

TONIC

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EDITORIAL

It has been a very long time until the publication of the current issue of *Tonic*. This does not mean, however, that in the past years since *Tonic* 23, nothing has happened on the Simpson front, well in advance to the twentieth anniversary of Robert Simpson's death in 2017.

2013 was a year of particular importance, not only through the unveiling of the Blue Plaque at Robert Simpson's birthplace in Leamington Spa, but also because it was marked by two major book publications. It may be interesting for readers to find, compiled in this issue, several of the reviews that have been published on both of these books.¹ WorldCat® lists the number of copies in international University libraries attached to this system, and in both cases the worldwide coverage is impressive. Let us now hope that the books will not remain in the shelves unused. That this appears not to be the case is indicated by two papers that were given on 14 September 2016 at the International Conference of the Gesellschaft für Musikforschung in Mainz, which the present writer was able to attend. Interestingly, both papers dealt with Robert Simpson as a writer on music, not as a composer; as the conference report is imminent, the authors (Professor Daniel M. Grimley from Oxford University and Florian Schuck MA from Halle University) sadly were unable to submit their papers for publication in *Tonic*.

Apart from scholarly attention paid to Robert Simpson, happily, several recording companies have returned to the music, both in first recordings and releases from the archive. Not the most obvious company, however, i.e. Hyperion, is to be mentioned, which would have some four or five CDs to go in order to offer a complete edition of all of Robert Simpson's music, but some others. It is good to hear that several of Robert Simpson's Hyperion CDs are sold out, but all of them are available on download or special archive hard-copy from <http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/c.asp?c=C554>.

The first new CD to be mentioned, published in November 2014, features the first recording of the Cello Concerto (Lyrita SRCD.344), coupled with Cello Concertos by John Joubert and Christopher Wright. Raphael Wallfisch (John McCabe's successor as President of the British Music Society), who commissioned and gave the work in its first performance on 17 May 1992 in Malvern, under the direction of Vernon Handley. Stephen Greenbank writes, on <http://www.musicweb-international.com/>, on the the Simpson work, which is in form of a set of Introduction and eleven variations: "As well as exhibiting some skilful cello writing, it's a masterstroke of scoring, with lightness of texture and portrayal of colour being a distinctive feature, offering the soloist a platform for virtuos-

¹ *Robert Simpson: Composer – Essays, Interviews, Recollections*, ed. by Jürgen Schaarwächter, Hildesheim/Zurich/New York: Georg Olms, May 2013. – Donald Macauley, *The Power of Robert Simpson: A biography*, Milton Keynes: Xlibris Corporation, June 2013.

ity. Yet the rhetoric is never empty, but explores a contrasting range of emotion. Variation 8 is scored for orchestra alone and is characterized by energy and bombast. Out of this maelstrom the cello emerges (Var. 9) with a serene melody set against a colourful and lightly-textured backdrop. The effect is spellbinding. At the end the music dies away to nothing. [...] Hoddinott Hall proves an ideal acoustic to showcase the incandescent playing of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. William Boughton elicits sumptuous sound from his players, illuminating the bounteous wealth of these lavish scores with accomplishment. Wallfisch gives persuasive and authoritative accounts, drawing a rich burnished tone from his cello, which is rightly positioned on the left-hand side, so one can gain a concert-hall perspective." Paul Conway, who contributed the text on the concertos in *Robert Simpson: Composer*, supplied the informative liner notes.

The second CD to appear was, in March 2015, a SOMM production of world premiere recordings which was to some extent financially supported by the Robert Simpson Society (although this is not indicated in the CD booklet or on the company website). The CD (SOMMCD 145) is, as we shall see below, closely connected to the Robert Simpson Society as it combines Elgar's String Quartet in E minor, Op. 83, and Malcolm Arnold's Second String Quartet (the latter now called Sonata for Strings), both arranged for string orchestra by David Matthews, and the premiere recording of Simpson's *Allegro deciso* for string orchestra of 1954, a reworking from the Third String Quartet, which had been premiered on 4 December 1958 by the Swiss Radio of Beromünser under Stanley Pope. *BBC Music Magazine's* review gave a mouth-watering statement: "Like the full English breakfast, the full string orchestra has a distinctive character all its own. Eat this English breakfast with confidence." And Andrew Achenbach writes on the *Allegro deciso* in *Gramophone*: "music of tremendous eloquence, awesome rigour and kinetic force. Here, as elsewhere, Ben Palmer elicits an agreeably spruce and consistently alert response from the 16 string players of the Orchestra of St Paul's, while Ben Connellan's sound is pleasingly transparent and airy to match. All told, a stimulating and laudable release." No-one by the recording date March 2014 could have been aware of the upcoming election of David Matthews as our new President, but there is no doubt that this CD is another must-have for Robert Simpson Society members.

The third company which must not be forgotten is Classical Recordings Quarterly Editions (<http://crqeditions.co.uk/>) who have now released two Robert Simpson recordings: Lewis Foreman referred us to CRQ CD268: *A Tribute to Robert Simpson*, which was released in 2016. The CD contains the first broadcast performance of Havergal Brian's *Sinfonia tragica* on 21 September 1966, produced by Robert Simpson; the Orchestra of the Covent Garden Ballet and Opera Company was conducted by Douglas Robinson. The item which interests us most, however, is Beethoven's *Eroica*, performed by an Orchestra da Camera under Robert Simpson, in a BBC broadcast of a performance given at St. Paul's Church, Birmingham on 14 January 1968. The recording, which has long rested in the Robert Simpson Society Archive and which I revived as a special present on occasion of the Leamington event in 2013, so is now available officially, at a modest price and offering most interesting insights into Simpson's view of Beethoven.

In April 2017, so most recently indeed, another Simpson release has been published, containing, in a two-CD set titled *Sir Charles Groves at the Proms, 1967* (CRQ CD290-291), the important performance of Simpson's Third Symphony from the London Proms of 21 August 1967. Other items featured in the set are by Haydn, Walton, Vaughan Williams and Delius.

As lack of new material for this issue *Tonic* was the main, or rather sole reason for its long delay, all the more strongly I have to apologize to Lionel Pike for the long overdue corrections to his paper published in *Tonic* 23. Alas, a considerable number of sharps had turned into flats in the printed version of his text, and in order to improve on this matter fully we offer, as a kind of bonus, this text again in full, relegating its publication in *Tonic* 23 to the readers' oblivion.

Now for personal matters. On 13 February 2015, our much-missed President Emeritus John McCabe CBE died, who had been giving his services to the Robert Simpson Society, as President, from 1997 to 2001 and again from 2009. We were all the more happy that he accepted the honorary position of President Emeritus, in April 2014. The BBC obituary² published the same day reads thus:

"Composer and pianist John McCabe has died at the age of 75. A gifted artist, he had composed 13 symphonies by the age of 11, and his recordings of Joseph Haydn's piano sonatas are considered definitive. His own compositions included orchestral and chamber music, and he was director of the London College of Music between 1983 and 1990. Confirming his death, publishers Novello and Company said he had 'passed away peacefully, after a long illness'.

Born in Lancashire in 1939, McCabe was badly burned as a child and was educated at home for eight years, giving him ample time to experiment with music. 'There was a lot of music in the house as I was growing up,' he told [BBC] M[usic] Magazine last year. 'My mother was a very good amateur violinist and there were records and printed music everywhere. I thought that if all these guys – Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert – can do it, then so can I!' However, he insisted, those early symphonies were 'absolute rubbish, and I have successfully destroyed most of them'.

He studied at the Royal Manchester College of Music (now the Royal Northern) and in Munich with German composer Harald Genzmer. In the 1960s, he was pianist-in-residence at Cardiff University, after which he successfully pursued a dual career as pianist and composer. He was prolific, producing a catalogue of more than 200 works in a wide array of forms and contexts, working on instruments from the recorder to the organ to the penny whistle.

His first internationally recognised work was the song cycle *Notturmi ed alba*, for soprano and orchestra. Based around four medieval Latin poems on the topic of night, *Gramophone* magazine called it 'an intoxicating creation, full of tingling atmosphere and slum-

² <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-31457464>

bering passion'. McCabe agreed it 'really opened doors' for his career, adding: 'It was ... taken up by all kinds of people like André Previn and Bernard Haitink - it brought me to a much bigger audience.'

