It is clear that in the finale of his Second Symphony Simpson is responding to many of the phenomena he identifies in the above quotation. The 'dramatic new use of tonality' refers to Beethoven's striking use of the keys of C major and F major as additional areas of tonal exploration to the usual ones of the Classical A major symphony. It is not hard to spot the parallel between this and Simpson's own comprehensive use of G and Eb in relation to the B major/minor tonic in Symphony No.2.

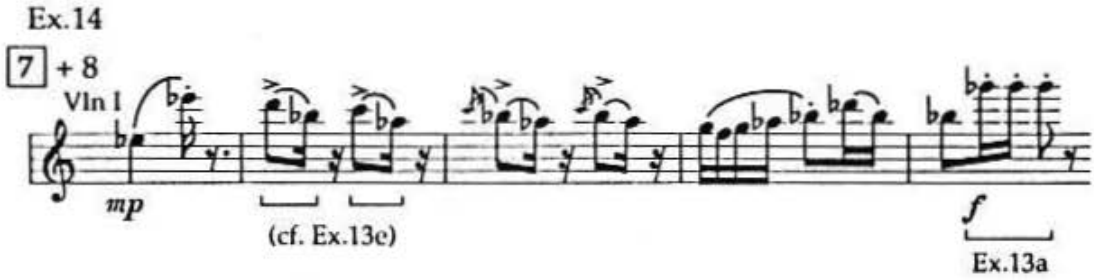
The second point, concerning the extensive coda, must be considered in relation to the first movement. After that movement's final huge climax in G, the music quickly subsides, dying away without any firm establishment of B as the tonic. Given that the tonal argument of this symphony is closely integrated throughout, it is quite natural that a large-scale coda should be required in the finale, both to balance the inconclusive end of the first movement and firmly to establish B as the tonic of the whole symphony. Bearing these points in mind, the processes of the finale can now be described fairly concisely.

Ex.13



The first four bars contain five important elements from which almost everything in the movement is derived. The similarity of Ex.13a to the driving rhythmic pattern dominating Beethoven's finale has been mentioned. Ex.13b is rhythmically an extension of this and the use of interlocking thirds reflects in harmonic terms the thirds-dominated tonal structure of the whole. The top line of Ex.13c is a descending/ascending step of a major second and this is immediately seized upon at the beginning of Ex.13d and combined with Ex.13a. The subsequent unfolding of Ex.13d (which is a long melody of some 36 bars) is almost entirely step-wise. After the first note (C) of the descending bass-line, Ex.13e is made up of major thirds: B, D#, G (which are of course the roots of the work's main tonal centres). These elements propel the music for ninety bars, during which the tonality is never in any doubt, until the strident interruption from the trumpets of a bare fifth on G (and added harmonic ambiguity from the sustained Ab in the horns) causes the music to move to the 'intermediate' key of Eb for the 'second subject':

Ex.14

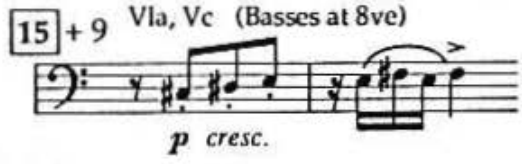


This provides appropriate contrast in terms of its delicacy but is nevertheless closely integrated with the first subject through its use of both descending major thirds and, more obviously, the *f* interruption derived from Ex.13a.

The second bar of Ex.14, with its prominent descending thirds, is to prove important in building climaxes and it now proceeds to do that, joined by Ex.13b/c to provide the basis of a fierce tutti in Eb (Fig.11). This passage relates to the first big climax at Fig.20 of the first movement, not only tonally, but by the common use of the descending chromatic idea, Ex.3 - here combined with Ex.14b. The dynamic suddenly drops to *pp* for the start of the 'development' (Fig.12).

'Development' is of course an inadequate term for music which is in a constant state of development anyway. However, the most important aspect of this fairly brief section (83 bars) is that it transforms two figures from Ex.13. Firstly, Ex.13e becomes an important idea - the second major third now extended to a fourth, thereby generating strong tonal implications within a tonally exploratory passage. Secondly, Ex.13d becomes slightly more fragmented and forms the basis of much imitative (canonic) sequential writing:

Ex.15



The two elements combine and (with the help of a timpani roll on the dominant) drive the music to the point of recapitulation - now in the other 'intermediary' key of G (Fig.18).

