TONIC

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EDITORIAL

Members of the Robert Simpson Society may have wondered whether another issue of *Tonic* was ever likely to be produced in their lifetime. Here, at long last, is Vol.6! Apologies that it has taken so long to prepare.

The fact that in this case your editor is also the author of the single article making up the new edition has compounded the delay. Authors are apt to make revisions and to keep on making them until the editor says 'enough is enough' and stops them from tinkering with what they have written. Readers may therefore well imagine the somewhat schizophrenic existence I have led whilst working on this issue...

The analysis of Symphony No.3 is I hope timely, for its publication coincides with the release of Hyperion's superb new recording of the work by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Vernon Handley (CDA66728). This is the first RS symphony to have achieved a second commercial recording - the old Unicorn recording with Horenstein and the L.S.O. is still available on UKCD2028 - and this will surely be seen as an important moment in the reception history of RS's music. Few contemporary symphonies make it to a second recording; fewer still with the first recording still in the catalogue.

In my opinion the Third Symphony was, on its appearance in 1962, the most impressive thing RS had done up to that time. The second of its two movements (the 'composed accelerando') has always been viewed as one of the most original structures RS has created, but I hope that my analysis helps to show that the first movement is also no less remarkable a structure.

Needless to say, an analytical essay of the size offered here (and I must apologise that the number and complexity of musical examples precluded typesetting on this occasion) is bound to be rather detailed. Those readers wishing to follow it blow-by-blow will certainly find a copy of the Lengnick study score to be extremely helpful. The publication itself is a bit of a mess - a poor reproduction of the professionally (and elegantly) copied score, issued with an erratum slip whose 40 items represents a far from complete list of the score's errors. Fortunately, they are generally minor mistakes, so the printed score remains well worth having to hand.

Finally, whilst wishing readers a Happy New Year, I should add that *Tonic's* editorial address has changed again, my Department having moved premises. The new address is:

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SIMPSON'S THIRD SYMPHONY - AN ANALYSIS

John Pickard

Robert Simpson's Third Symphony was completed in 1962 and was composed for the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. The six years separating it from its predecessor saw the composition of only one large-scale work: the Violin Concerto (1959). Written for Ernest Element (whose quartet premiered Simpson's first three String Quartets) this was a substantial piece, lasting almost forty minutes. However, Simpson felt dissatisfied with the work and, though he considered revising it, the revisions would probably have been so extensive as to make the project unfeasible, so its withdrawal from Simpson's list of works is now permanent.

If the Concerto turned out to be an uncharacteristic artistic failure, the Third Symphony amply makes amends. In it, Simpson realised, with greater originality than ever before, the principles of organic development and tonal argument which had fuelled the first two symphonies and three quartets. Once again, the approach to form is unorthodox: the symphony has just two movements, each lasting about a quarter of an hour. The first is a stormy sonata-allegro and the second a unique "composed accelerando, but with the dynamics repressed" (Simpson's own description).

As in the earlier symphonies, the source of the musical drama is tonal conflict - this time between the keys of Bb and C. (It is curious that in each of the first three symphonies the areas of tonal contention became progressively closer: in No.1 it was the difference of a tritone; in No.2, that of a major third; now it is a major second. Put simply, the first movement seeks to consolidate Bb minor by resisting the pull of C, whilst the second begins in Bb minor but ultimately establishes C major. Additionally, the two tonal regions are associated with certain emotional characteristics i.e. Bb minor is always related to music of stormy or menacing character and C is (in the words of Hugh Ottaway) "felt as a region of promise" [1] - something towards which the music aspires.

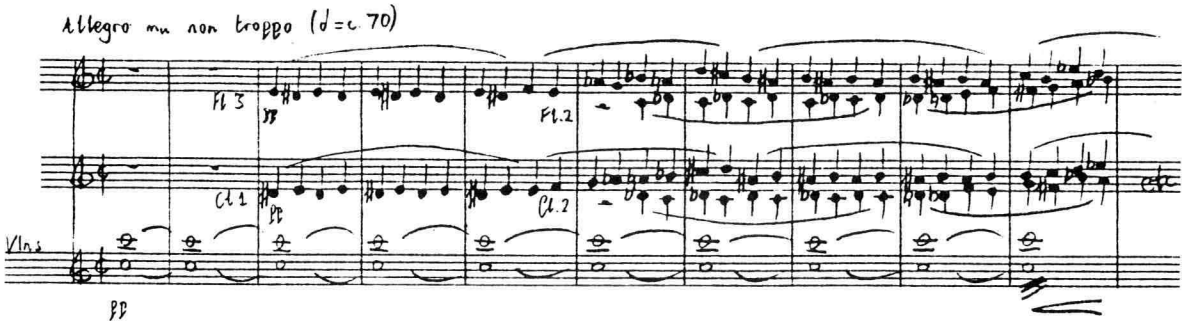
A new feature to this symphony is its stronger sense of rhythmic definition. Thematic material is consequently more self-contained and arguably more immediately memorable. This is particularly important in the sonata form first movement where the very idea of recapitulation dictates that themes should be clearly recognisable and have a strong identity. Tovey once suggested that every subject in the Beethoven symphonies was recognisable by its rhythm alone - an observation which Simpson seems to have taken to heart in this and many subsequent works.

FIRST MOVEMENT

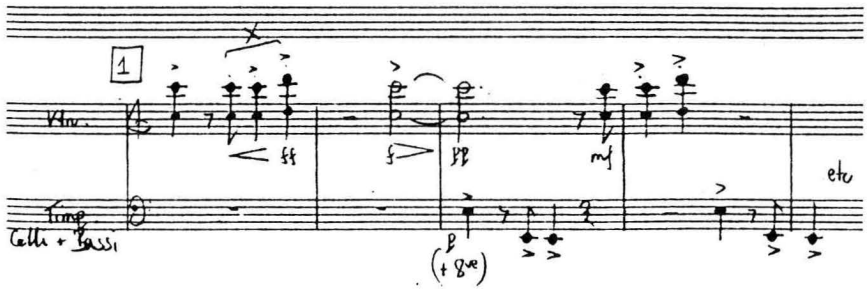
Exposition

The cover photograph for the first LP issue of this work shows Earth from Apollo 11, taken just a year earlier. Continents are hard to make out, but the wispy outlines of the weather systems so essential to life on our planet are clearly evident - a reminder that the boiling activity of our world if seen from (not all that great) a distance is not evident at all but is replaced by a mysterious stillness. For Simpson, the enthusiastic amateur astronomer, there could hardly be a more appropriate visual image to accompany the first notes of this symphony.

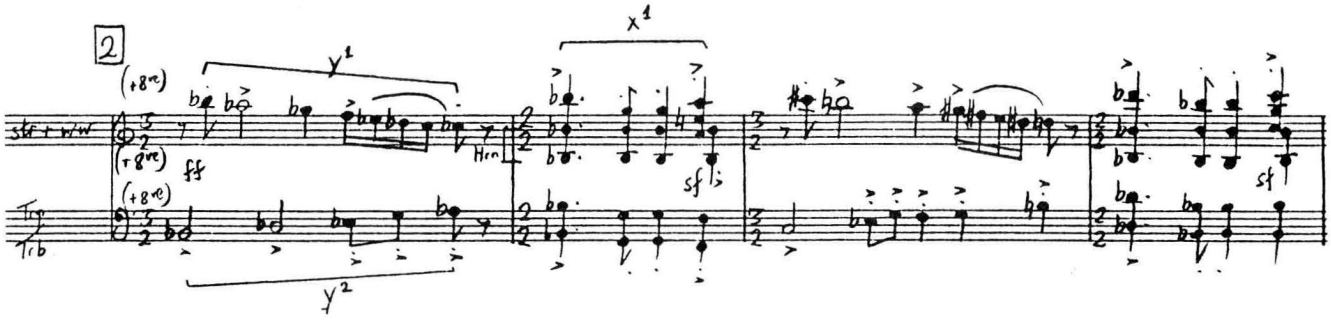
It seems to begin in outer space. Against a soft, pulseless octave C on the violins, third flute and first clarinet set up a strange series of ascending semitonal clashes which begin by implying C major and minor combined and which constantly change colour, the clashing notes alternately taken by each instrument: Ex.1.



The entry of the second flute and second clarinet is in canon with the first and the canon is continued with the entry of a third pair of instruments (piccolo and horn). As these weird oscillations rise in pitch and increase in harmonic complexity, the sustained violin C becomes tonally unstable and a tremolando crescendo culminates in a nervous little rhythmic figure answered by timpani and lower strings: Ex.2.

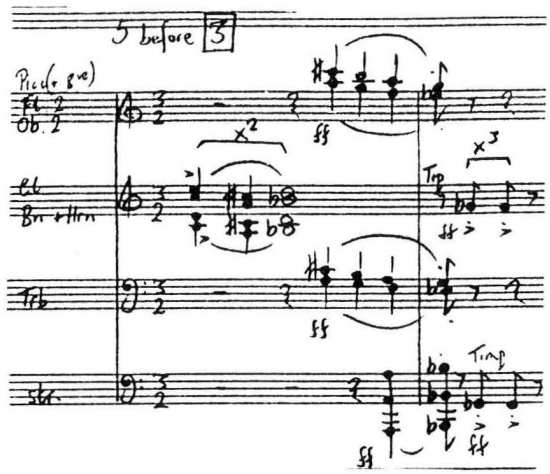


Two aspects of fig.'x' make it disruptive: firstly (and obviously), its movement upwards to the D after so long on a sustained C (the upward step of a tone anticipating in microcosm what happens, tonally, in the symphony as a whole); secondly, it is a cross-rhythm - a 3/4 unit imposed upon a carefully prepared 2/2 pulse. The combination of these factors undermines the stability of C and the first subject proper erupts in the conflicting Bb minor: Ex.3.



The first bar is a two-part idea, in contrary motion. Each part has a distinct character but they are designated 'y1' and 'y2' due to their (at this stage) mutual dependancy. The second bar is the first of several rhythmic transformations of 'x' (given here as 'x1'), and it forms a kind of imperfect cadence as it moves from the tonic Bb to a chord of the flattened 7th (final crotchet beat) with the tonic note still sounding on the lower horns. This two-bar phrase is immediately repeated in bars 3 and 4 of Ex.3, but with a more developed version of 'y2' transposed up a tone to C (exemplifying the Bb/C tonal conflict of the work) and with 'y1' now a minor third higher. This lends the third bar a greater sense of intensity than the first, not only because it is at a higher pitch but also due to the new tonal conflict between 'y1' and 'y2'. In answer to this, the fourth bar of Ex.3 returns strongly to Bb minor, this time beginning on the minor third of that key and ending on the dominant 7th in F (i.e. the dominant of the dominant).

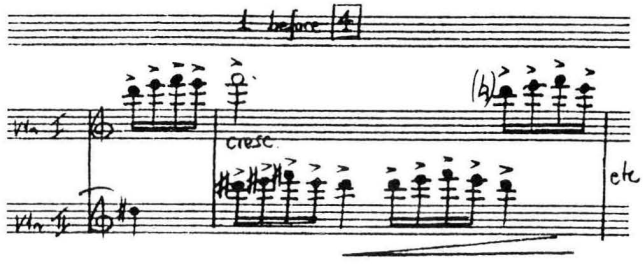
Development of this material begins immediately (after the dramatic one-bar general pause) starting with the melodic shape of 'x1' (without its characteristic rhythm) in major thirds on clarinets, bassoons and horns (x2), and continuing with a slowed down derivation of 'y1's descending semiquaver scale, heard on piccolo, flute, oboes and trombones (also in major thirds). This is punctuated by powerful timpani interjections - the simplest imaginable reference to the 'x' rhythm and one which is to prove immensely important (x3): Ex.4.



The unusual doubling in this passage between flute/piccolo, oboes and trombones in widely spaced registers is to become a characteristic feature of Simpson's orchestral style from this work onwards. His instrumental imagination is highly individual and frequently favours unexpected textures and spacings which, while never distracting attention from the symphonic argument, enhance the tough, steely power so typical of his musical invention. This fact is equally applicable to the chamber music as it is to the orchestral works.