Between 1974 and 1976, he recorded the entirety of the Haydn sonatas for Decca, and the discs have never gone out of print. He also delved into 20th Century works by Hindemith, Britten, Bax, Webern and others.

One of his most successful works was the ballet *Edward II*, created and choreographed by David Bintley and premiered by the Birmingham Royal Ballet, winning the 1998 Barclays Theatre Award. He also received acclaim for his *Haydn Variations*, written in 1983 to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Haydn's birth and initially performed by fellow pianist Philip Fowke. According to McCabe, Fowke believed the work 'was one of the most difficult pieces he has ever had to play'. 'He liked it very much and he played it wonderfully well,' the composer told *Seen and Heard* magazine - adding: 'This is going to sound very pretentious, I don't actually find it difficult. One or two bits are very difficult, but on the whole I don't think it's very difficult. And the reason I think that is because it's written for my hand, instinctively.'

Despite his dual careers, McCabe said he rarely composed at the piano, saying it was 'disruptive to my thought processes'. 'What I like to do when I'm composing is see the structure taking shape before me,' he told BBC Radio 3 last year. 'But if you're playing piano you can't do that - you're concentrating on playing the right notes ... hopefully. Another reason for it is, when I was doing the two activities concurrently, I found myself being much too heavily influenced as a composer by the works I was playing. If I was playing Copland, a few phrases of Copland would suddenly creep into my music.'

McCabe was appointed CBE by the Queen in 1985 for his services to British music. He was also given an honorary doctorate in music by Liverpool University and last year's Ivor Novello Award for classical music.

He continued to work until his death, despite a long battle with brain cancer, whose devastating effects were chronicled in an article by his wife Monica in a 2013 edition of *Musical Opinion*. She wrote how 'his courage and will-power... astonish me'.

McCabe's most recent work, *Christ's Nativity*, was commissioned by the Hallé Choir and premiered in Manchester in December 2014.

Paying tribute, McCabe's friend and colleague James Rushton said: 'We have lost a man of great wisdom, humour and integrity and a complete musician. My abiding memory of John will be his acceptance speech when receiving the classical music award at the Ivor [Novello awards] last year. It was quite extraordinary - self-deprecating, loyal to fellow composer colleagues, and immensely humorous - leaving everyone on their feet, cheering. That is as it should be.'"

I met John only once, at the unveiling ceremony and Annual General Meeting of the Simpson Society in Leamington Spa in May 2013. It was most sad when shortly after, on 5 June, he asked to be relieved from his position as President of the Robert Simpson Society. Those who have met him will never forget him.

Only one month later, on 28 March 2015, followed the demise of Ronald Stevenson, our long-standing vice-president. A shortened version of Martin Anderson's obituary appeared in *The Independent* on 30 March; here it is given in full by kind permission:

"Ronald Stevenson was one of the great composer-pianists, a musician in the manner of Liszt, Rachmaninov and, his own personal idol, Paderewski. He was one of the few pianists whose playing was so individual that you could tell who was performing with your eyes closed, and yet he turned his back on the glittering career he could have enjoyed so as to have the time to compose. And compose he did, producing an extraordinarily generous body of work: a number of large-scale orchestral works, much chamber music and literally hundreds of piano pieces and songs – 232 songs the last time I counted – and a huge body of transcriptions.

Stevenson is best known for the piece reputed to be the largest single-movement work in the piano literature, his *Passacaglia on DSCH*, which uses Shostakovich's musical initials to build up a monumental 80-minute structure. Improbably, there are no fewer than four recordings of it on the market, one of them (on the Altarus label) played by the composer himself.

It was no part of Stevenson's intention to write something that would get into the record books. In 1962 he sat down at the desk in the room he called the 'Den of Musiquity' in his sturdy stone house in the village of West Linton, in the Border Country south of Edinburgh, meaning to write a tribute piece to Shostakovich – and at the height of the Cold War, as Stevenson was then a Marxist, it was a gesture with political as well as musical resonance. He began a series of variations on DSCH (in German notation Shostakovich's monogram gives the four notes D, E flat, C and B) and found that the music kept flowing – rather as Bach built the 'Goldberg' Variations on a little lullaby and Beethoven his 'Diabelli' Variations on a cocky little waltz.

The richness of invention in the *Passacaglia on DSCH* reflected the generosity of Stevenson's own spirit and his instinctive humanism. His Marxism was born of his working-class background: he was born in Blackburn into a cotton-weaving family (with its origins in Kilmarnock), and his naturally anti-authoritarian stance saw British class-structure as inimical. He cited the memory of his father singing in front of the fireplace in his overalls as a major musical stimulus.

He stuck by his beliefs, too, enduring prison and directed agricultural labour in 1951–52 because, as a pacifist, he refused national service. But his views were not a matter of dogma: when in 1985 he spent several months as a visiting lecturer at Shanghai Conservatoire and encountered the effects of Marxism in practice, its arguments disappeared from his intellectual armoury. And he never let sometimes stark differences of opinion obstruct personal friendships.

Stevenson's first piano lessons, at age eight, were with a Miss Ethel Pratt in Blackburn, and he was soon able to accompany his father in Scots and Irish songs and operatic favourites. At 16 he studied with Dorothea Fraser May, a German-Jewish refugee, who after a year passed him on to Iso Elinson, who had himself been a student of Blumenfeld and Glazunov in Russia, thus siting Stevenson downstream in a major musical tradition.

It was from Elinson that Stevenson learned an essential aspect of his piano technique: to stroke, not hit, the keys, which gave him a unique command of the most subtle sonorities – some virtuoso pianists shout at you, but Stevenson could whisper.

His formal education concluded with his graduation, with special distinction, from the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester in 1948, and six months in Rome in 1955, studying orchestration with Guido Guerrini at the Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia.

A major turning point in Stevenson's life came in 1952, when he married his long-time girlfriend, Marjorie Spedding (in whose arms he was to die, 63 years later). In 1955 they settled in West Linton, Stevenson's base for the rest of his long life. For the next forty years, until a series of strokes in his mid-sixties put an end to his public performances, Stevenson made occasional sallies from there to concertise around the world, with appearances in Australia and across Europe and North America. And he spent two years, from 1963 to 1965, as Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Cape Town, where, unsurprisingly, he found the apartheid regime an affront to his conscience. (In a gesture of reconciliation, he wrote a short piano piece combining the liberation hymn *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* and the national anthem, *Die Stem*.)

Essentially, though, he sat at his desk and wrote music, lots of it. (The worklist I put together for a 2005 Toccata Press book on his music took me three years to compile and occupies an astonishing 78 pages.) But since he had no publisher, he made almost no money from it, the occasional commission aside. Times were naturally tough, and the Stevensons now had a family of three to support (who have all achieved distinction in their own right: Gerda is an actress, Gordon is a luthier and Savourna a clarsair, a performer on the clarsach, the Celtic harp). That threw the bread-winning onus on Marjorie, and her work as a district nurse kept them afloat. It was her sacrifice that allowed him to work as he did.

From his West Linton base Stevenson cultivated a circle of friends around the globe. Some, like the poet Hugh MacDiarmid, were near to hand, just over the rolling hills. But most were half a world away, and in those pre-Internet days Stevenson became a prodigious letter-writer, his calligraphic handwriting – always in india ink – making his letters as visually attractive as his exquisite music manuscripts.

Stevenson's voice, with its gentle Scottish burr, and his playing became frequent features in BBC broadcasts, on the Third Programme and its successor, Radio 3, not least because of his friendship with one of its senior producers, the composer Robert Simpson. One major series, presented and performed by Stevenson, was on the piano music of Busoni (on whom he was the leading authority), most of it unknown to a wider public. He wrote, too, and was a frequent contributor to *The Listener*.