The recapitulation of the first subject is now condensed to 38 bars with *fff* horns enthusiastically underlining the increased importance of Ex.13e towards the end. It is the horns too who have the second subject (still in G) - though only the first two bars are used. This is combined with the 'new' version of Ex.13d as quoted in Ex.15: the music is, of course, still developing and the second bar of Ex.14 is again used to generate a powerful climax. As before, the climax combines Exs.13 and 14b - now in G and corresponding to the second main climax of the first movement (from Fig.32). Again, this subsides and the long coda now begins.

The coda is, in effect, a second development, in which Ex.15 is again developed sequentially in close canon. The first phase of this occurs on the strings with woodwind interjections based on Ex.13c. Development of Ex.15 now extends to the wind, whilst the timpani make a determined attempt to assert tonal stability with fortissimo attacks of Ex.13a. At Fig.35 the music reaches the key of C and, with splendidly impetuous vigour, is immediately wrenched downwards by a semitone to B and a return of the first subject material. Of course, this by no means provides a satisfactory tonal resolution and the brass and timpani now work their way through a series of interjections, each outlining a minor third, beginning on F minor - tonally as far away from B as one can get. The root of these minor third interjections then rises with each entry - F, A, C#, F - forming a now familiar series of interlocking major thirds. After resuming the original F minor the crucial move is then made: up a tone to G, thus re-establishing the major third-based tonal relationship to the tonic B, which can now be hammered home with confidence. Marked *fff* and *grandisonate con fuoco*, the trumpets proclaim what is in fact a final metamorphosis of the symphony's very opening bar, and, momentarily touching upon Eb major, the symphony sails to its jubilant conclusion with Ex.13a driving home the key of B major with absolute finality.

[1] In 1989 the composer altered this opening, adding an extra bar at the beginning in which the lower note (A#) is played alone. The reason for this was that it had previously proved excessively difficult to balance the soft dynamic of the two parts when they began simultaneously. (See Simpson, 'On Conducting Oneself in Public', reproduced on p.26)

[2] The Lengnick study score of the Second Symphony gives two different metronome indications at the beginning of both the first and third movements. This is due to a correcting error; the metronome marks should read ♩. = 72 and ♩ = 56 respectively.

ON CONDUCTING ONESELF IN PUBLIC

Robert Simpson

In conducting his own work a composer has one initial natural advantage and another possible later one. From the start the orchestra will not expect him to be an accomplished conductor in the technical sense; this may be an advantage, however, only at the outset, before the orchestra has become acquainted with his music. On the music itself depends his possible second chance—if the players are at once aware that what they are playing is (on the lowest level) practical and practicable, that they are faced with a sound professional musician, the first advantage is confirmed. It may be thought that above these two factors is the ability of the composer to know how his music should be interpreted. This is not so, because there are a thousand ways of performing any worthwhile work; if the composer has produced what he should, he has provided a valid basis for projecting many different human reactions, all of which (provided they come within certain artistic limits, admittedly difficult to define) are true accounts of genuinely coherent experiences. That is why composers are less often dogmatic about matters of interpretation than musicologists, and it is why I am always interested in the spontaneous reaction of the performer when he is confronted with my own music.

To perform (or to direct performances of) one's own work is a valuable lesson in more ways than one. Its simplest value is purely practical: there is no better way of finding out what can or can't be done. I discovered, for example, that the beginning of my Second Symphony, where muted second violins are divided between B and A sharp in soft dissonance, was wonderfully easy to write down but enormously difficult to perform properly. How, when you give the beat, can you and all the players be sure that the two notes will be exactly equal in sound? They must be, or the opening loses its point. This is a problem I have not yet solved, and it is no consolation to me that no skilled conductor has solved it either. All music contains difficulties of this nature, and being compelled to deal with them is not only salutary in the practical sense—it may well spark the imagination to new adventures. It is surprising how many of a composer's best ideas come from grappling with practical problems.