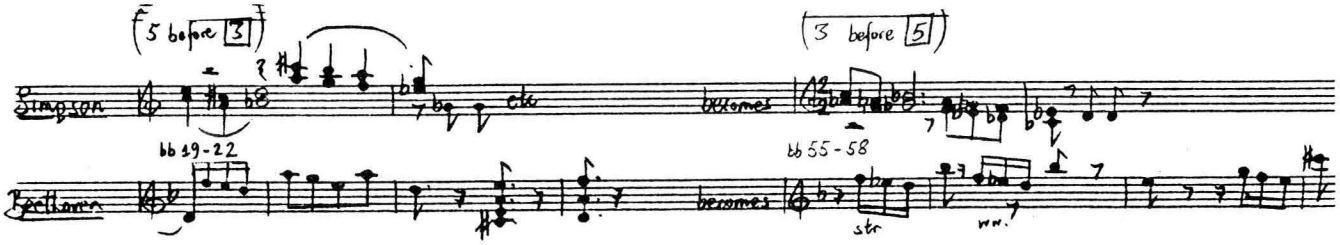
As with the first two bars of the previous example, Ex.4 is repeated (transposed up a tone) and this culminates in a climactic moment where upper woodwind, brass and upper strings repeat fortissimo syncopated A's whilst trumpets and trombones have a further transformation of 'y' against a powerful descending scale of Bb major on bassoons, contrabassoon, cellos and basses, which comes to rest on a sustained low C exploiting the resonant lowest note of the cellos and basses doubled by tuba and bassoons.

This moment (fig.3 in the score) attempts to re-establish the stability of the opening C, but its effectiveness as a tonic has been undermined by the Bb minor outburst at fig.2. C is now simultaneously challenged by the oscillating semitonal clash of Ex.1, but this time between Bb and A. It is a moment of strong tonal contention and is sustained through a five-bar diminuendo. In the fourth bar, the conflict between Bb and C is obscured by the trumpets' sustained pianissimo B natural. This sets off another chain of rising semitonal clashes similar to that of the opening (Ex.1), and culminates in a second fortissimo statement of Ex.3 - this time beginning on F# and again moving up a tone after two bars. However, the build-up to Ex.3 contains a new detail: a rushing semiquaver figure on the violins, which the ear relates to the semiquaver idea of Ex.3 as these are the only semiquavers to have been heard so far: Ex.5.



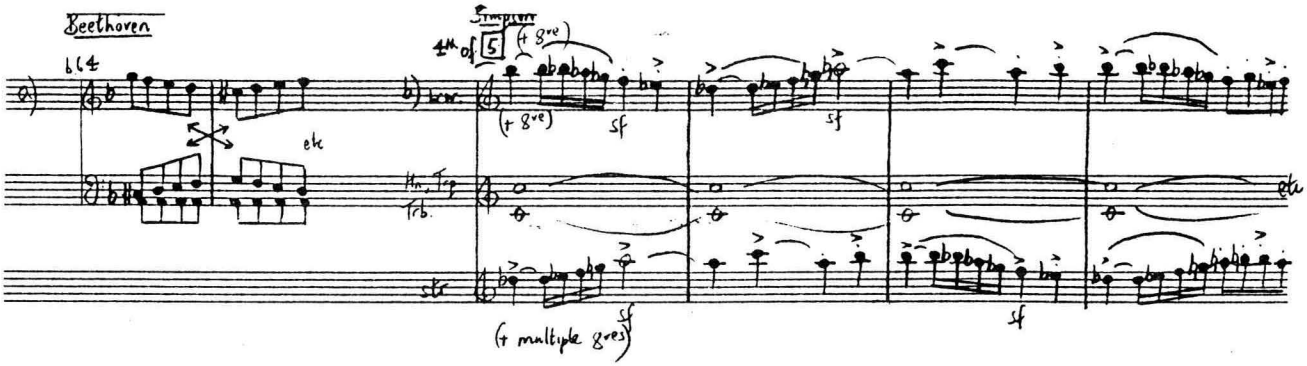
To summarize what has happened so far: two long, mysterious crescendi have each culminated in a huge fortissimo tutti, the first beginning in Bb minor and the second, a major third lower. There is a clear structural precedent in the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony which also begins with a mysterious crescendo, moves towards a fortissimo statement of the main theme in the tonic (at bar 15) and then repeats the process with the second statement of the main theme a major third lower (b.51). Such a correspondence could be coincidental or subconcious, especially for a composer so greatly influenced by Beethoven, but further comparison of the two movements shows their relationship to be both profound and intentional. As already shown, the analogy is not merely gestural but tonal and this deeper relationship invites further comparison of the two movements

After the second statement of Ex.3, the music (dispensing this time with the General Pause) develops Ex.4, now in quavers. This relates to the way Beethoven develops the semiquaver figure from the end of his first fortissimo statement (bb.19-20) and it forms a series of antiphonal exchanges between the strings and wind (bb.55-61): Ex.6.



In the Beethoven, this culminates in an extended tutti passage where, previously, the climax had disintegrated. Exactly the same thing happens in the Simpson: a vehement three-part antiphonal exchange of x3 (Ex.4) comes to rest on a pedal C sustained in the brass (fourth bar of Fig.5). Beethoven also sustains a pedal note to powerful effect in bars 63-5 and 67-9, though in this case it is a dominant of D minor whereas Simpson sustains the supertonic (C). However, it is worth remembering that the Beethoven movement begins 'in A': in fact, until the D minor ff tutti at bar 17, the movement could well be in A major/minor.

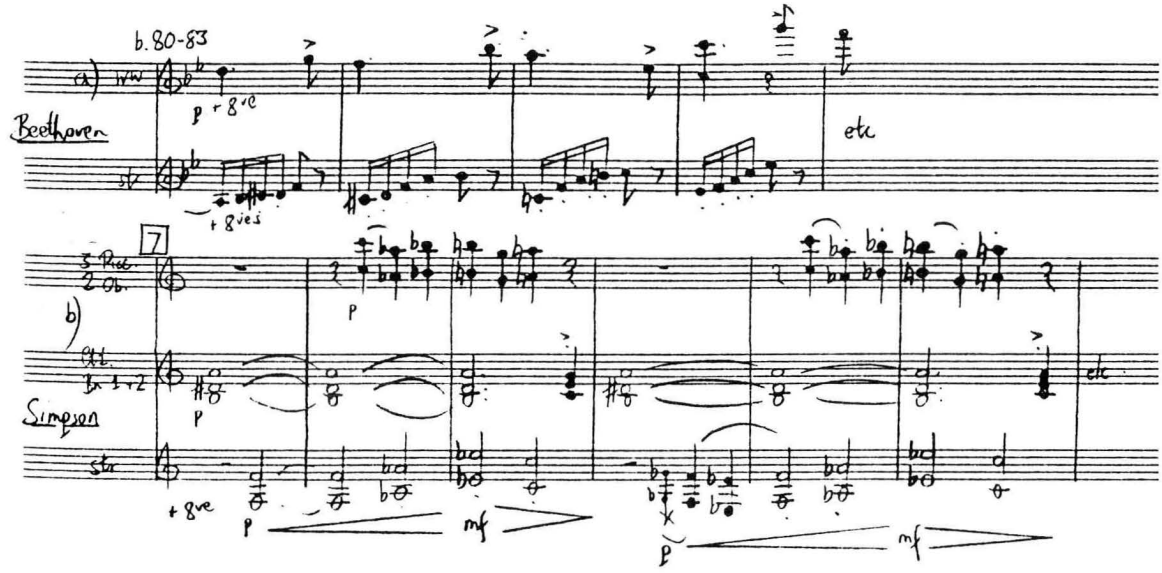
Another important feature at this point in Beethoven 9 is the contrary motion between upper and lower parts (bb.64-65, 69-70) and its implied canonic treatment (in bar 65, the upper part imitates the lower part from the previous bar and vice versa). In the Simpson, not only are the woodwind and strings also in contrary motion but they are canonic as well: Ex.7.



The last bar of this example shows how the woodwind decorate the strings' third and fourth beats of the previous bar by the addition of quavers. A bar later this results in the strings and woodwind coming together in descending unison quavers, always staccato and accented on every down-beat. At the third bar of Fig.6, three horns add a fortissimo sustained chord comprising the notes E, G, Bb - or the dominant 7th of F with the root, C, missing. This acts as a preparation for the second subject-group, which gravitates to the traditional dominant.

At bar 74 of Beethoven 9, contrasting material is found in the woodwind after a long tutti. The passage also serves to establish the key of the second subject (in this case Bb major). Simpson does likewise three bars before Fig.7 with a descending sequential link to the second subject. It is achieved with some quite unconventional scoring: three horns doubled two octaves higher by three piccolos - another of Simpson's characteristic combinations. (He is particularly fond of the bright sonority of the piccolo and asks all three flautists to double them in Symphonies 4, 5 and 8 as well as in this one.)

The second subject group also has a strong affinity with Beethoven's. Here Beethoven constructs an idea made up of two independent, but complementary, parts - a melody for the woodwind against a rising semiquaver figuration in the strings: Ex.8a.

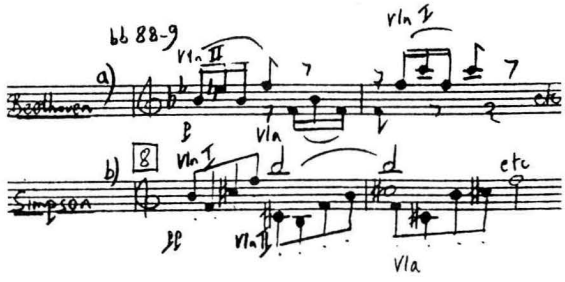


This passage marks a crucial point in the tonal argument of Beethoven's Ninth due to its tonal ambivalence. The whole symphony is concerned with the relationship between D and Bb and here, at the beginning of the Bb major second subject, the music is momentarily caught between the two keys. In his book *Beethoven, Sibelius and the Profound Logic,* Lionel Pike perceptively comments that the first two bars of the strings' accompaniment could equally be in D minor or Bb major. This is also true of the beginning of the woodwind melody, the key only being defined by the Eb in the third bar.

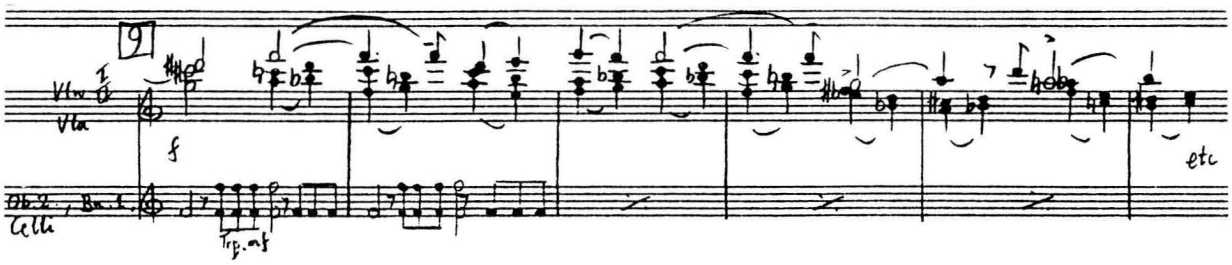
Of course, Simpson's equivalent does not function in quite the same way, due to the different tonal relationships being explored. His second group tends towards F but is no more 'in the dominant', in the Classical sense, than the first group was 'in the tonic'. Nevertheless, clear analogies exist: the section begins with two separate, but complementary lines - like the Beethoven - one in the woodwind, the other, simultaneously, in the strings: Ex.8b.

The string figure, which rises through a minor 7th, is clearly derived from fig.y2, whilst the woodwind line can be traced to the sixth bar of Fig.5 (Ex.7b, third bar) which is itself derived from the sixth bar of Fig.2 (Ex.4). Another analogy lies in the fact that, like the Beethoven, the passage is tonally ambiguous: the strings, piccolos and oboes imply F major/minor, whilst the 1st clarinet and bassoons hold a chord of the flattened 7th on B major (without the fifth), moving every third bar to an anacrusis on a C major chord. This diatonic chord shines through the texture quite noticeably, but the tonal 'region of promise' with which it is associated is not established here and, in this context, C major acts merely as a dominant in F.

From this point, Beethoven builds two climaxes in Bb (bb.95 and 102). Simpson just builds one climax but it is done in two stages. First, between Figs.8 and 9 he takes Ex.8b and transposes it up a tone (also altering the scoring) combining it with another flattened 7th (again without the fifth) on the strings. This pattern is derived from bars 88-91 in the Beethoven: Ex.9.



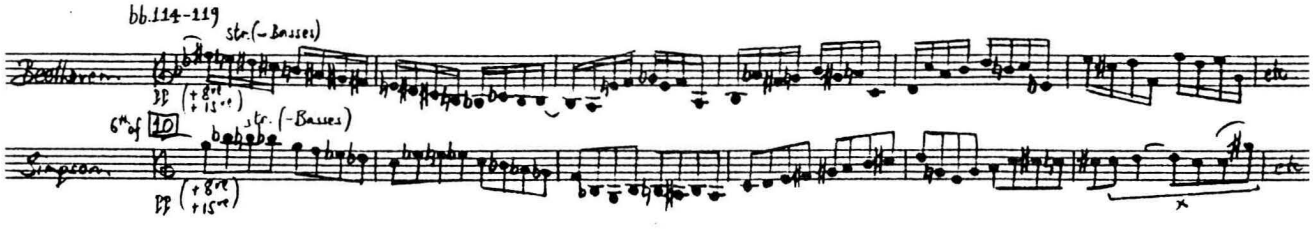
The second stage involves an intense development in the strings of the woodwind figure from the second bar of Fig.7 over an F pedal (Fig 9) - whose rhythm seems to relate more closely to the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth than to the Ninth!: Ex.10.