An outsider himself, he had a natural affinity for other maverick composers, championing – in concert, on air and in print – such figures as Havergal Brian, Nathaniel Dett, John Foulds, Leopold Godowsky, Bernard Stevens (a personal friend and fellow Marxist) and countless others. Stevenson was one of the first to take the music of Percy Grainger seriously and, though they never met, they exchanged letters for the last three years of Grainger's life (as Toccata Press, I published their correspondence as *Comrades in Art* in 2010).

Although it was the Passacaglia on DSCH that made Stevenson's name (not least when in 1965 it was recorded for EMI by John Ogdon, for whom Stevenson was a close personal friend and something of a father figure), it is not really representative of Stevenson's music. True, there are four concertos, two for piano (first performed by the composer, of course), a violin concerto that was commissioned by Menuhin and a cello concerto, and a choral 'epic' *Ben Dorain*, which took decades to complete and was finally premiered in Glasgow in 2008, when the 80-year-old Stevenson was cheered to the roof in a display of national affection.

But Stevenson, the arch-internationalist who embraced 'World Music' in his own compositions long before the term became fashionable, was very conscious of being a Scottish composer, and so he preferred to write small piano pieces and songs that reflect the filigree detail of Celtic art rather than tackle the conflict-based sonata structures of mainland Europe. He did, eventually, write a symphony, the *Sinfonia Elegiaca* of 2010, but it is an orchestration of sections of the Passacaglia on DSCH, an additive, Celtic, form.

In the 19th century pianists like Liszt naturally transcribed the music of other composers so it could be played on the piano, a tradition which died out with the advent of recordings. Stevenson revived it, and something like a quarter of his output takes the form of piano transcriptions, all intended to emphasise the singing qualities of the piano, an aspect of contemporary performance he felt was undervalued.

For all the profundity of his intellect and the profusion of his imagination, Stevenson was the most natural and open of men. Visitors to West Linton were welcomed with a grin and a glass of whisky in front, in winter, of a roaring peat fire. In the early 1980s I used to head over there to bring in the New Year with him and remember one lubricated occasion when, helpless with laughter, neither of us could keep the other upright on the frost-covered ground. The warmth of that personality naturally informs the huge quantity of music he has left – and in the past few years musicians have finally begun to discover and perform it.“

I personally never met Ronald Stevenson, but when writing to him I experienced him to be an equally sincere champion of the music of fellow-composers as John McCabe, and in my special case of that of the late Alan Bush.

It was only after some time that we heard, in 2016, of the death of Miriam MacEwan, Robert Simpson's sister and another vice-president of the Robert Simpson Society. Donald Macauley has been so kind to write the following contribution for this very issue:

“I had met Bob's sister briefly a couple of times before beginning work on his biography, and remembered a small, brisk, dark-haired lady who ticked me off for smoking in Bob's car when I was being given a lift to the station following one of the Malvern concerts. Not the most auspicious beginning, and I was a little apprehensive when approaching her with a view to an interview about their early life. I need not have worried – she was friendly, co-operative and very enthusiastic about the project. Grey-haired by then, she was still lively mentally and physically, though somewhat plagued by arthritics. One of her passions was gardening, and she said that, if it came to the point when the condi-

tion prevented her doing this, she would not be too concerned about departing this earth. She was very hospitable, and a plate of sandwiches always awaited me on my visits to her home in Wigston Magna, near Leicester. She was immensely proud of her brother's achievement, and a mine of information about the early days, most of which found its way into the first few chapters of my book. I was a little surprised when, having sent her a copy of the published volume, I heard nothing for six months. Then a phone-call – almost her first words were 'What you must think of me?' It turned out that she had moved house without redirecting the post, and the book had only just reached her. She said, 'You've made an old woman very happy,' which greatly touched me.

I last saw her in February 2014 when, to celebrate her 90th birthday, her great-niece Naomi Reynolds and partner performed a modern dance routine while the Dante Quartet played Bob's Seventh String Quartet. She seemed as cheerful and lively as ever, and it was quite a shock when I heard of her death. For all that, she had a long and, I think, a happy life. I shall always be grateful for her support, and will remember her with fondness."

At the 2016 Annual General Meeting Lewis Foreman and John Pickard were elected new vice-presidents of the Robert Simpson Society. Lewis Foreman (born 1941) had strong connections to Robert Simpson and was in close contact with the composer not least through the latter's efforts on behalf of other British composers, notably Havergal Brian. Since the late 1960s he has remained a strong advocate of British music, not least through the now much-sought publications in his own Triad Press. During his long and distinguished career as a writer on music, has he not only written countless books (including the authoritative biography of Arnold Bax), articles and CD booklet liner notes, he has also frequently been instrumental in study days on British music and particularly behind the scenes a steady advocate for neglected or forgotten repertoire. He was awarded several fellowships, and in 2005 received an honorary PhD from Cardiff University. John Pickard (born 1963) studied music and composition at the University of Wales, with Welsh composer William Mathias, and later in The Netherlands with Louis Andriessen and in 1989 was awarded a PhD in composition from the University of Wales. Since 1993 he has taught at the University of Bristol, where he is Professor of Composition and Applied Musicology and was Head of Music for four years. He is meanwhile a composer of international acclaim and reputation, his music frequently been heard and several recording companies having issued a substantial amount of his works. He was editor of *Tonic* from 1991 to 1997 (nos. 4,1 to 8), so his close connection to Robert Simpson and the Robert Simpson Society is obvious.

Jürgen Schaarwächter

THE POWER OF ROBERT SIMPSON – ROBERT SIMPSON: COMPOSER
BOOK REVIEWS

The Power of Robert Simpson – A Biography. Donald Macauley Xlibris Publishing (hardback, 418 pages, illustrated, ISBN 978-1-47979-438-6, £26.00; also available in paperback, ISBN 978-1-47979-437-9).

‘A mass of platitudes and clichés’ was the reaction of A. H. Fox Strangways, music critic of *The Observer*, when Klemperer conducted Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony in London in February 1932. William McNaught in *The Musical Times* was no kinder, suggesting that the symphony was ‘not merely naïve, it is uneducated, badly conceived, badly worked out, badly orchestrated. In fact, it is not worth discussing.’¹

If attitudes have changed since then, it is to a large extent because, after the Second World War, a small band of musicians, who included Robert Simpson, Deryck Cooke and Hans Redlich, insisted against all the odds on the artistic worth of Bruckner’s music. They faced an uphill struggle, and being a Brucknerian in those days must have been like belonging to the Wagner-Verein in 1880s Vienna – a few enthusiasts holding out against a mixture of derision and indifference. No account of Bruckner reception in the UK can ignore Simpson’s contribution. The 1967 publication of *The Essence of Bruckner* followed 20 years of articles, broadcasts and lectures (and goodness knows how much private lobbying).

The child of serious-minded Salvation Army parents, Robert Simpson might have been cut out from birth for the role of man of opposition. Childhood religion did not survive his experiences in an ARP Mobile Surgical Unit in wartime London, when his duties included pulling dead bodies out of bombed buildings, but he remained a dedicated socialist and pacifist, a man of principle who resigned his post at the BBC – when he could have retired on a full pension a year later – in protest against what he felt was a lapse in standards. Although a significant figure in British musical life as writer and broadcaster, he saw himself first and foremost as a composer, and the primary focus of this book is on Simpson’s composing career.

A biography of this fascinating figure is naturally welcome. It is self-produced by enthusiasts, and slick presentation is not to be expected; still, more trouble could have been taken over spelling. Foreign names fare especially badly, but English ones do not escape: Wilfrid Mellers becomes ‘Wilfred Mellors’ on pages 72 and 76 (and again in the Index), Harrison Birtwistle is ‘Birtwhistle’ on pages 248 and 404, while the Australian conductor Bryan Fairfax is ‘Brian’ throughout. They are however more fortunate than Constant Lambert, who undergoes a sex change, becoming ‘Constance Lambert’, on

¹ Quoted by Peter Heyworth in *Otto Klemperer, His Life and Times* (Vol. 1), Cambridge 1983, p. 388.

pages 75 and 408.² After this it seems quibbling to point out that the composer Halvor Haug is Norwegian, not Danish.