In doubting the ability of a composer to give a definitive interpretation of his music and in feeling that there can be no such thing, I do not suggest the absurd extreme that he has no authority. As the originator of the work, he has in his mind a number of points he (better than anyone else) knows must be made; he is more aware, perhaps, than any other musician of the form of the work, the thing that can remain constant throughout a variety of interpretations, but which can become distorted if certain cardinal aspects of the piece are not perceived. The composer normally regards these as basic to his idea; a performance over which he has no control, or which he cannot influence at rehearsal, may well miss them and will fall outside the artistic limits defining an interpretation. If the work is new, only the unfortunate composer is likely to be aware of this, and one cannot blame the unsuspecting listener for thinking that what he hears is the composer's fault. I, for one, am always grateful for the chance to insist on

these fundamentals in a performance, even though my own interpretation may never be twice the same. The attempt is of course not always successful.

These basic structural facts about a work do not depend on a 'correct' tempo. I am often asked 'What is the right tempo?' and can reply only that it is between this and that, depending on the performer's temperament, his present state of mind, the acoustics, the standard of the orchestra, and many other considerations. The composer himself will not always adopt the same tempo, but within limits he feels to be sensible, will react naturally. Beyond these limits the work can be misrepresented. A case in point is the finale of my own Second Symphony—it is the sort of music that tempts the speed merchant by its appearance on paper and by its obviously vigorous nature. But to rush it is to make impossible proper accentuation and to reduce the impression of pace. I became so exasperated by this tendency in conductors that I eventually added a footnote in the score—'If this movement lasts less than eight minutes, it is too fast'—and have so far been relieved to find it effectual. Listeners with stop-watches will no doubt hope to catch me out here; if so, they will be disappointed.

A common fallacy is that composers (as performers) know their own scores better than anybody else. When you have composed a work, you have got it out of your system and rarely love it very much: they say that a woman quickly forgets the pains of childbirth; a composer as quickly forgets his child, and can look at it as at a stranger. I know the *Eroica* far better than any of my own symphonies: first because I have known it much longer, second because I did not suffer the composing of it, third because I love it much more, fourth (and obviously) because it is so infinitely more worth knowing. And there is no more difficult or unnatural process than the reabsorption, detail by detail, of what you have tried so hard to remove from yourself in the first place. It is like returning to—let us not pursue this analogy. This problem, I am sure, will always effectively prevent me learning my own scores with either the accuracy or even the enthusiasm I would apply to other music. To learn the score of the *Eroica* is (from a composer's point of view) to enjoy the journey back into Beethoven's mind without having experienced the original creative pain. Only a composer can appreciate the sheer delight and excitement, the glorious relief, of such a task.

If the composer cannot know and love his own work as he does the masterpieces that have driven him to compose, he must at least know his own ear. Disaster strikes if he cannot hear wrong things in his scores during rehearsal. I think there are two things he must be absolutely sure of. He must never be satisfied until what he has written arouses genuinely in him the spontaneous excitement he hopes to arouse in the listener—without this sensation he cannot hope to produce a response in anyone else. He cannot do this without being sure that he hears everything he writes down: this is the second necessity, too often forgotten today. A famous conductor once told me a tale he swore was true (and he is a man whose word one does not question). He was rehearsing a concert of new works, and one of the composers approached him at the rostrum, hesitantly: 'Would you mind taking it a little quicker?' The amazed conductor knew that this was a situation in which tact could serve no purpose and replied: 'But this isn't your piece!' The 'composer' would have been spared this particular embarrassment had he been conducting his own work; at least he would have known whose piece it was when it was his turn to step on the rostrum. One should always be glad of the chance.

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General communications for the Society should be addressed to the Chairman, Dr Lionel Pike, Music Department, Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, Egham, Surrey, TW20 0EX

Enquiries about membership, subscriptions etc., and record orders should be sent to the Treasurer, John Young, 154, Kirkham Street, Plumstead, London, SE18 2EN tel 081-317 9966

Correspondence about 'Tonic' should be sent to the editor, Dr John Pickard, Department of Music, University College of North Wales, College Road, Bangor, Gwynnedd, LL57 2DG.

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