The passage serves both to build up tension and to prepare tonally the powerful 'ff' outburst in Bb major four bars before Fig.10. This eruption is immediately offset by two bars of quiet clarinets and first horn, marked 'dolce', before it is repeated, this time in Db. The alternation in rapid succession of these two elements is clearly derived from bb.102-107 of the Beethoven, which also presents the second ff outburst in varied form (b.107) to prepare for the striking entry of flute, violins and viola at b.108 in B major.

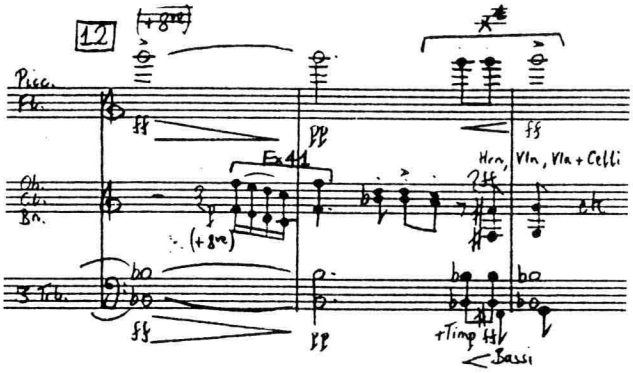
Although, at this early stage in the work, Beethoven's introduction of B major appears tangential, it is to have long-term tonal consequences, as can be seen from bb.837-842 of the finale and bb.171-6 of the scherzo. Simpson's analogy is to introduce a similarly unrelated, though ultimately relevant, key - E major, whose implied appearance was noted at Fig.7 and whose importance will shortly become apparent. This passage (three bars before Fig.10 in the score) also relates to the Beethoven in its rapid change of texture after the tutti of the previous bar.

Beethoven returns to Bb major/minor by means of a wonderfully hushed and mysterious run of semiquavers in the strings (bb.114-119) and this is reflected in Simpson's work in a similarly striking and evocative way. Indeed, it was whilst listening to this passage that it occurred to me that there might be a correspondence between this and the Beethoven. Ex.11.



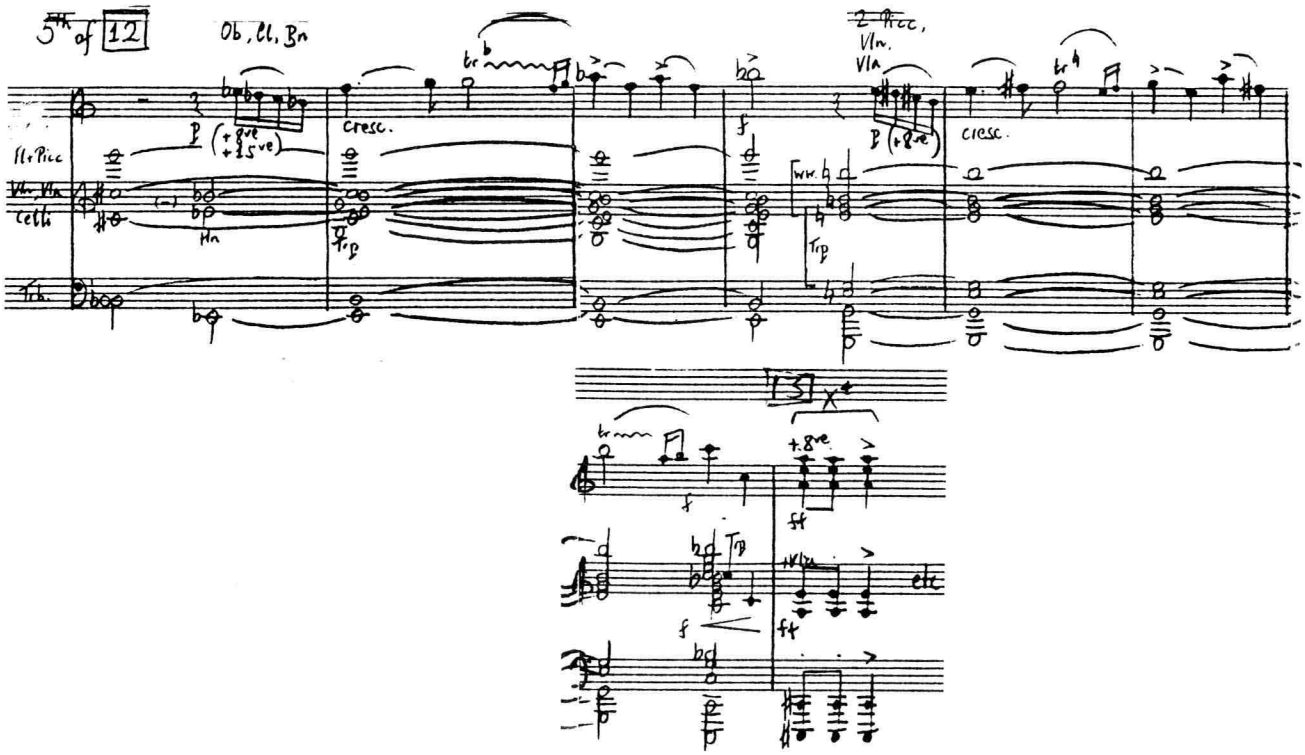
Beethoven now starts to build up tension to the exposition's powerful conclusion, first of all, by the reintroduction of the timpani rhythm  from the first subject. Simpson does the same - in this case, by introducing a new derivation of 'x' (anticipated in the final bar of Ex.11 but played in the three bars of Fig.11 by cellos and 1st bassoon). The second stage of Beethoven's build-up is marked by the introduction of rushing demisemiquavers on violins and violas (bb.132-7) - Simpson introduces semiquavers (the movement is in alla breve time) derived from Ex.7 in the basses and cellos six bars after Fig.11. In the next six bars the figuration spreads through the whole string section to reach a fortissimo climax.

At bars 138-44, Beethoven alternates fortissimo tuttis with soft legato phrases on upper woodwind. Simpson's musical parallel is a development of Ex.3 for woodwind combined with another version of 'x' against the remarkable sonority of flute and piccolo in their high register together with three trombones: Ex.12.



The Beethovenian alternation of contrasting dynamics is here as well, but Simpson's passage feels significantly different from Beethoven's. It has greater thematic identity; more sense of the emergence of a new theme. I do not think there is much doubt that it is at this point that the centre of gravity of Simpson's exposition seems to have subtly shifted from that of the Beethoven model.

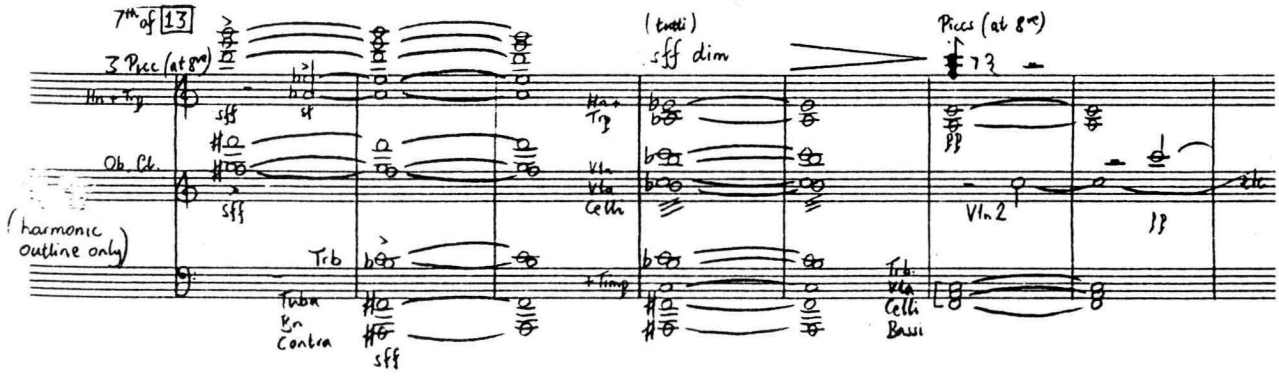
The woodwind idea of Ex.12 is extended at the fifth bar of Fig.12 and taken over by the upper strings (doubled by two piccolos) as a decorated E minor chord over a sustained G in the bass (i.e. the first inversion of E minor): Ex.13.



As has already been remarked, E is tonally at the furthest remove from Bb. However, it is closer to the other main tonal area of the symphony, C. This is particularly so when E is in first inversion as it can be interpreted as a V13-I progression in C. This is what happens in the bar before Fig.13 (see Ex.13), though, admittedly, this C major chord (with an added flat 7th) is not consolidated as a tonality here. Nevertheless, the chord does assist in preparing for the end of the exposition in F major.

Before that, however, a codetta (relating to bars 150-7 in the Beethoven) has the effect of an 'interrupted' cadence as the implied V13-I progression of one bar before Fig.13 moves (by chromatic movement in the bass) to a first inversion chord of A major at Fig.13 itself. This chord, with its bare fifths in the treble and major third deep in the bass is one of the 'Beethovenian' sounds which constantly recurs in Simpson's music. It is a spacing of which both composers are fond. Compare Fig.13 in the Simpson with Beethoven's treatment of the same chord at bar 30 of the finale of No.9. In both cases the composers make this straightforward major triad sound like a new discovery.

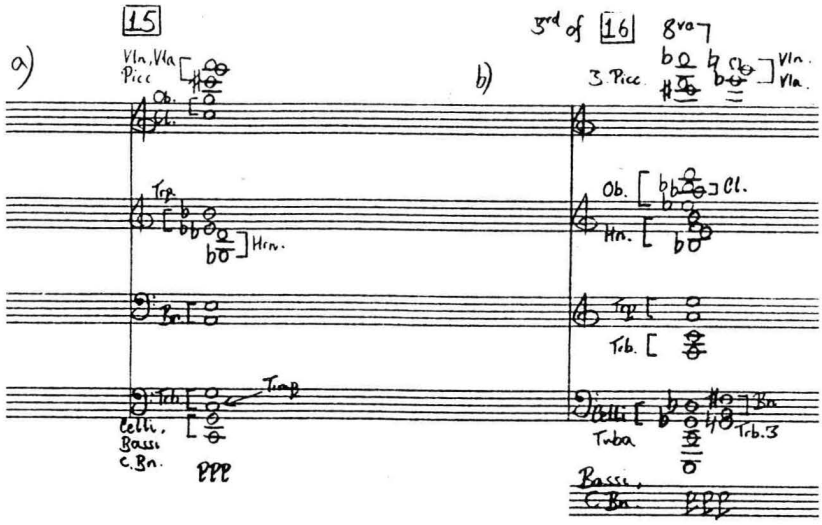
The listener is adjusting to the surprise of the progression described above when, at the seventh bar of Fig.13, Simpson prepares another harmonic shock - a grinding dissonance (rendered the more scarifying by three screaming piccolos in their highest octave) resolves, via a chord of F#, Bb, C, Ab and Eb on brass with strings emphasising C and Bb, onto an F major triad scored for trombones, lower strings and three piccolos: Ex.14.



Development

I suggested earlier that it is possible to detect a subtle shift away from the Beethoven model towards the end of Simpson's exposition. Inevitably, Simpson's musical material (which is certainly not pastiche Beethoven!) begins to follow an independent course. So from this point onwards the similarities between this movement and the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth become somewhat less marked.

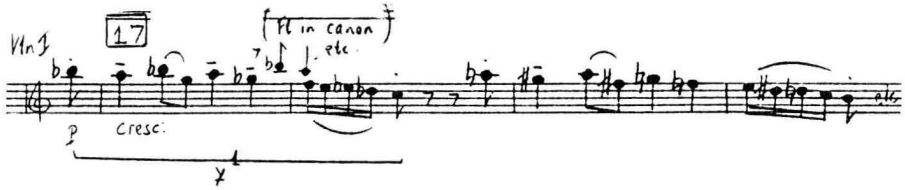
Nonetheless, certain broad analogies exist and will be pointed out as they occur. For example, Beethoven begins his development by expanding upon the symphony's mysterious opening (not all that unusual for the start of a development section!). Simpson does likewise. Once again, violins sustain an octave C, though it no longer feels like a tonic (the previous F major chord saw to that, turning it into a dominant). The quiet semitonal clashes of Ex.1 begin again - this time on horn and bassoon, piccolo and oboe. But instead of the expected crescendo, the progress of the music is halted by a dense nine-note chord spread, 'ppp', across the entire orchestra: Ex.15(a).