The Index could also have been more accurate; looking up Simpson's Third Symphony, the one recorded by Horenstein, we find that one of the references is actually to Nielsen's Third Symphony and another is to Bruckner's Third, but page 85, where the author begins his informative account of Simpson's Third, is not listed, and neither is the mention on page 183.

More seriously, the author falls into the trap of trying to answer back Simpson's critics. Noel Goodwin's complaint that the Second Symphony suffered from 'insufficiently memorable thematic material' and 'an oratorical over-insistence of repeated fragments and emphasised rhythms, tiresomely hammered home' is followed by 'I hope the poor man took a powder'. Reviewing the First Symphony, Neville Cardus felt that 'an acute brain is obviously in action but nothing strikingly memorable remains, except the technical know-how'.³ It may be, as Macauley suggests, that Cardus was 'still smarting' over an altercation with Simpson; but these critics are articulating widespread listener responses which cannot simply be put down to prejudice or intellectual laziness. It is surprising then to find no comment when a new note appears in a review of Simpson's Violin Concerto: "I know of nothing lovelier in contemporary music than the sustained meditation of the slow movement, glowing organically out of the wonderful slow canon for muted strings."⁴ Likewise Bayan Northcott in *The Independent*: "There is nothing quite like the Simpsonian meditation, or the sound of Simpson in full cry, to be found anywhere else in music."⁵ In other words, these listeners have *enjoyed* Simpson's music, and this is crucial, for there is no point in a work being 'music of the high intellectual imagination',⁶ or 'the composition of a strenuous thinker with abundant contrapuntal resource',⁷ if it doesn't live in the hearts and minds of its listeners.

This is an accessible biography which makes no claim to be a mature academic consideration of Simpson's output. But what Simpson needs most is enthusiasm, and Donald Macauley has that in abundance. He has also carefully researched Simpson's unusual family background, and there is a good selection of letters, especially welcome as Simpson's letters show a sense of humour not always apparent in his media appearances.

Macauley deals tactfully with Simpson's first marriage, to Bessie Fraser (alias 'Squibs'), a fellow ARP veteran considerably older than himself. She cooked him enormous meals – transforming the slim youth of early photographs into the familiar tubby figure – but

² He is however 'Constant' Lambert on p. 79.

³ From a review (published in *The Guardian*, 11 March 1970), of a Royal Festival Hall performance conducted by the composer (p. 61).

⁴ J.F. Waterhouse in the *Birmingham Post* in 1960. The work was later withdrawn, Simpson suggesting that it had been 'composed by an orang-utan when I wasn't looking' (p. 85). After listening to a recording, Macauley can 'understand why [Simpson] withdrew it', but finds the slow movement 'very fine'. A projected revision was never realised.

⁵ Bayan Northcott, *The Independent*, 2 March 1991, quoted on p. 303. It is not clear if any specific work is being referred to.

⁶ J.F. Waterhouse, reviewing the Third Quartet in the *Birmingham Post* in 1955 (p. 72).

⁷ 'RC' [Richard Capell?] reviewing Simpson's First Quartet in the *Daily Telegraph* (page 71).

also suffered from mental illness, at one point threatening the composer with a carving knife. She then spent two years in an institution before Simpson eventually agreed, on what he called 'the worst day of my life', to a lobotomy. Amazingly, it seems to have worked. We are also told that Simpson was (at the same time?) 'very good friends' with the violist Dorothy Hemmings, who as a member of the Element String Quartet was involved in the first recordings of Simpson's music; at which point English reticence descends.

Thereafter the book is mainly a discussion of pieces and performances – nice to know the sometimes incongruous accompanying items. There are also useful lists of works, articles, and recordings, filled out with sketches of friends, including Havergal Brian. He said of Brian the man that 'you couldn't tell what he was thinking or feeling',⁸ and was far from being an uncritical admirer of Brian's music: "I still think he's an incredibly uneven composer. Some of his music I think is really bad, terrible. But at his best he's got tremendous originality ..."⁹ He must also have had some fellow-feeling for a composer even more bloody-minded and determinedly unfashionable than himself.

There is a list of works and a list of recordings (neither of them very numerous), and profiles of friends such as Deryck Cooke, Robert Stevenson and Hans Keller. Also reproduced are several essays, including Simpson's notorious Preface for *The Symphony*, a popular history published in the 1960s – notorious because, as editor, he had excluded Schoenberg, Hindemith and Stravinsky for what seemed to many to be unconvincing reasons. At least one review devoted more space to Simpson's Preface than to the articles – which, as Simpson pointed out, was hardly fair to the contributors.

Simpson does come over as a man of limited sympathies. He had little time for Berg's Violin Concerto ('a slimy work') or the music of Harrison Birtwistle ('plain nasty') or the quartets of Bartók ('overrated') or Shostakovich ('unidiomatic and not really quartets' – the Eighth Quartet was 'a dreadful piece'). He didn't 'like Elgar's music very much' but preferred him to Strauss, who was 'completely hollow'. And so on. But there are also appreciative insights, and above all he valued Bruckner when few others did (in England, at any rate). Simpson's music never sounds superficially like Bruckner's, but he resembled him in other ways: like Bruckner, he faced public indifference, but also never lacked advocates. Most unusually, and somewhat to his initial embarrassment, a society was founded for the promotion of his music in his lifetime. Meetings seem to have been refreshingly convivial!

The account of Simpson's last years makes sad reading. Having found peace and a measure of contentment in Ireland, he succumbed in September 1991 to a stroke which damaged his thalamus, an organ which normally acts to reduce the sensation of pain. The malfunctioning thalamus sent out signals that the body was in pain, even when there was no reason for it. As there was no organic cause, the usual palliatives did not work, and alternative remedies were tried in vain. No-one could be expected to do any constructive

⁸ From a 1976 broadcast talk, quoted on p. 261.

⁹ Quoted on p. 56 – presumably from a previously cited 1980 interview with Lewis Foreman published in *Tonic*, the journal of the Robert Simpson Society.

work under such circumstances.¹⁰ From then until his death in November 1997 Simpson completed only one work, his second String Quintet, whose bleak ending is one of his most powerful passages. Other requests and commissions had to be turned down.¹¹ One is left with the feeling that life is very unjust sometimes – something I suspect Simpson would not have disagreed with.

Dermot Gault
The Bruckner Journal 18/1 (2014), pp. 17–9

The Power of Robert Simpson: A Biography. By Donald Macauley. pp. 418. (Xlibris, 2013. £16.99. ISBN978-1-4797-9437-9.)

After the Hyperion recording of Robert Simpson's Ninth Symphony (1986) was released in 1988, David Fanning wrote in *Gramophone* magazine that 'Simpson had found what Sibelius in the end seemingly despaired of finding – a way of uniting the essentials of symphonic momentum with the essentials of modern consciousness'. Such high claims – Fanning also described Simpson's music as 'uniquely invigorating' – were by no means exceptional. According to Donald Macauley, 'a poll of readers of the BBC Music Magazine [in 1999] asking them to nominate their favourite twentieth century work and composer, gave Simpson's Ninth joint third place alongside Britten's *Peter Grimes* and Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, while among composers he ranked fifth, after Bartók, Elgar, Prokofiev and Richard Strauss' (p. 174). But just five years later, in 2004, Julian Anderson could describe the same work more ambivalently, as 'an isolated case of Sibelius-influenced uninterrupted transformation extended to previously unheard-of lengths within a relatively traditional harmonic and orchestral idiom. As such it is an undervalued and underplayed masterpiece by a lone figure in British music' (*The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, ed. Daniel Grimley (Cambridge, 2004), p. 211).

The paradox of the fifth 'best' twentieth-century composer as 'isolated', and 'a lone figure', is reinforced by Macauley's observation that the Ninth has not been performed live since its London premiere in February 1992. Despite a constant stream of commissions – 'since coming to prominence as a composer in the mid-fifties he received more than he could actually accept' (p. 192) – Simpson's major works were often left unplayed after their premieres. For this reason alone, 'paradox' might have been a better noun for Macauley's title than 'power'.