This chord has a notable preponderance of fifths in its spacing (a fact worth remembering) and it serves to halt any aspirations towards establishing C as a tonic. In fact, immediately following this chord, the music touches on Bb major (i.e. the triad is sustained in horn, violas and 2nd violins at the seventh bar of Fig.15) with oboes playing 'x' in its original version (see Ex.2) on the notes F and G. It sets off the semitonal oscillations once more, now between violas, cellos and two piccolos, only to result in another soft sustained chord, of even greater complexity: Ex.15(b).

This second chord contains all twelve notes of the chromatic scale and, again, fifths tend to be prominent in the spacing. From this symphony onwards, twelve-note chords are an occasional feature in Simpson's works. They are not 'clusters' and are certainly not intended as some sort of homage to the school of Schoenbergian twelve-note composition. The chords are generally soft, always spread across an extremely wide compass and are constructed with great attention to the intervals set up between the pitches. Their effect is often deeply poetic: remote and mysterious, to me they seem like the musical equivalent of faint nebulae hanging in the night sky.

The chord also dislodges any residual sense of Bb major and the preceding passage is repeated in a rescored version, transposed a semitone lower to A. At Fig.17 a new, and important, derivation of Ex.3 y1 is heard in a canon at one bar's distance between violin I and three flutes: Ex.16.



Its semitonal transposition in the second phrase reflects the tonal tendency of the previous passage. On its third repetition, the phrase is a semitone lower still and the crescendo which has grown all the way through this passage erupts into another dense chord - this time fortissimo and made up of successive entries of pairs of instruments in fifths: violins on G and D, trumpets on Bb and F, trombones on D and A, flutes and oboes on F# (obs.& fl.2) and C# (fl.1&3), horns on A and E, and clarinets on C and G - again, nine notes of the chromatic scale - with bassoons, lower strings and low brass playing a menacing version of 'x' on the notes C# and D#. As if in protest, the first violins interject a passionate, but fragmented, version of 'x' which quickly collapses. With flute and bassoon playing a slowed down version of the descending group in 'y1' the music comes to a halt. The analogy between this and the 'ritard' woodwind phrases in Beethoven's Ninth (bars 195-197 and 213-215) is clear as is the Beethovenian derivation of the ensuing three-part fugue based on the first subject (c.f. Beethoven: b.218 etc., Simpson: Fig.18 etc.)

The fugue subject in Simpson's movement is yet another version of 'x1': Ex.17a.

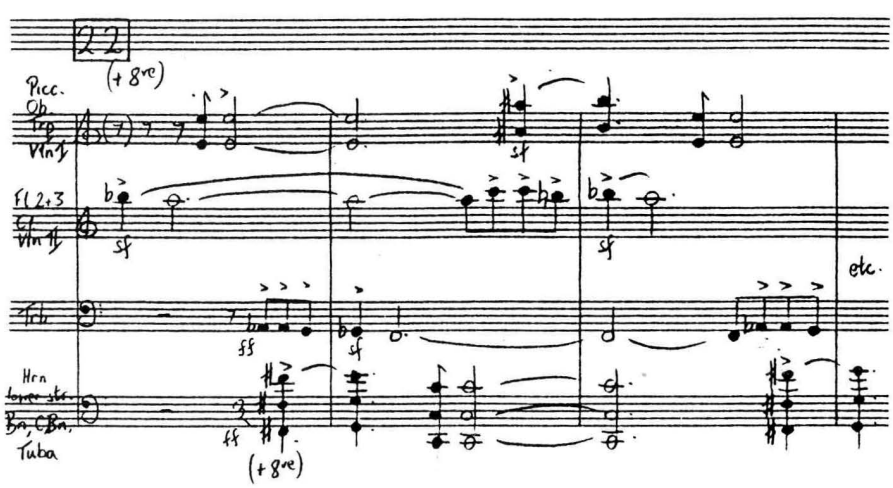
a)

It is immediately presented with the countersubject (as in the Beethoven). Simpson derives it from the descending pattern at Fig.6 and, like Beethoven, he interchanges the parts at the entry of the answer (six bars before Fig.19), so that instead of the countersubject continuing on the second violins, it switches to bassoons and violas whilst the second violins play what turns out to be a second countersubject derived from an inversion of 'y1': Ex.17b.

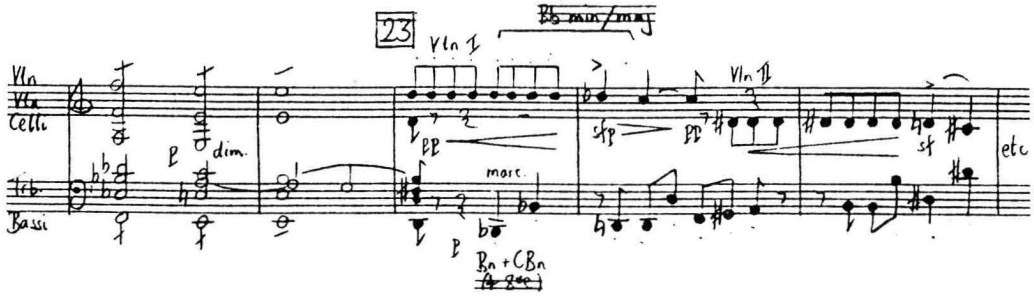
b)

With the third entry of the subject at Fig.19 on high woodwind, the first countersubject (which grows from the bass figuration at Fig.18) moves to first violins and violas (joined by second violins), whilst the second is taken over by cellos, basses and bassoons. Behind this triple invertible counterpoint muted brass sustain soft chords: Ab minor followed by F# major with flattened 7th, then D major first inversion, C major plus flattened 7th and finally (with the third entry of the subject) G# minor first inversion. It is only at this point that the dynamic begins to rise above pianissimo. The quiet but dense texture combines with the increasing prominence of the figure from Ex.4x3 to create a remarkably sinister atmosphere. One of the qualities which distinguishes this symphony from its predecessors is its increased power of suggestion - the feeling of overwhelming forces contained just below the surface. It is a particularly potent characteristic of this development section and, indeed, of the whole of the work's second movement.

Through Figs.20 to 22 the development of the three contrapuntal parts and the rhythmic idea of Ex.4x3 becomes increasingly intense until, at Fig.22, a C major climax of considerable grandeur is achieved for four bars in which the melodic potential of the fifths from the chord of Ex.15 is impressively realised: Ex.18.

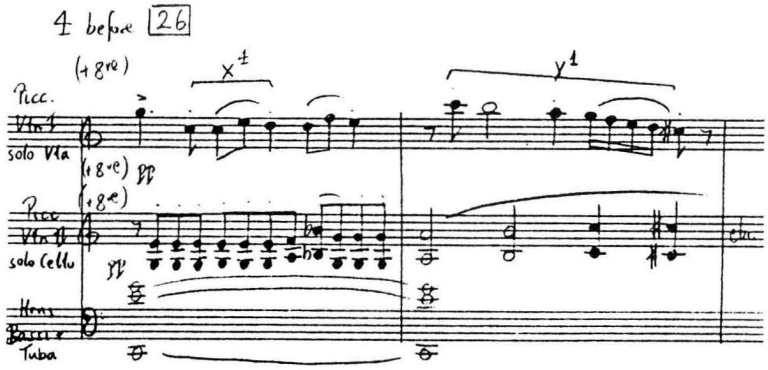


This passage is the most powerful reference to C major heard so far, but even here it is undermined by the imitative writing for flutes clarinets, second violins and trombones (derived from Fig.9, Ex.10), and the music is soon pulled, via the relative minor, back towards Bb at Fig.23 : Ex.19.



The first violin figure at Fig.23 moves to second violins, to violas and back to first violins, each time a semitone higher though displaced by octaves. Against this, the accompaniment rises through the woodwind to arrive at an antiphonal exchange with the upper strings. The exchange involves the quiet chromatic descent of the repeated four-note chord against a rising chromatic line in the bass doubled at the fifth and ninth by bassoons, clarinets, trombones and violas. The result is a quiet consolidation of Bb major four bars after Fig.24.

With the entry of piccolo and clarinet six bars after Fig.24 (a new version of Ex.3y2) and, two bars before Fig.25, the flutes and horn (a transformation of part of the second subject - Ex.8b, 4th and 5th bars), the tonality tilts towards C. Four bars before Fig.26, in a moment of tonal stability rare in this stormy movement, the music briefly settles on an unclouded C major: Ex.20.



For seven bars it quietly and calmly modulates through G major and A major until, in the third bar of Fig.26, it inclines briefly towards Bb minor before settling into another soft, this time mysterious, seven-bar passage beginning in Eb and moving down another fifth, to Ab. This whole passage can be seen as analogous with the corresponding F major passage occurring just before the recapitulation in Beethoven's movement (b.283ff)

The respite proves short-lived and the re-entry of the trumpets and timpani on C with Ex.4x3 provokes a rapid crescendo spreading through the orchestra to a massive tutti on a first inversion C major chord (Fig.27). This is the moment of recapitulation, with the high woodwind playing the rocking semitonal clashes of Ex.1 - now 'fff'. Against continued C's in trumpets and timpani and rocking contrary motion semitones on piccolos and horns, the rest of the orchestra plunges into the first subject in its original Bb minor.

As with the Beethoven, the development section of this movement has been proportionately concise - 139 bars against 155 bars of exposition and 214 bars of recapitulation and coda (the Beethoven movement works out at 159 bars of exposition, 141 bars of development and 247 bars of recapitulation and coda). In both cases one could say that the recapitulation and large-scale coda form a natural extension of the development. But one important respect in which Simpson diverges from the Beethoven model is that, although both movements have an enormously powerful moment of recapitulation, Beethoven prepares the unequivocal return of the tonic and the first subject with

great care over many bars whereas, in the Simpson, the moment is a continuation of the Bb/C conflict of the whole movement. The result is that the return of the first subject is somewhat less obvious in the Simpson than in the Beethoven.

Recapitulation

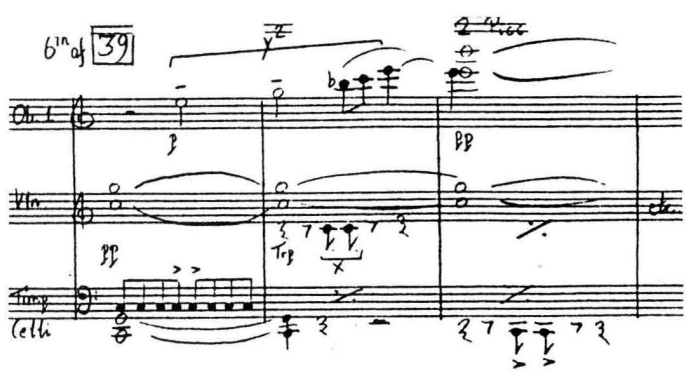
Beethoven's first subject recapitulation marks a high-point of stress in this movement; Simpson's is similarly unyielding in its ferocity. But whilst the Beethoven, with its extraordinary timpani pedal-point, is monolithic, Simpson's is tonally exploratory. It is also quite irregular, involving both the extension of Ex.3 and the incorporation of an idea from the development - dense 'nebula' chords similar to those shown in Ex.15. Here there are four such chords: the first and last each containing all twelve-notes, the second and third comprising eleven and seven notes respectively. Each time a chord is sounded, certain sustained notes are picked out and make a crescendo, with the result that a series of wide-spaced major chords emerges from the texture (Ab, Gb, C and Db). In each case, first subject material is superimposed and, throughout the entire passage, trumpets and timpani continue their ostinato based on Ex.4x3, changing pitch every few bars, forced by the conflict raging around them to search for tonally compatible pitches. Thus, they move C, C#, D, E, F, E, Eb, D, Db, back to C, before finally hitting Bb, and, with a roar of timpani and trombones, the violent storm of the first subject recapitulation ends with the firmest assertion yet of Bb minor. It is a searingly intense passage - one of the most impressive in the symphony.

Whereas the recapitulation of the first group was unorthodox, that of the second group is fairly straightforward. Although it begins at the equivalent of Fig.8 (in other words omitting the first six bars) it observes the Classical convention of appearing a fifth lower than in the exposition and, apart from variations in scoring and (like the Beethoven) some subtle harmonic redirection to end in the minor rather than the major, it repeats the original material in the same order. The complex tonal process described earlier therefore concludes, not in F, but a fifth lower in Bb (minor this time).