Simpson lived from 1921 to 1997, and the unusual degree of social mobility possible in the middle of the twentieth century enabled this son of full-time Salvation Army workers to progress from school to medical studies only to abandon them in 1942 in favour of private composition lessons with Herbert Howells. As a conscientious objector called up in wartime he followed a very different path from Michael Tippett and Benjamin Britten, fulfilling (in an eerie parallel with Karlheinz Stockhausen in Germany) the harrowing

¹⁰ The '1992' version of *The Essence of Bruckner* had been completed in 1984, but publication was held up until Simpson's American publisher had sold off the existing stock.

¹¹ Simpson's passing was marked in the fourth issue of *The Bruckner Journal* (2/1, March 1998; an obituary by Brian Duke is on p. 15).

obligations of working with an ARP mobile surgical unit. After a hand-to-mouth freelance existence after 1945, he joined the BBC in 1951, and stayed there for nearly thirty years, resigning in 1980 – just before he was due to retire – after increasing irritation with the allegedly autocratic ways of the Head of Music, William Glock, and his successor Robert Ponsonby. This found expression in a booklet called *The Proms and Natural Justice*; the esteem in which Simpson was held as a composer helped to add plausibility to his broader musical arguments at a time when such support as the ‘avant-garde’ had been given during the Glock-Boulez years at the BBC was coming to seem distinctly passé.

Simpson’s own musical identity was well formed by 1949, a review in *Music Survey* of Tippett’s third string quartet homing in on matters of ‘tension’, and the risks of seeming ‘busy rather than energetic’ even when preserving a ‘sense of tonality’ that is ‘delicate and imaginative’. The completion of his Durham DMus exercise, the Symphony No. 1, in 1951 – Macauley tells us that this had at least four predecessors – and the publication of his absorbingly partisan monograph *Carl Nielsen Symphonist* in 1952, written in a mere nine weeks, made clear that Simpson was working a very different musical seam from that of such well-established British symphonists of the time as Ralph Vaughan Williams, Arnold Bax, and Edmund Rubbra: and he was no less distinctive when considered alongside the younger post-war star, Benjamin Britten. Simpson would later comment that Britten ‘always seems to me to take the easy way out’ (p. 247) and he excluded the composer of *Sinfonia da Requiem* and the *Cello Symphony* from his two-volume survey of symphonic composition (Penguin Books, 1966-7), claiming with a complete absence of detailed argument that ‘this is music whose positive attributes do not depend upon the art of symphonic movement with all it implies’ (p. 334). Instead Simpson declared that ‘this composer’s main achievement lies in other fields’ (ibid.), while adopting the very unBritten-like position that great poetry could never benefit from musical setting. He himself wrote only a handful of vocal works.

There was always a notable contrast between Simpson’s informed advocacy of the composers he liked, such as Bruckner or Havergal Brian, and his polemical caricaturing of those he had no time for. The story of the sometimes strange personal and professional relationships lying behind the formulation of Simpson’s always arresting critical judgements is complex and fascinating enough to merit the kind of full-on documentary treatment undertaken by Anthony Meredith and Paul Harris in their study of Simpson’s exact contemporary Malcolm Arnold. Macauley is sometimes rather more impressionistic than forensic in relating facts to interpretations, though many readers will probably welcome his avoidance of what might easily have turned into an all-too-amateurish psychology-tinged linking of life and work. Nevertheless, Simpson’s description of the violinist Ernest Element as ‘a pure and profoundly naïve spirit’ (p. 73) might be no less fitting for Simpson himself, fuelling an almost primitive insistence in his single-minded pursuit of the belief (outlined in a radio script from 1971) that ‘the greatest art ... defies death by being organic’ (p. 343).

Claiming that ‘this is the first age to produce anti-art, consciously and deliberately anti-organic, not defying death but playing with it’, Simpson declared that ‘this makes me not

so much an optimist as an anti-pessimist': the broadcast version of this script was accordingly entitled 'The Ferociously anti-Pessimist Composer'. With that ferocity went a stubborn refusal to mourn through music; he complained of being 'left with a sense of empty desolation' by Shostakovich (p. 247) and also wrote that 'the side of Mahler I don't like is the enormous amount of self-regard his music contains. Often he stands himself on a great stage and bewails his fate and that of humanity in general. I soon get tired of that kind of personal exhibitionism' (pp. 242-3). Even a composer as unMahlerian as Purcell provoked the rejection of 'that particular kind of English melancholy' (p. 237). When it came to defining the melancholic spirit, in connection with *The Four Temperaments* for brass band (1983), Simpson wrote that this 'is not merely lugubrious. It is deep feeling, serious and dignified. There is something grand and courageous in its gloom and strength and its willingness to face grim facts' (p. 160). Such a description might also be thought well suited to, say, Dido's Lament. But from Simpson's perspective on melancholy, Alban Berg's Violin Concerto was 'a slimy work', and Harrison Birtwistle's music 'just plain nasty'.

Macauley ensures that these and many other pungent comments come across loud and clear, placing them in the context of the most detailed account of Simpson's life so far published. But Macauley is not a music specialist, and some of the most perceptive discussions of Simpson's compositional manner and methods – by Jim Samson and Robin Holloway as well as Julian Anderson – go unmentioned. As a result, the paradoxes affecting Simpson the composer remain to be fully explored. One of Simpson's most revealing statements, which Macauley does quote, is that 'the idea for a new treatment of tonality came to me from listening, not to Nielsen or any other composer I love, but to Schoenberg's Piano Concerto. I didn't want, as Schoenberg did, to deny tonality, I wanted to find a way to make tonal centres react against each other, not make non-tonality react against tonality' (pp. 244-5). If Nicholas Williams was right to claim in 1994 that Simpson 'remains the most challenging figure to emerge from the generation between Tippett and Britten and the Manchester school of Goehr, Birtwistle and Maxwell Davies', it might be because he used tonal thinking in ways closer to Schoenberg's principles of extended and suspended tonality than to the consistently prolonged diatonicism of the classical and (some) Romantic masters. As Samson has noted, 'the tonalities of neither the Fifth nor the Seventh Symphonies ... are definable in any "normal" terms' (*The Blackwell History of Music in Britain*, ed. Stephen Banfield (Oxford, 1995), vi. 283). Maybe Simpson had more in common with Schoenberg than he would have cared to admit. This is certainly the view of Simon Phillippo in another recent publication devoted to Simpson's life and work ('Simpson, Modernism and Relevance', in Jürgen Schaarwächter (ed.), *Robert Simpson: Composer. Essays, Interviews, Recollections* (Hildesheim, 2013)).

Allowances have to be made with this self-published book for a wide range of small slips – 'Wilfred Mellors', etc. – which suggest that the colleagues Macauley credits with advice and proofreading were not as assiduous as they could have been. Nevertheless, the extent to which Simpson is allowed to speak for himself – something he always did with great eloquence and élan – and the context provided by Macauley's own sensible reactions to the compositions, and no less sensible unwillingness to exempt Simpson

from all criticism, ensure that the book is well worth reading, especially when accompanied by frequent extracts from the extensive legacy of Simpson recordings. Live performances might not pick up any time soon, but historians of British music since 1900 need to keep Simpson's challenging and distinctive contributions to both composition and criticism clearly in view; 'making tonality react against non-tonality' seems an ever-more salient strategy for present-day British composers.

Arnold Whittall

Music & Letters 95/1 (2014), pp. 138-40

Robert Simpson – Composer. Edited by Jürgen Schaarwächter. Georg Olms Verlag (hardback, 560 pages, musical examples, ISBN 978-3-487-15003-1, £65.00). Website www.olms.de.

The Power of Robert Simpson. A Biography. Donald Macauley. Xlibris Publishing (hardback, 418 pages, illustrated, ISBN 978-1-47979-438-6, £26.00; also available in paperback, ISBN 978-1-47979-437-9). Website www.xlibrispublishing.co.uk.

Although it has never been without devotees among performers and listeners, the music of Robert Simpson (1921-97) has yet to shed its cult status and establish itself as part of the current repertoire. Most of the composer's output is available on disc – primarily through the series from Hyperion – but, notwithstanding publications to mark his 50th and 70th birthdays (Triad Press and Alfred Lengnick respectively), there have been no major books until now. Indeed, these in-depth studies of work and life would seem to touch all the necessary bases.