Coda

Both symphonies have big, powerful codas, which continue the developmental process. Simpson's coda begins with the only slackening of tempo in the entire movement - seventeen bars marked 'pochettino meno' - and a contrapuntal development of y1 (a slightly altered version of Ex.16 canonically combined with its free inversion). The accompanying thirds, in even quavers on violas and cellos tend to rise chromatically and are taken over by tremolando violins at Fig.31. An accelerando at three bars after Fig.38 leads back to Tempo 1 and a fierce three-part canonic passage based on y1 over a rising bass-line. The whole passage has C as its tonal centre and comes to an end five bars after Fig.39 with a huge sforzando dominant seventh on the last crotchet beat of the bar.

At this point, a sudden pianissimo prepares for the most violent tonal conflict so far. Timpani set up a pulse of regular quaver Cs, accenting the fourth and fifth quavers of each bar together with trumpets interjecting Ex.4x3 on repeated Cs, whilst the violins and cellos both sustain a perfect fifth on C and G. Against this a solo oboe plays a C major (plus flattened 7th) version of Ex.3y2 (equivalent in its function and its first subject derivation to the horn solo in the Beethoven- b.469ff): Ex.21.



As the trumpets and timpani continue their ostinato Cs, pairs of instruments successively enter with sustained perfect fifths. Violins are already playing C and G, piccolos enter with E and B, then bassoons with D and A, oboes with B and F#, first and second trombones with Ab and Eb, first and third horns with C# and F#. This forms another complex chord - eleven notes. The only missing note is of course Bb - the tonic and, as the general 'pp' swells to a sudden 'ff', third trombone and tuba with second violins, violas and cellos provide the missing fifth of Bb and F. The twelve-note chord rapidly fades out leaving only the Bb and F on fortissimo tremolando strings. Whilst all this has been happening, the trumpets and timpani have doggedly clung to their repeated Cs but now have no choice but to succumb to the law of tonal gravity: timpani move down to Bb, trumpets up to Db and, as a final transformation of Ex.3y1 enters on strings and woodwind, Bb minor reigns supreme.

As in the Beethoven, the final section of the coda is an impressive crescendo based on Ex.4 and set against a syncopated, chromatically rising accompaniment on violins with a chromatically rising bass. The passage gains a sense of increased urgency through gradual contraction of bar lengths - i.e. two bars of 5/2, two bars of 4/2, three of 3/2, three of 2/2, four of 3/4 and thirteen of 2/4. At Fig.44, the dynamic now a uniform 'ff', a series of grinding, tonally unrelated, bare fifths is unleashed, perhaps an unconscious tribute to the symphony's dedicatee Havergal Brian, whose predilection for chords with the third missing is such a singular feature of his harsh, uncompromising sound-world. Finally, with four bars marked 'fff' and a terse V-I cadence, the movement comes to a splendidly choleric Bb minor conclusion. The minor third is however taken for granted in the final chord, rather in the way that Beethoven ends his first movement simply with a unison.

In my discussion of Symphony No.2 (TONIC, Vol.4 no.1), I mentioned several points of similarity between its finale and that of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. In the first movement of No.3 Simpson obviously takes things much further and, now that some of the musical analogies have been discussed, we might briefly consider why Simpson chose to draw them in the first place.

As far as the composer is concerned the answer is perfectly simple: "No comparison welcomed or intended! I just gave myself a lesson and then let fly in the second movement." [2]. This is fair enough. Composers have, throughout history, learned either by imitating works they admire or by finding their own musical analogies to an existing blueprint. For example, Elgar said that the greatest composition lesson of his life was to write his own 'version', precisely similar in terms of bar length and formal division, of the first movement of Mozart's Fortieth Symphony. What makes Simpson's first movement unusual is that it is not only the work of a mature artist, as opposed to a beginner, but it is also the creative response of a composer who feels an uncommonly close affinity with another in such a way that this kind of approach stimulates, rather than stifles, his individual artistic expression. As Hugh Ottaway said in his note accompanying the recording of No.3: "It is music that could only have been written in the twentieth century, yet its deepest roots are in that most unfashionable of periods, the age of Beethoven... There is no suggestion of going back and refurbishing an old stylisation; rather it is a matter of carrying forward creative principles felt to be perenially alive and relevant".

In recent years, many contemporary composers have expressed a direct creative involvement with specific works from the past - Peter Maxwell Davies and Michael Tippett for example. Tippett's Fourth String Quartet contains references to Beethoven's Grosse Fuge Op.133 in a manner which I would term 'gestural' [3] - that is to say, the material is used in a dramatic way which remains self-contained and does not imply development. To say that Simpson's reworking of a Beethovenian model is more profound is in no way intended to cast aspersions on Tippett's response but is intended to show how fundamentally different Simpson's attitude to Beethoven happens to be. In the first movement of this symphony, Simpson is not borrowing ideas from Beethoven and building on them in the manner of 'Variations on a Theme' (though he has subsequently done this in the Beethoven Variations for piano) - and he is certainly not parodying his source, as seems to be fashionable amongst a depressingly large number of contemporary composers.

For Simpson, the purpose of this astonishing creative exercise is to learn more about the internal workings of a piece he loves in the way he enjoys best - i.e. creating his own music. Three particular ways of listening to this music spring to mind from the innumerable variety of options: 1) it can be heard as pure music, unrelated to external models - which is how it has been heard for the past

32 years; 2) the listener can find musical satisfaction in identifying the various analogies; 3) as a result of (2), the composer would hope that this would lead the listener to find new things in the Beethoven model. Each approach is valid, though the composer would be the first to agree that if the music is unconvincing in the first of these approaches, then there is not much point in bothering with the other two.

The same could be said of the three String Quartets (Nos. 4, 5 and 6) which Simpson produced in the '70s, each of which constitutes a close study of one of Beethoven's 'Rasumovsky' Quartets Op.59. In a BBC interview concerning these quartets, Simpson was asked 'can you imagine ever doing the same kind of thing again with a masterwork by another great composer of the Classical period?' He replied that he might: 'It's possible, but I think if I did it again, I wouldn't declare my guilt, I wouldn't confess. I'd just do it and see whether anybody noticed it.' [4].

SECOND MOVEMENT

If the first movement was at one level an analogy, the same could be said of the second, though in quite a different way. It lasts about as long as the first and, viewed in terms of the whole work combines the functions of slow movement, scherzo and finale. However, it is more complex than that and it should be stressed that the movement avoids points of punctuation which could be interpreted as clear formal divisions.

Ottaway paraphrases the composer's remarks on the movement:
"[The movement is] Nature music in a sense - the only piece of mine which has an origin in some external situation... Put programmatically, the situation is this: a sleeper wakes in the early morning, his mind passively receptive; the first bird-songs begin, gradually becoming the dawn chorus; the mind quietly absorbs and reflects until at last a tremendous sense of excitement is experienced; an energy that cannot be repressed" [5].

Despite the 'external situation', this scenario affects the music internally - everything leads towards "an energy that cannot be repressed." This is reflected musically through a very simple analogy - the movement is, in the words of the composer, "a huge composed accelerando but with the dynamics repressed". The music begins Adagio and gradually speeds up to Presto, the dynamics only occasionally rising to 'f', until a sudden and massive 'fff' outburst at the second bar of Fig.93 drives the symphony to its dramatic conclusion.

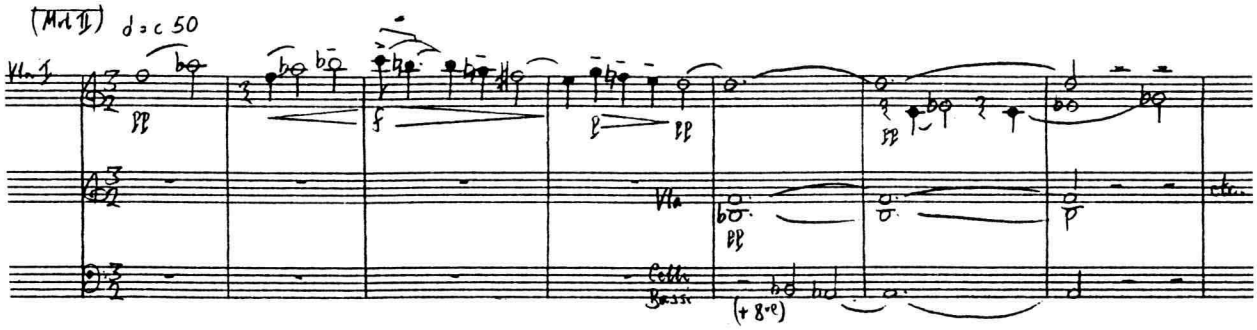
By "composed accelerando" the composer implies an accelerando achieved not by speeding up the basic pulse, but by gradually increasing the amount of activity within that pulse and creating new tempi from this. Pulse does not in itself create movement; harmonic change does. As soon as the changes become frequent, pulse inevitably becomes a contributory factor.

The first tempo change, which occurs in the fifth bar of Fig.51, is achieved by deriving the new crotchet beat from the triplet crotchets of the flutes and second violins in the previous bar. Similarly, at Fig.67, the new crotchet beat is again derived from the speed of the triplet crotchets of the preceding bar. It is, however, worth noting that, after giving the opening tempo of ♩ = c.50, the composer does not provide another metronome mark, even when he actually does indicate an accelerando (or, as he puts it, "pochettino mosso al... Allegretto") in the seven bars from Fig.56 to the new tempo. The opening metronome mark is a guide for the initial tempo and not the inviolable basic pulse to which all succeeding tempi must mathematically relate. In a structure of this kind such pragmatism is wise because if one did not allow the possibility for careful adjustment of the tempo by the conductor, the result in performance may be unfortunate. An orchestra of ninety musicians is not a machine and the discrepancies of tempo which occur in even the most severely regimented performance can mean that an ingenious temporal scheme which works on paper may not be quite so successful in practice. Besides, such artifice has no place in Simpson's philosophy of symphonic form as a process of natural development impelled by the force of the musical ideas themselves. So 'composed accelerando', in this case, means something more than metric modulation - it also refers to a gradual increase in momentum caused by a corresponding increase in musical activity.

This is clearly seen at Fig.82 where the tempo changes from the 'Vivace', introduced at Fig.73, to 'Presto' but with the relationship of the crotchet pulse unchanged. What actually speeds up is the harmonic movement - the accelerando is literally 'composed'.

TEMPO 1 (Opening to 5th bar of Fig.51)

The concept of a constantly evolving structure applies to the treatment of melodic material as well as to the overall form. In the composer's words, "[The movement] all comes out of the first theme, changed as the pace changes".[6]. This theme, given to the first violins at the opening, is an intense, arching line rising through a crescendo then falling through a diminuendo: Ex.22.



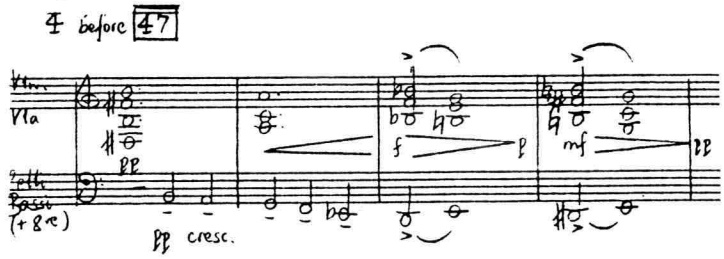
This melody carries a variety of harmonic implications and the main source of its ambiguity is the way it approaches its highest note (the C in b.3) through a flat note (Bb) and quits it through a sharp one - the reverse of the way a tonal melody usually behaves.[7]. The entry of the Bb in the second bar seems to confirm a modal Bb tonality at the opening (Bb approached via a flattened 7th) but, by the third bar, C emerges the strongest tonal contender (due to its placing at the top of the phrase and its dynamic emphasis) - again approached through a flattened 7th. The descent in the third and fourth bars, implies E before Bb major is strongly suggested in the first two minim beats of the fifth bar - only to be undermined by a flattened 7th in the bass on the third beat. Now Eb is implied and this is confirmed by the entry of the second violins in the sixth bar.

So, to sum up, a possible F minor opening (the minor third at the very start) approaches a modal Bb (second bar, last beat) which, in turn, proves to be an approach to C. Descent through a sharpened 7th implies E before the music settles back to Bb. The two important points to note are: 1) the continuation of the Bb/C conflict from the first movement; and 2) the importance of the flattened 7th - also apparent in the first movement. This variety of possibilities is, of course, essential to any musical structure if the opening is to be used as the basis of a gradually evolving argument.

Intervallically, the phrase is tightly compact - the rising minor third and major second of the opening are reversed (a semitone higher) in the third bar and the whole phrase consists entirely of minor thirds, and major and minor seconds.

An answering phrase on the second violins (after rising through an extra minor third in the sixth and seventh bars) is exactly similar to the opening, but its transposition to a major ninth lower than the original results in its reaching an apex on Bb, not C (again the Bb/C relationship is evident).