Robert Simpson – Composer is a collection of 'Essays, Interviews and Recollections' which surveys the bulk of the music. Among the introductory chapters, Jennifer Parkes pens a brief though pertinent biographical note, and Hans Keller discusses 'The man *and* the music' (his italics) from the perspective of the 'naïve/sentimental' duality – as posited by Schiller – with typically combative insight, while violinist John Underwood, producer Andrew Keener and conductor Matthew Best offer complementary insights into working with the composer and his music.

The next eight chapters focus on the symphonies by which Simpson is best known to a wider public. Malcolm MacDonald contributes a detailed overview, while the redoubtable Harold Truscott looks at the origins of the First Symphony – Simpson's conceptual breakthrough whose tonal ground plan is deftly outlined by Simon Phillippo. Martin Radcliffe's account of the genesis of the Third Symphony is meticulously detailed with copious musical examples, though is overly specialist even in the context of such a study; by comparison, John Pickard's analysis of this work makes for absorbing and relatively effortless reading. Lionel Pike's study of the Sixth Symphony typifies his earnest and considered approach, while a lengthy discussion between Simpson and the much-missed Michael Oliver on the genesis of the Eighth Symphony is a reminder of a bygone era of radio talks. John McCabe's 'note' on the Ninth Symphony is more a descriptive analysis, taking as it does an ostensible middle course which is as understated yet thought-provoking as are the composer's own symphonic works.

Seven chapters are allotted to the string quartets, which, even more than the symphonies, are arguably the core of Simpson's legacy. 'The Cosmos and the String Quartet' finds Edward Green going to great (and rather too fanciful) lengths to place these works 'in Philosophic Perspective'; Pike's succinct introduction to, and MacDonald's lively discussion with the composer on Simpson's 'Razumowsky Quartets' (Nos. 4-6) follow as a welcome corrective. Phillippo's study of these latter in relation to Beethoven's Op. 59 triptych has many insights even if its underlying premises are a little contentious, while Pike's analyses of the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Quartets are studious and methodical undertakings that need to be read at leisure and with continuous reference to the scores: suffice to add that the ends justify the means.

The final eight chapters look at 'Simpson and beyond' from a number of perspectives. Pike's survey of the composer's writings and lectures is effectively an overview in the dissemination of classical music during the immediate post-war era, while his analysis of the *Haydn Variations* for piano is a rounded analytical introduction to this easily overlooked piece. Paul Conway provides a decent overview of the concertos, as do Terry Hazell, Kevin Norbury and Eric Wilson of the notable corpus for brass band, while editor Jürgen Schaarwachter looks at the significance of Reger on Simpson's thinking – his many insights tending to be lost amid the welter of musical examples. Finally, in 'Simpson, modernism and relevance', Phillippo considers what this music represents to listeners at the start of the new century: his arguments are not without a tendency to academic 'box-ticking' and tautology, though his conviction that Simpson may well prove to be a pre-war modernist born too late is highly compelling and as good a vantage as any from which to view the composer as his centenary approaches.

The book is simply yet stylishly presented, a few inconsistencies of editing notwithstanding, while the combined catalogue of works and discography is not free from error but the most comprehensive currently in print (among the handful of unpublished pieces, a String Quartet in D from 1945, with which Simpson earned his B.Mus., will hopefully reach performance). Taken overall, this volume – which also includes a touching foreword from the composer's widow Angela – is an admirable benchmark for any future studies of Simpson's music.

This, regrettably, cannot be said of Donald Macauley's (oddly titled?) biography *The Power of Robert Simpson*. To be sure, a full-length study of this kind was sorely needed (though it is in the nature of such coincidences that a detailed memoir by my IRR colleague Robert Matthew-Walker has just been published as Volume 22 of the Robert Simpson Society's journal *Tonic* and is required reading for its overview of his association with the composer and his music) and, as a longstanding devotee of the composer, Macauley was seemingly well placed to provide it.

His book incorporates a great deal of information – notably on the Salvationist background that shaped the composer's thinking more completely than he may later have cared to admit, as well as Bessie Fraser ('Squibs'), who, 19 years his senior, became his first wife via a notable act of selflessness on Simpson's part at the end of the Second World War and then effectively assumed the role of housekeeper until illness clouded her

last years through to her death in 1981. Equally well covered is the composer's steady decline following a stroke in 1991, in which defiance soon yielded to resignation as the realization set in that further new works (such as a Sixteenth Quartet and a choral Twelfth Symphony) would not be possible. A fuller and more detailed picture of Simpson emerges here than was previously the case.

Set against this is a lack of detail on Simpson's career as a BBC producer during the three decades after 1950. The period leading up to his resignation in the wake of the debacle concerning the intended disbandment of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and partial cancellation of the 1980 Proms season is well covered, though more could reasonably have been devoted to Simpson's activities in the context of the BBC's gradually shifting cultural priorities (indeed, several colleagues who both shared and decried his convictions are still alive and could surely have been interviewed). Without this, an inaccurate image emerges of a figure who espoused perennially unfashionable views operating in a less than splendid isolation: a 'loner' (heroic or not) of a kind Simpson would have unhesitatingly debunked.

More problematic, though, is the rather haphazard way this book appears to have been put together. The division into chapters often seems arbitrary, while the paragraphing is messy and inconsistent – not least in its juxtaposing biographical information with descriptions of specific works, or between the author's text and the comments of others. Too often, these latter assume prominence so that Macauley's contributions are little more than anecdotal glosses on the matter at hand, with all the lack of substance or authority that this implies. A pity, too, that the author's remarks on issues such as 'pop' music and competitive sport give the impression of a negativity and intolerance regrettable in the context of a composer, who, whatever his stated views, was essentially concerned with solutions and affirmation.

Following the chronological survey, several additional chapters focus on sundry aspects of Simpson, of which the most valuable is a personalia of friends and colleagues that extends over several generations of British and North European musicians. Also welcome are the appendices that reproduce a number of Simpson's articles on matters musical and existential, though the list of compositions and discography could surely have been combined so as to minimize repetition, while both these and the list of books and articles are not without error. Inclusion of a large number of photographs, many not previously seen outside of Simpson's inner circle, is an undoubted enhancement – though their having been scanned directly into the text rather than being reproduced as plates means the resulting quality is often poor. Inevitably an enthusiast does not a biographer make, though Macauley might have redressed many of these failings simply by having recourse to an external editor to pull the overall text into more cohesive and systematic shape, and so avoid the impression of a manuscript that was assembled on a computer without much thought as to its eventual appearance on the page. Admirers of Simpson's music, particularly those who find technical analysis to be forbidding or abstruse, should acquire this book – but the feeling persists of an opportunity squandered.

Richard Whitehouse

International Record Review, April 2014, pp. 80-1

Robert Simpson: Composer – Essays, Interviews, Recollections. Edited by Jürgen Schaarwächter. With a foreword by Angela Simpson. Hildesheim, Zurich, New York: George Olms Verlag, 2013. 560 pages.