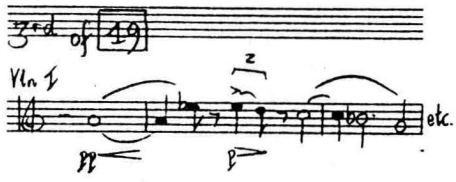
The early stages of this movement alternate imitative treatment of Ex.22 with solemnly beautiful chordal passages (anticipated in bar 5). The four bars before Fig.47 are characteristic - consisting mainly of simple triads in first inversion. Attention was drawn earlier to the particularly 'Beethovenian' sound of these first inversion chords as used at Fig.13 of the first movement - the same is true in this passage: Ex.23.



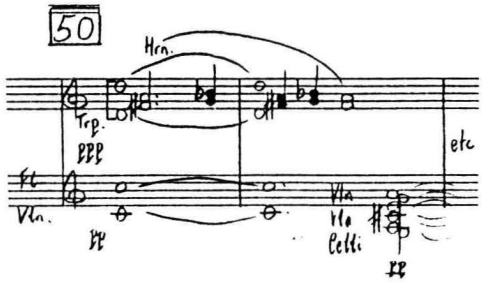
Even in this calm, serene music the Bb/C conflict is still in evidence: the first two bars of this example move towards a Bb major chord but the phrase ends on a C major chord. Both chords are somewhat unstable because they are in first inversion, thus offsetting any cadential feeling they might have.

A new development of the first theme now begins (the bar after Fig.47) with six bars of double canon - first and second violins / violas and cellos, the texture constantly punctuated by an accented semitonal figure which first appeared in bar three (marked 'z'). This idea fulfils a similar function to 'x' in the first movement, dominating the music and subtly changing identity as the music proceeds. The counterpoint thins out to three parts (second bar of Fig.48) then essentially to two parts (three before Fig.49) and, throughout, the music is suffused with a drowsy sense of unreality - surely a reflection of that moment between sleeping and waking when time and space can seem to contract or expand at will.

The next chordal passage (clarinets and muted horns at Fig.49) consists of chords of C major (first inversion), F# minor, C major (first inversion), F# major and their tritonal relationship influences the next contrapuntal development of Ex.22 at three after Fig.49. Here, instead of approaching the top of the phrase by two steps of a minor third, as the second violins did in the first two bars of Fig.45, the first violins leap a tritone to the top of the phrase and 'z': Ex.24.



This idea is taken up in the fifth bar of Fig.49 by the oboe and expanded into an eloquent solo - the first melodic line for a wind instrument in a movement so far dominated by the strings. The soft chord sustained on the second beat of Fig.50 (flute, horns, trumpets, trombone and violas) derives from the use of the flattened 7th mentioned earlier: Ex.25.



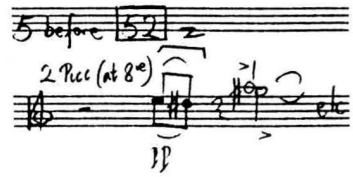
This chord would normally be termed a third inversion dominant 7th in G (that is to say D maj. plus a 7th), but the superimposition in the next bar of the same chord, but a fourth lower, completely undermines any perception we may have had that the first one was a dominant. Such ambiguity is essential to this passage (as, indeed, it is to the whole movement) and a further overlapping of what I prefer to term 'chords of the flattened 7th' rather than dominant 7ths (because they do not behave like dominants) occurs in the third bar of Fig.51 - Ab7 on wind joined by C7 on upper strings.

A rocking semitonal idea in minor thirds given to the horns in Ex.25 is taken up by second violins (flutes 2 and 3 doubling an octave lower) in the fourth bar of Fig.51, but they have now been

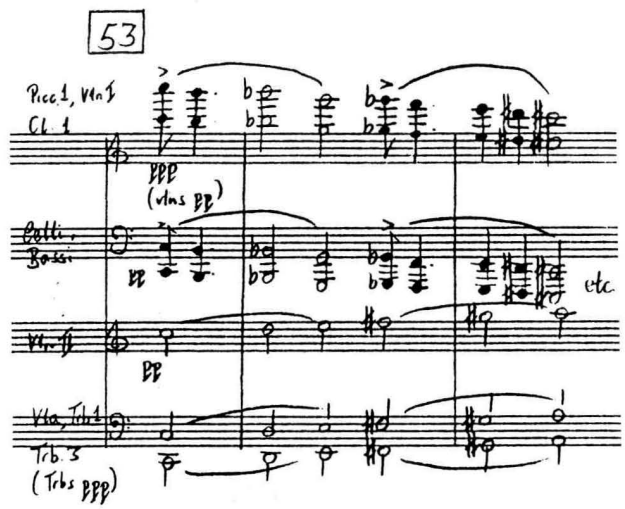
speeded up to become crotchet triplets and these in turn become the basis of a new, faster tempo in the next bar, (the relationship is marked in the score as ♩. = ♩ del prec.).

TEMPO 2 (5th bar of Fig.51 to 8th bar of Fig.56)

The first bassoon takes up a shortened version of the opening violin theme - this time starting on C and instigating imitative entries of the theme on strings, beginning successively on B, F, G, E, C#, Bb (the last four entries are then repeated and respaced). The texture is punctuated by successive entries of the four pairs of woodwinds, each entry consisting of a descending quaver semitone followed by an accented, and sustained, semitonal clash - clearly a derivation of 'z': Ex.26.



The increased speed of the accented woodwind entries produces the distinct sensation of something gradually stirring into life - an impression totally in accordance with the music's programmatic associations. The cadential figures quoted in Ex.23 are further developed, first on the strings in the four bars before Fig.53 (a simplified version), then, at Fig.54, on the trumpets and trombones - this latter passage combining 'z' (trumpets) with the tritonal progression from Fig.49. Between them (Fig.53) comes an unusual, very Simpsonian(!) piece of octave doubling: Ex.27.

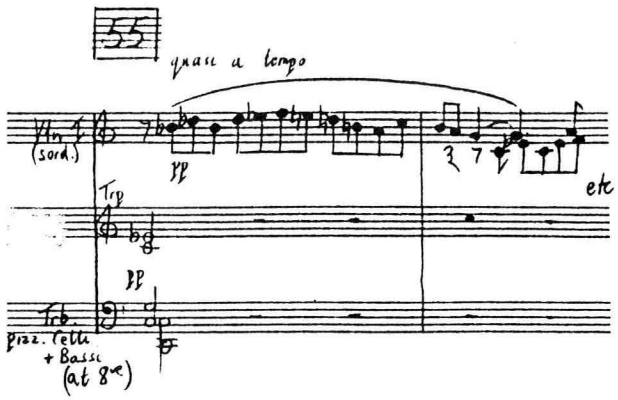


This passage is simply a two-part texture derived from the scalic ideas in the second half of the opening melody and presented both in the original descending shape and, simultaneously, in a freely inverted form. However, the fact that the lines are doubled at four and three octaves respectively and that they interconnect creates the illusion of greater textural density than is actually the case.

In fact, contrary motion was partially anticipated in the seven bars before Fig.52, with the overlapping entries of the opening melody, and it is further exploited from the fourth of Fig.53 to Fig.54 (the brass entry already mentioned). This is basically a three-part texture with octave doublings and each of the scalic phrases consists of four notes in the rhythmic pattern ♪♪♪♪. It is so disguised that one of the voices is always starting a new phrase on each beat.

The brass entry at Fig.54 is marked 'Poco rit' (such a rubato is fairly rare in Simpson's music) and this recurs when they re-enter with a further development of the tritonal harmonic idea at two before Fig.55 (this time joined by pizzicato cellos and basses playing a rising scalic figure). Between these entries comes a further development of the three-part string/woodwind texture - now with the doubling slightly extended by the addition of the three piccolos from five bars before Fig.55.

The cadential passage given to the trumpets and trombone in the two bars before Fig.55 comes to rest on a C minor chord at Fig.55 itself and this brief but definite confirmation of the C tonality, plus the slight rubato which leads up to it, lends the passage a strong feeling of one large-scale formal division coming to a close. This feeling is confirmed by the music which immediately follows. With the C minor brass chord still sustained, the first violins begin a section dominated by continuous quaver movement with a speeded up version of Ex.22: Ex.28.

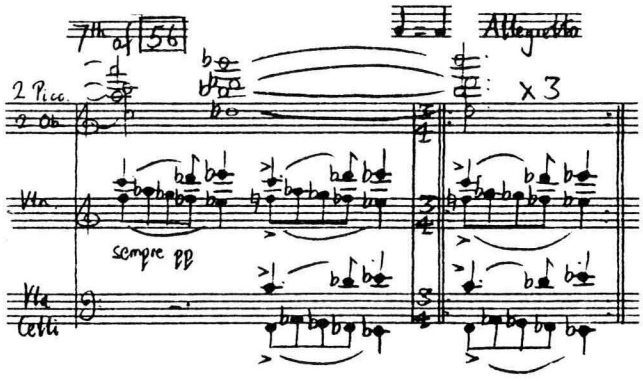


The tonal contention here is very clear - a C minor cadence is contradicted by the entry of the first violins in Bb minor with a line which tends towards C (the imitative entry of the second violins). The speeding up of Ex.22 and the removal of any rhythmic stress has resulted in harmonic implications entirely different from those experienced at the start of the movement - the accelerando is indeed being 'composed'.

Ex.28 is the basis of a three-part (initially) imitative texture between violins I/II and celli (beginning, respectively, on Bb, C and D) and again punctuated by accented wind entries similar to those heard at five bars before Fig.52 (Ex.26). The marking, 'quasi a tempo' at Fig.55 implies that the passage should begin slightly hesitantly and the speed gradually established through the seven bars of 'pochettino mosso' from Fig.56.

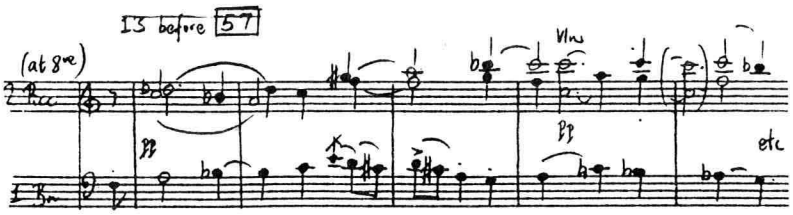
TEMPO 3 (8th bar of Fig.56 to Fig.62)

This tempo change retains the same crotchet pulse but reduces the bar-length from 3/2 (six crotchets) to 3/4 transforming the music into a graceful one-in-a-bar Allegretto. The new pulse is established through a quietly insistent string phrase recalling some of the ostinato patterns to be found in Bruckner's scherzos: Ex.29.



The ostinato itself is derived from Ex.28 (and, by extension, from the opening idea), the rising three-note pattern on second violins and violas coming from the fourth, fifth and sixth notes of Ex.28 and the accompanying figure from the last five-notes of the first violin phrase in the same example. Tonally, the music appears to be in F but the sustained Db and Bb on piccolos and oboes confirms the F as a dominant of Bb minor. However, when the sustained notes cease, after three bars of the Allegretto, the music moves more definitely into F major/minor as the opening theme takes on a

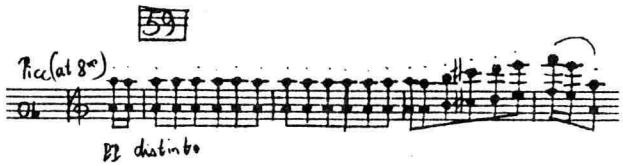
new guise, this time scored for solo bassoon and luminously accompanied by two piccolos: Ex.30.



A prominent addition to the opening theme is the grace note preceding fig.'z'. It becomes increasingly important from this point onwards and its appearance on the piccolo seven before Fig.57 and at various subsequent points, on the same instrument, irresistably evokes bird-song. But this bird's evolution can be clearly traced: the grace-note figure is entirely germane to the movement, derived as it is from Ex.22.

The complementary chordal material of Ex.23 has not been abandoned either and a speeded-up version of the tritonal idea from two before Fig.47 is heard on the strings at Fig.57, and on wind at Fig.58. In between, the clarinet and violas develop the bassoon melody of Ex.30 accompanied by a descending chromatic bass whose provenance can be found in the ascending chromatic line of the second to fourth bars of Fig.56.

A further transformation of Ex.22 appears on the first violins in the third bar of Fig.58. This particular development exploits the opening of the original melody and, by the end of the fourth bar of Fig.58. It is dominated by a rocking minor third in even quavers which gradually ascends chromatically. Against this, further contrapuntal development of Ex.22 occurs in the brass and is combined (at Fig.59) with a new staccato figure introduced by piccolo and oboe: Ex.31.

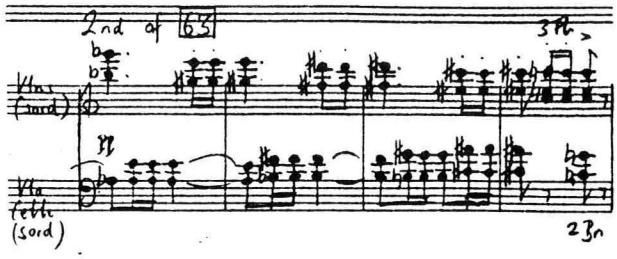


This idea is important: it provides additional rhythmic impetus by introducing a semiquaver 'tag' at the beginning and end of the phrase. Additionally, the repeated-note quavers (combined with the violin quavers) serve to increase the pace of the music from crotchet movement to more or less continuous quaver movement. The figure is also subtly related to Ex.22 by its shape (the rising quavers of the third bar of Fig.59 relating to the upward motion of the melody's opening). The concluding semiquaver figure relates to 'z' and encompasses the overall interval through which Ex.22 descends between the beginning of bar 3 (C) and the beginning of bar 4 (E). Between Figs.59 and 62, Ex.31 becomes the basis of continuous imitation and, against this soft but rapid music, a slower version of Ex.22 is heard (almost as slow as the very opening statement): first on trombones (Fig.60), then on second flute, first oboe and first horn.

TEMPO 4 (Fig. 62 to Fig 67)

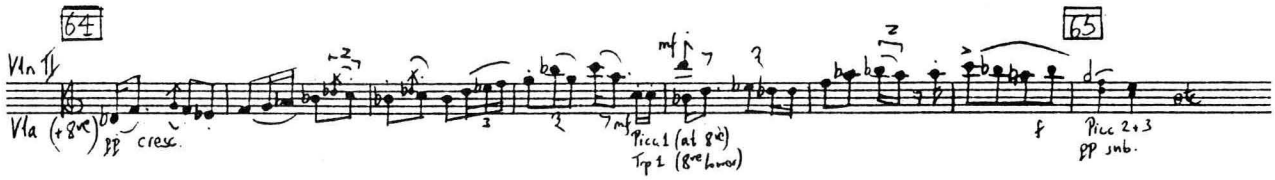
Although not strictly a tempo change at all, the speed now increases still further. With the crotchet relationship unchanged, the time signature is reduced from 3/4 to 2/4. Again there are two important elements in this passage: a series of entries at two-bar intervals based on a simplified version of Ex.22, each occuring a tone lower than the previous one - E (picc.), D (cl.1), C (ob.1), Bb (bn.) - and a series of entries of a single note on each crotchet beat preceded by the repeated semiquaver pattern from Fig.59 (Ex.31). These entries are also divided into two-bar groups in the following way: the first two bars of Fig.62 comprise the notes D, E, C, D; the second two bars, D, C, Bb, C; the third, C, Bb, Ab, Bb; and the fourth, Bb, Ab, Bb, Gb. So each two-bar group involves the note on which the complementary woodwind entry begins and the two whole tones below that note. The general tendency for imitative entries to occur at the interval of the major second has already been seen at Fig.55 (both in the string parts and in the woodwind entries).

In the second bar of Fig.63 the strings divide into two groups: violins I&II and violas & cellos, each group playing alternately major and minor sixths to the same repeated semiquaver pattern. The two groups play on alternate beats of the bar, the violins descending and the violas and cellos rising: Ex.32.



They come together to form a chord of A# minor in first inversion on the last quaver beat of two before Fig.64 and on the first beat of the next bar. This is, of course, an enharmonic Bb minor chord and it is immediately answered by flutes and bassoons with a C major chord - the tonal contention remains.

Against a chromatically descending bass line (previously encountered at the third bar of Fig.57) the second violins and violas have a complementary rising line which, when developed at the fifth bar of Fig.64 (piccolo and muted trumpet), proves to be a further transformation of the opening melody: Ex.33.

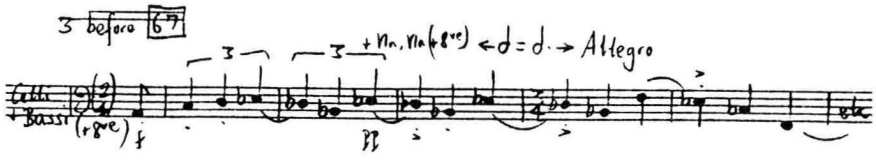


The passage culminates, at Fig.65, in a 4/2-3/1 suspension in C major - in contrast with the Db major/Bb minor implications of the melody at Fig.64 and their now follows another gradually built up twelve-note chord similar to the ones encountered in the first movement. The chord is constructed as follows: each instrument sustains a note, preceded by the semiquaver 'tag' mentioned at Fig.59, and starting from the G (picc. & trp. at Fig.65) the chord is built up chromatically with octave displacements until the complete chord is formed. The rate at which this happens is extremely rapid: one note/voice per crotchet beat. When all twelve notes are sustained (seventh of Fig.65) the chord is then gradually dismantled by the reverse process. When, during the building up of this chord, the point of greatest density is approached (sixth and seventh bars of Fig.65) a dramatic new element is added - cellos and basses with a further transformation of Ex.22 in crotchet triplets which cut across the 2/4 pulse. The phrase is based on the rising three-note figure of Ex.22 and even though it is not very loud it creates a further disturbance in a passage whose sudden harmonic density has already been something of a surprise.

From Figs.66 to 67 two further developments of Ex.33 alternate with two appearances of the triplet idea on cellos and basses. These latter begin on F# and A respectively and their starting note is, in both cases, the root of a soft accompanying chord sustained on woodwind and brass - each preceded by the semiquaver rhythm from Ex.31 and by a quasi-cadential figure on clarinets and bassoons (a major second clash 'resolving' upwards to a minor third). Given the nature of the triplet theme, and its upward transposition on each appearance, it is inevitable that the ear detects a sense of the tonality being pulled gradually upwards during this section and, by the time the new tempo is reached at Fig.67, the tonal centre has moved towards Bb minor.

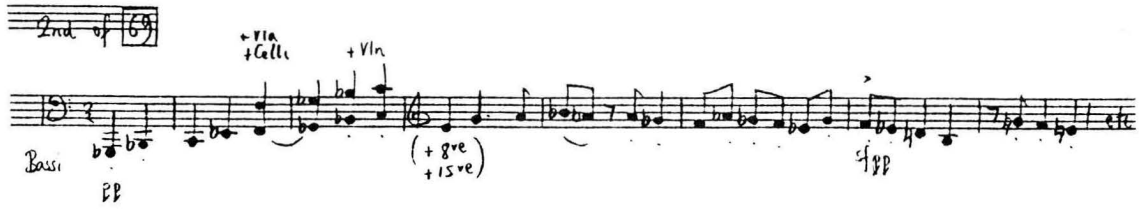
TEMPO 5 (Fig.67 to Fig.73)

Now the significance of the triplet interjections is felt as they become the crotchet basis of the new 3/4 pulse. The relationship of the bar lengths remains the same (𝅗𝅥. of the new 3/4 tempo = 𝅗𝅥 of the old 2/4) but the number of beats per bar increases. This Allegro is, of course, the second one-in-a-bar scherzo tempo of the movement - the first having occurred just after Fig.56 - but this one is more akin to the 'Beethovenian' scherzos of Simpson's later works like the Fourth and Ninth Symphonies and the Twelfth String Quartet. Its motivic starting point is the inversion of the opening intervals of the movement, as heard in bar 3 of Ex.22: Ex.34.



When the music is moving with such rapidity one tends to feel the pulse in phrases of several bars. This is true of the passage from Fig.68 onwards where the ascending figure on the violas and oboes (derived from the woodwind 'cadential' idea in the fifth bar of Fig.66) is felt as a five-bar phrase. The continued ascent (on violins, violas and cellos) from the sixth of Fig.68 is phrased according to the 'ffpp' accents working out (in numbers of bars) as 4+3+2+1, adding to the sense of gradual acceleration and of suppressed excitement.

The imitative piccolo writing from the fourth bar of Fig.69, with each instrument sustaining a different beat of the bar (reminiscent of a passage in Simpson's First Symphony: bar 544 onwards) is taken up by the strings at Fig.70 in a chromatically rising sequence. The material played by the strings from Fig.69 is a metamorphosis of the opening melody: now the intervals have been changed so that the whole melody has been completely, though organically, transformed. What remains, and makes the relationship identifiable, is its arching shape - though now the melody moves flatwards, tonally, on descent rather than vice versa. The result is that C major and Bb minor feel to be the strongest tonal poles between which this melody is pulled: Ex.35.



At this point it is worth remembering just how much, and how imperceptibly, the music has speeded up from its remote, almost static opening. From here onwards its great swiftness, together with the lack of conventional points of formal reference make it particularly difficult to analyse in words. References to earlier material are fleetingly suggested rather than stated - a case in point being the chords in the four bars before Fig.70. The sensitive listener may well hear them as a development of the 'cadential' figures traced earlier (two bars before Fig.47 to Fig.58, via Fig.54 etc.). But, in substance, they do not relate to what has gone before in any definite way.

The music is moving too rapidly for any clear tonal centre to emerge, so when a single note is sustained the ear tends to fix upon that as a temporary tonal anchor. This is certainly true of the fourth bar of Fig.70 where, against the chromatically rising string development of the piccolo's imitative idea (heard at the fifth bar of Fig.69), the bassoons and contrabassoon obstreperously disturb the delicate texture with a sustained low Bb. This provokes a shrill cry from the piccolo and clarinet which, combined with the low Bb still rumbling ominously, invests the prevailing mood with a new and volatile quality.

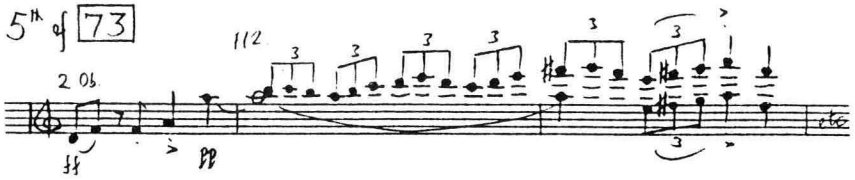
The low Bb is answered by the dominant (in the extreme bass of the tuba at five before Fig.71) and the passage appears to disintegrate in a series of exchanges between the pairs of woodwinds concluding with two chirping piccolos (the programmatic reference to birdsong is, again, inescapable). Two important ideas are generated by this passage: first, the repeated quavers on the

strings at Fig.72 are punctuated at the start of every other bar by a triplet figure - marked 'ffpp' and rising through a perfect fourth - which is shortly to prove significant. The second feature is the tendency, from Fig.72 onwards, for the piccolos to stress a hemiola pattern within a two bar phrase - for example, the grace notes in the third bar of Fig.72 on the first and third beats of the bar and the second beat of the next bar. This emphasis proves to be transitional to Fig.73 and the next tempo. Here the crotchet relationship remains the same but the tempo changes from 3/4 to 2/2 - the piccolo accents were a preparation for this.

TEMPO 6 (Fig.73 to Fig 82)

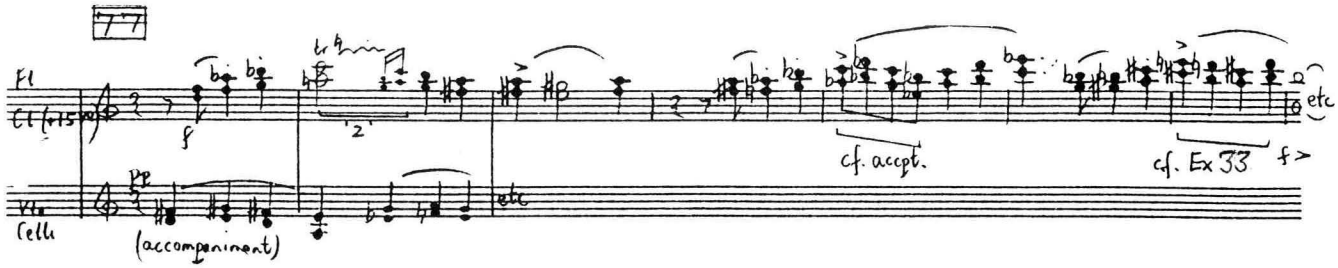
Ostinato has proved to be an increasingly significant feature of the preceding section and this trend is now continued with second violins and violas providing a quasi-modal accompaniment in thirds and fifths to a regular pulse set by bassoons on the first and third beats of each bar and answered on the offbeats by the first violins incorporating the triplet 'gruppetto' first heard twelve bars earlier.