Assembling collections of key articles on a specific musical topic, especially when done by an editor of wide-ranging knowledge and interest, is a very effective way of increasing access to the literature of that subject, especially when the volume is closely indexed as here. This collection about the life and music of composer Robert Simpson is a magisterial example of such a collection which adds significantly to the literature on the composer. These essays are collected from a variety of sources, including examples newly written, others transcribed from aural sources, lectures and interviews. The majority have appeared in *Tonic*, the journal of the Robert Simpson Society, a source not easily available to non-core enthusiasts. Schaarwächter gives us four sections – ‘The man and his music’, ‘Symphonies’, ‘String Quartets’ and ‘Simpson and beyond’. Within these there are 29 contributions plus a very useful and handy catalogue of works (incorporating discographical information), but no bibliography which we are reminded is on the Simpson website. Robert Simpson was a very eloquent interview subject and transcriptions of interviews with him are always not only informative but readable. Here we have two, with Malcolm MacDonald and Michael Oliver, eloquent interviewers – they make for an informative and engaging read. Indeed many of these pieces when they are quoting Simpson give us a vivid feel for the man, his strengths and his foibles. Lionel Pike writes a number of these essays and in opening his piece on ‘Simpson’s “Rasumowsky” Quartets’ he writes: ‘The biggest problem faced by any analyst is that of describing the musical events he perceives in such a way that they are intelligible to those with less than his own expertise.’ This is certainly an issue in a number of the more technical accounts. I must say one of my first interests about Robert Simpson’s background was his Salvation Army family background, but to me he was always fairly negative on allowing any discussion of this aspect of his life and music or how it might impinge on his scoring in more seriously intended pieces. All the more interesting then, to read Terry Hazell’s short account of Simpson’s brass band music and Salvation Army background, and Kevin Norbury’s longer examination of Simpson’s *The Four Temperaments*, written for the Yorkshire Imperial Band. Despite its length this is not an exhaustive collection of writings, and even in the two main categories – symphonies and string quartets – not every work is covered. But what we have is immensely readable, and Simpson emerges as a living personality, a man of overwhelming integrity, even if one is not able fully to adjust to the reality of the trends in his later artistic life. We are left wanting to hear the works discussed.

Lewis Foreman, June 2014
British Music 36 (2014/1), pp. 69-70

Robert Simpson: Composer. Essays, Interviews, Recollections, hg. von Jürgen Schaarwächter, Hildesheim u. a.: Georg Olms Verlag 2013; 560 S.; ISBN 978-3-487-15003-1

Der britische Komponist Robert Simpson (1921–1997) verfolgte zeitlebens sehr klare künstlerische Ziele. Sein Schaffen, das 1946 mit einer Klaviersonate beginnt und 1995 mit einem Streichquintett endet, ist durchweg traditionellen Gattungen verpflichtet. Fast ausschließlich widmete er sich der Komposition großformatiger Instrumentalwerke und hinterließ elf Symphonien und 15 Streichquartette, in denen er, seinen Leitbildern Haydn, Beethoven, Bruckner, Nielsen und Sibelius verpflichtet, danach strebte, durch ständiges Zusammenwirken von Melodik, Harmonik, Metrum und Rhythmus sowie der verschiedenen Möglichkeiten des homophonen und polyphonen Tonsatzes die Musik in einer permanent pulsierenden Bewegung zu halten, die das ganze Stück trägt. Tonalität galt ihm als Grundvoraussetzung zur Verwirklichung dieses „organischen“, „symphonischen“ Kompositionsideals. Simpson war nicht der Auffassung, die Titulierung eines Orchesterwerks als „Symphonie“ würde dieses bereits zu einer solchen machen; mit spitzer Feder polemisierte er gegen die Vertreter der Neuen Wiener und Darmstädter Schule sowie ihre Nachfolger, wobei er auch zu neoklassizistischen und folkloristischen Tendenzen auf Distanz ging. Doch bei aller „klassischen“ Grundorientierung folgen bereits Simpsons Frühwerke nur noch ansatzweise einer Dur-Moll-basierten Harmonik, später gelangte er zur Entwicklung ganzer Werke aus wenigen Intervallverbindungen und entwickelte dabei eine ausgesprochene Vorliebe für dissonante Reibungen. Auch sind diejenigen seiner Werke in der Unterzahl, die sich mithilfe der Schemen des Formenlehreunterrichts einigermaßen zufriedenstellend beschreiben lassen.

Dass Robert Simpson in der deutschen Musikwissenschaft bisher auf kein besonders ausgeprägtes Interesse gestoßen ist, verwundert kaum angesichts dieser Querständigkeit zu den prägenden Strömungen des zeitgleichen deutschen (insbesondere westdeutschen) Musiklebens – eine Eigenschaft, die er mit vielen Generationengenossen aus dem englischen Sprachraum sowie Nord- und Osteuropa, etwa Peter Mennin, Joonas Kokkonen und Wilhelm Georg Berger, teilt.

Hinsichtlich des literarischen Ertrags war 2013 in Sachen Simpson ein bedeutendes Jahr. Gleich zwei umfangreiche Bücher gelangten an die Öffentlichkeit, die die wissenschaftliche Beschäftigung mit Leben und Schaffen des Tonsetzers nun nicht nur ungewein erleichtern, sondern auch eine hervorragende Grundlage zu weiterer Auseinandersetzung bieten. Beide Publikationen ergänzen sich gut: Legte Donald Macaulay mit *The Power of Robert Simpson* eine materialgesättigte Biographie vor, so gab Jürgen Schaarwächter, Vorsitzender der Robert Simpson Society, den vorrangig der analytischen Durchdringung des Werkes gewidmeten Sammelband *Robert Simpson: Composer. Essays, Interviews, Recollections* heraus. Etwa die Hälfte des Buches nehmen Originalbeiträge ein, bei den Übrigen handelt es sich um „Recollections“, vorrangig Texte aus *Tonic*, dem Journal der Robert Simpson Society. Die einzelnen Aufsätze sind vier Abteilungen zugeordnet: „The man and the music“, Symphonien, Streichquartette und „Simpson and beyond“.

Die Analysen eignen sich durchgehend vorzüglich, interessierten Lesern einen Einblick in die jeweiligen Werke zu verschaffen. Da sie der Werkchronologie folgen, bekommt man nebenbei einen Eindruck der künstlerischen Entwicklung des Komponisten. Fast jeder der Aufsätze fokussiert einen anderen Aspekt des Simpsonschen Schaffens und regelmäßig finden sich Überlegungen, die darüber hinausweisen. So etwa, wenn Lionel Pike, dessen Texte etwa ein Fünftel des Bandes ausmachen, anhand von Simpsons Neuntem Streichquartett bzw. den *Haydn-Variationen* für Klavier, denen beiden das gleiche palindromische Thema zugrunde liegt, allgemeine Thesen zu den Möglichkeiten tonaler Palindrom-Komposition aufstellt. John Pickard und Simon Phillippo widmen sich Simpsons vielschichtiger Anverwandlung Beethovenscher Vorbilder in der Dritten Symphonie bzw. den als Studien über Beethovens op. 59 angelegten Streichquartetten Nr. 4–6, deren Konzeption selbst im an „Musik über Musik“ reichen 20. Jahrhundert wohl einmalig ist. Herausgeber Schaarwächter reflektiert über kompositorische Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen Simpson und Max Reger. Simpson selbst kommt in Gesprächen mit Michael Oliver und Malcolm MacDonald zu Wort.

Sei es aus Zufall, oder, vielleicht als Tribut an den sorgfältigen Formarchitekten Simpson, aus Absicht: Gegen Anfang, in der Mitte und am Schluss des Bandes findet sich je ein Aufsatz, der sich eingehender mit der Ästhetik des Komponisten auseinandersetzt. Hans Keller unternahm es 1981, Schillers Gedanken *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* auf die Musik zu übertragen und die Komponisten in die entsprechenden Kategorien einzuteilen, wobei er seinen Freund Simpson, wie Beethoven und Schönberg, den „sentimentalischen“ zuschlägt. Sein kurzer Text „The man and the music“ wirkt stellenweise etwas schematisch, enthält jedoch einige anregende Ausführungen, die zum Weiterdenken einladen, etwa über die unterschiedliche Beschaffenheit und Funktion der Themen in Werken „naiver“ und „sentimentalischer“ Komponisten. Im Gegensatz zu Keller scheint sich Edward Green über die Problematik seines Ansatzes nicht im Klaren zu sein. Zwar bietet er mit „The Cosmos and the String Quartet“ einen guten, mit Notenbeispielen reich gepflasterten Überblick über Simpsons Streicherkammermusik, stolpert jedoch beim Versuch einer philosophischen Ausdeutung der Werke mehr als einmal über die Fallstricke seiner dogmatischen Grundannahmen. Green versucht offensichtlich, Simpson in Übereinstimmung mit der Weltanschauung des „Ästhetischen Realismus“ zu bringen, als deren Anhänger Green sich im sicheren Besitz des Wissens über das Wahre, Schöne, Gute und die Beschaffenheit der Welt und des Kosmos wähnt. Entsprechend leicht fällt es ihm, von „Music, understood rightly“ (S. 209) zu schreiben, abzuwägen, welche Musik „has ‘more world’ in it“ (S. 206), und regelmäßig die Worte „sane“ und „healthy“ zu gebrauchen. Seiner Zuversicht, dass „Music Tells What the World is Like“ (S. 206), sei hier zum Vergleich eine Äußerung Simpsons aus dem Gespräch mit Michael Oliver gegenübergestellt: „Music expresses all sorts of things that we are not really aware of. I don’t know what I’m expressing when I compose“ (S. 182). Zu den wertvollsten Beiträgen des Bandes muss der abschließende Aufsatz „Simpson, Modernism and Relevance“ von Simon Phillippo