The passage initially implies Ab, but the raucous intervention of two oboes insisting on D minor/major (fortissimo in the fifth bar of Fig.73) serves to contradict this. Their line is based on the beginning of Ex.22, now accompanied by rapid triplets on the second flute - derived from the triplet 'gruppetto' at the third bar of Fig.72: Ex.36.

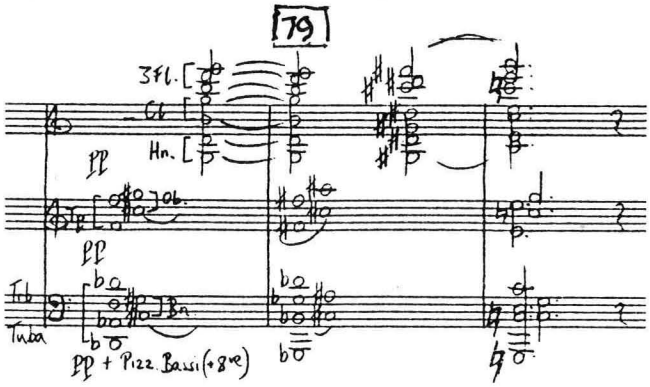


The more or less constant accompanying figuration tends to rise chromatically throughout this passage until Fig.78 and the result is a sense of a gradually rising tonal centre. The various incursions of melodies based on Ex.36 (fourth of Fig.74, Fig.77, Fig.78) take as their starting point the note a tritone away from the bass line.

The development of Ex.36 reaches a definitive melodic statement at Fig.77 with a theme (in thirds - these have grown out of the accompaniment on violas and cellos) scored for flutes and clarinets and including a reference to an earlier development of the opening melody given in the last two bars of Ex.33: Ex.37.



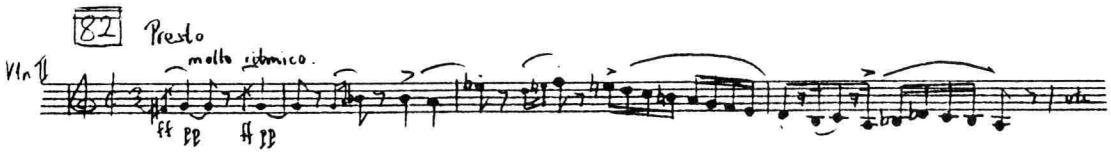
After this theme has been taken up by oboes and bassoons, a cadential figure is heard 'pp' in the wind and brass - a V-I progression in Gb, with 'added notes' on flutes, clarinets and 2nd and 3rd horns, subsequently slipping to a 2nd inversion chord of C major (a further development of the tritonal harmonic progression from two before Fig.47): Ex.38.



The version of Ex.37 which follows (violas and cellos) is an extension of the original and, by Fig.80, it moves into triplet crotchets against the persistent exchange of 'gruppetti' on each crotchet beat. The cadential figure from Ex.38 is now developed into a series of V-I cadences which gradually move down by a semitone - C#, C natural, B (Cb), Bb. (The quiet but teeming activity of this passage, combined with the unusual pianissimo writing for full orchestra always reminds me of the 'Cortege' from Busoni's 'Doktor Faust' - a work Simpson greatly admires.)

TEMPO 7 (Fig 82 to end)

A crescendo through descending quavers (and based on 'z') leads into the final, fastest, tempo - Presto. Here the beat does not change, nor does the stress: it is the amount of activity within the (now 'alla breve') beat which increases. The steadily accumulating sense of suppressed energy is also emphasised by the 'molto ritmico' marking added to the melody first played by the second violins at Fig.82: Ex.39.



This is, in fact, yet another transformation of Ex.22 and it retains the arching shape of the original as well as the prominent minor third near the opening. Every element within it can be traced back to some point earlier in the movement: for instance, the tritone between the last beat of the second bar and the first of the following one relates to the rising tritone in the third and fourth bars of Fig.49 (which in turn relates to the brass cadence at Fig.49 itself) and the semiquaver descending scale in the third bar derives from the fifth and sixth bars of Fig.70. The accompaniment in violas and cellos comes from the accompaniment at Fig.73 and, once again, it provides a chromatically rising outline against which Ex.39 is treated imitatively (each of the first three entries is a major second higher than the last - reflecting a tendency previously noted).

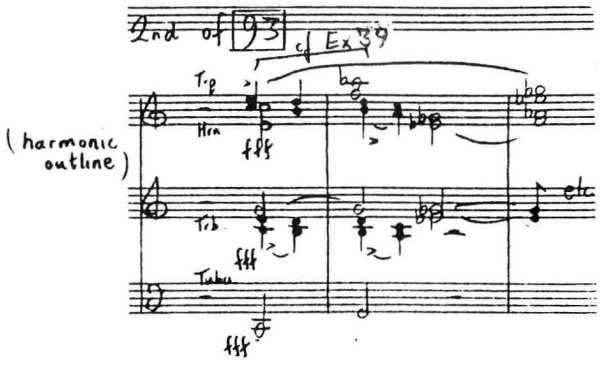
The three-note pattern from the second and third bars of Ex.39 becomes increasingly prominent during the ensuing passage. Fragments of Ex.39 are developed at great speed until, at the sixth bar of Fig.85 a wind chord of the dominant 7th in C provokes a subterranean 'ffpp' F minor chord two bars later. Its reinforcement with a low accented timpani roll seems strangely ominous and a 'resolution' onto a low Bb minor chord at Fig.87 leads one to suspect that the music may yet turn back to the Bb minor which ended the first movement so fiercely. With the benefit of hindsight, we may well feel that here the music is flexing its muscles in preparation for the sudden 'fff' outburst at the second bar of Fig.93. Indeed, despite the general 'pp' dynamic, the music from the 'Presto' onwards, with its strong offbeat accents and rhythmic drive, seems more formidable than anything heard so far in this movement.

From Figs.87 to 93 it is quite a straightforward process to trace all the material back to the first four bars of Fig.82 and, due to the speed at which the material is being explored, further elucidation of the motivic development is unnecessary. However, it is worth pointing out how the three-note figure from the second and third bars of Ex.39 becomes the basis of a complete phrase from Fig.88 and from Fig.90 - the latter scored for the bizarre combination of flute and tuba at three (and briefly four) octaves' distance.

The reappearance two bars before Fig.93 of the crotchet triplets from Fig.80 does not so much herald the huge tutti as give way to it, for the three and a half bars leading up to it are actually marked diminuendo.

With the first of four cymbal clashes - the only percussion contribution to the entire work - the entire orchestra suddenly erupts 'fff'. After almost fifteen minutes of quiet music, the impact is shattering . The very opening of the outburst takes C as its tonal centre (with a I-V progression in the bass). The

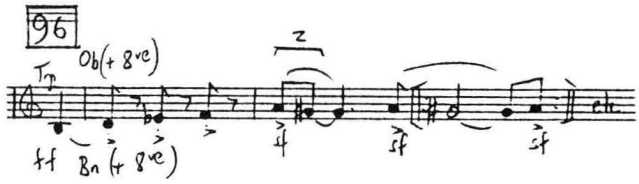
prominent trumpet line is based upon the three-note motif in Ex.39 and, like much of the writing in this section and elsewhere, it is in thirds. Simpson is fond of presenting a diatonic chord in such a way that the fifth is not particularly prominent (and sometimes entirely absent) thereby destabilising it. In this case, the fifth, though present, appears only on the first trombone: Ex.40.



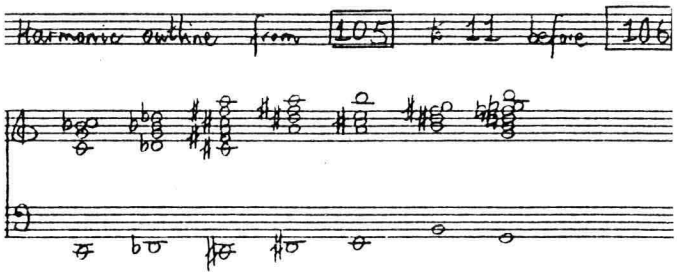
A similar outburst occurs at Fib.94, this time with the tonal centre a semitone higher (Db). Two bars before that, the furious triplets on the strings provide the basis of much of the activity that is to follow - they are a development of the triplets heard six bars after Fig.73 (see Ex.36).

In common with much of the movement, tonal centres, whilst undeniably present, are hard to pin down. Most of the harmony is basically diatonic, but chords which do not always have strong tonal relationships to each other are juxtaposed at such a speed as to defeat any attempt to find a fixed tonal point. For example, the seven bars before Fig.95 contain the following sustained chords (in order of appearance): C major, A major, Eb major, C# minor, Bb major, E major, D minor. This is excluding the grace note figures which themselves may imply a tonal centre: e.g. in the sixth bar before Fig.95 strings and woodwind imply Bb minor between a C major and an A major chord. Simpson is using the resources of tonality here in a new and exciting way and the effect, far from seeming keyless, is one of fierce tonal contention. Coming as it does towards the end of a work driven by tonal conflict the effect is exhilarating - the sensation of moving at great speed becomes almost tangible.

At Fig.95 the music seizes on Eb as a tonal centre, strings and flutes continuing their furious triplets against fortissimo Eb's on trumpets, trombones, contrabassoon, basses and timpani. These are of increasing frequency until an ostinato rhythm is established on timpani, contrabassoon and basses: 𝄆 𝅗𝅥 𝅗𝅥 𝅗𝅥 𝅗𝅥 𝅗𝅥 𝅗𝅥 𝅗𝅥 𝄇 . A time change to 3/4 initiates another development of Ex.22 in the trumpets, oboes and bassoons: Ex.41.



In this form, 'z' is added to the continuing timpani ostinato to propel the music forward and Ex.41 is taken up imitatively by other groups of woodwind and brass. A temporary cessation of the ostinato at Fig.97 leads to a fragmented theme played 'ff' and 'molto secco' by unison woodwind and horns (against a continuous stream of string triplets) which is based on an inversion of the opening three pitches of the movement. This leads, at the second bar of Fig.100 to a further series of ostinati - antiphonal exchanges between sections of the orchestra with the timpani taking a prominent role - tracing a series of rising tonal centres: C, Db, D, E, F#, G#, Bb, C. This process, with constant alterations, is repeated three times until a massive C major chord with flattened 7th and the major third omitted is reached at Fig.105. It brings about a series of seven chords whose formation is dictated not by conventional tonal harmony but by the stepwise movement of the part-writing and in particular by the movement of the bass-line: Ex.42.



Between the sixth and seventh chords the G and B are retained and the other two parts resolve chromatically downwards onto an unequivocal dominant 7th chord in C major. This is the moment to which the entire symphony has been leading: with a huge fortissimo crash, the structural and tonal tensions are discharged. The fastest tempo has been reached, but now the pulse is suspended. Is the music running or standing still? Or is it doing both?

As the sustained dominant 7th dies away, staccato Bb's are softly repeated by trombones and the bass-line moves to a sustained Bb over which a solo clarinet, in long notes, recalls the opening theme in its original version. The composer says "...the C tonality ...eventually wins, turning Bb into a mere Mixolydian 7th at the climax - as classical composers often turned to the subdominant near the end, so I have used the flat 7th ambiguously - is it tipping the music in the direction of F harmony that could be either the dominant of Bb or the subdominant of C, or is it in this case only a flat 7th? The latter, of course, but its old associations are not forgotten."[8]

The clarinet melody finishes on the major third of C major and the bass line at last slips to the tonic C. A hushed C major chord on violins and violas fades out leaving only the low hum of the open C string of cellos and basses. In the score one can see the first violins moving upwards - G, A, Bb (this last note a mere quaver at the end of the phrase) - as they fade away. When one listens, it is not quite so obvious. Was that last, barely audible note, with its profound tonal ramifications, imaginary or not? Either way, the boiling activity of the world has receded into the distance and we are left where we were at the beginning of the symphony: in outer space, contemplating something still and unfathomable. Hugh Ottaway says that Simpson describes this ending in terms of "wonder", "awe" and "mystery". It is certainly a moving and deeply poetic conclusion and a satisfying end to the first phase of Simpson's development as a symphonist.

Notes

1. Ottaway, Hugh: Notes on Simpson No.3 issued with record UNS 225 (1970)
2. Letter to author.
3. Another striking example of such an approach is Tippett's use in the second movement of his Third Symphony of the famous dissonant passage beginning the finale of Beethoven's Ninth.
4. TONIC Vol.3, No.1
5. Note on Symphony No.3 (see note 1)
6. Letter to author.
7. Although such considerations may be irrelevant to many contemporary composers, they are, for Simpson, very real. Indeed he has pointed out an exactly similar situation in the opening phrase of the third movement of his Quartet No.10.
8. Letter to author.

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