gerechnet werden. Der Autor unternimmt den Versuch einer Einordnung Simpsons in den Kontext seiner Zeit, indem er die Selbstinszenierung des Komponisten als dezidierten Traditionalisten kritisch hinterfragt. Simpsons Traditionsverständnis, so die These, ist eine grundsätzlich moderne Reaktion auf moderne Erscheinungen, von denen Simpson keineswegs soviel trennt, wie er selbst behauptete. Phillippo zieht Parallelen zum Schönbergschen Materialdenken, zu Weberns Intervallkonstruktionen und zur abstrakten Ästhetik Strawinskis, bleibt allerdings nicht bei der Musik stehen, sondern sieht ebenso Berührungspunkte zur Praxis kubistischer Malerei und brutalistischer Architektur sowie zur Verherrlichung des Maskulinen bei Pound und Hemingway. Simpsons Konzept der ständig in Bewegung befindlichen, niemals rastenden Musik nähert er sich über Ausführungen Schopenhauers und Heideggers zum „Willen“ bzw. „Dasein“, womit die nach 50 Minuten vielgestaltiger Entwicklung in eine leise Dissonanz auslaufende Neunte Symphonie in der Tat trefflich umschrieben werden kann (S. 523). Zum Schluss betrachtet Phillippo die Veränderung des musikästhetischen Diskurses im letzten Drittel des 20. Jahrhunderts und leuchtet das Verhältnis der Simpsonschen Musik zu postmodernen Traditionsbezügen aus.

Berichte von Freunden und Mitarbeitern über ihre Bekanntschaft mit Simpson, etwa Harold Truscotts unterhaltsame Schilderung der Entstehung der Ersten Symphonie, ein philologischer Beitrag von Martin Ratcliffe, der sich an einer Rekonstruktion des ursprünglichen Anfangs der Dritten Symphonie versucht, sowie ein detailliertes Verzeichnis sämtlicher erhaltener Kompositionen Simpsons runden den lesenswerten Band vorzüglich ab. Er mag vorrangig für ein englischsprachiges Publikum gedacht sein, doch sollten auch deutsche Wissenschaftler daran nicht vorübergehen. Robert Simpson kann uns noch viele Fragen stellen, denen nachzugehen sich lohnt.

During his lifetime British composer Robert Simpson (1921–1997) strived to achieve clearly defined artistic aims. His production, which begins in 1946 with a piano sonata and ends in 1995 with a string quintet, is consistently dedicated to traditional genres. Nearly exclusively he composed large scale instrumental music, and left 11 symphonies and 15 string quartets to the musical world, which show him on the paths of his idols Haydn, Beethoven, Bruckner, Nielsen and Sibelius. Like them he aimed to create a music permanently in motion by combining melodic, harmonic, metric and rhythmic procedures, by using the different possibilities of homophonic and polyphonic texture. Tonality for him was the fundamental condition to realise this ideal of “organic”, “symphonic” composition. Simpson didn’t share the opinion that calling an orchestral work a “symphony” would turn this piece into one. He polemicised sharply against the Viennese and Darmstadt Schools and their followers, but distanced himself from neoclassicist and folklorist trends, too. Despite this “classical” alignment, even Simpson’s early works are not written in orthodox major-minor tonality. Later he created whole works from combinations of a few intervals and developed a preference for harsh dissonant tensions. The compositions, which can be described satisfyingly using the schemes of academic theories of form, are in the minority in Simpson’s output, too.

Considering his non-conformity with the dominating trends of the German (especially West German) musical life of his time, it is not surprising that Simpson hasn't aroused much interest in German speaking musicology until now – many composers of his generation from the English speaking world, and from Northern or Eastern Europe join him in this fate, for example Peter Mennin, Joonas Kokkonen and Wilhelm Georg Berger.

2013 was an important year for Simpson's literary reception. It saw the publication of two comprehensive books, which not only make the scholarly access to Simpson's life and compositions more easy now, but give also a good basis for future discussions. Both books complement each other well: while Donald Macauley presented a biography full of material, Jürgen Schaarwächter, chairman of the Robert Simpson Society, edited a collection of mostly analytical texts on the composer's work: *Robert Simpson: Composer. Essays, Interviews, Recollections*.

About half of this book consists of newly written texts, the rest are mostly taken from *Tonic*, the journal of the Robert Simpson Society. The texts are assigned to four parts: "The man and the music", symphonies, string quartets and "Simpson and beyond".

The analytic studies are throughout very useful to introduce the compositions in question to interested readers. As they follow the chronology of composition, they also give an impression of the composer's artistic development. Nearly each text is focused on another aspect of Simpson's work, and thoughts reaching beyond their topic are to be found regularly: e.g. when Lionel Pike, whose writings amount to about one fifth of the book, develops theses about the possibilities of palindromic composition in tonal music in general when discussing Simpson's Ninth String Quartet and *Haydn Variations* for piano, which are both based on the same palindromic theme. John Pickard and Simon Phillippo are describing Simpson's complex reworkings of Beethovenian models in the Third Symphony and the String Quartets No. 4–6 respectively, which are – possibly a unique conception even in a century that saw much "music about music" – designed as studies on Beethoven's Op. 59. Editor Schaarwächter reflects about similarities of Simpson's and Max Reger's ways of composing. Simpson himself has his say in interviews with Michael Oliver and Malcolm MacDonald.

It may be accidental or – perhaps as a tribute to Simpson, the thoughtful architect of musical form – by intention: near the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the book there is one text each dealing with Simpson's aesthetics. In 1981 Hans Keller tried to use Schiller's thoughts *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* for discussing music, dividing the composers into these two categories, and calling his friend Simpson, like Beethoven and Schoenberg, a "sentimental" composer. His short text "The man *and* the music" sometimes makes a somewhat schematic impression, but contains interesting statements worthy to think about, for example the different appearances and roles of thematic material in works by "naïve" or "sentimental" composers. Unlike Keller Edward Green seems not to realize the problems of his approach. His "The Cosmos and the String Quartet" is a useful survey on Simpson's chamber music for strings with many music examples, but more than once the author, while trying to give a philosophical interpretation of the works, stumbles over his dogmatic views, which he obviously tries to impose on Simp-

son. As a follower of "Aesthetic Realism" Green feels himself in the secure possession of the knowledge of the nature of world and space, and on what is true, nice and good. So it is easy for him to write about "music, understood rightly" (p. 209), to reflect about which music "has 'more world' in it" (S. 206), and to use the words "sane" and "healthy" frequently. His confidence that "Music Tells What the World is Like" (p. 206) may be contrasted here with some words by Simpson from the interview by Michael Oliver: "Music expresses all sorts of things that we are not really aware of. I don't know what I'm expressing when I compose" (p. 182). Simon Phillippo's essay "Simpson, Modernism and Relevance", which concludes the book, must be considered one of the most valuable contributions. The author tries to view Simpson in the context of his time, questioning the self-styling of the composer as a decided traditionalist. Simpson's understanding of traditionalism, so Phillippo's thesis, is a modern reaction to certain modern developments, from which Simpson is not separated as clearly as he stated himself. Phillippo shows parallels to Schoenberg's ideas on musical material, to Webern's construction with intervals, and to Stravinsky's aesthetic of abstraction. He doesn't stop at the music, and thinks about similarities to cubist painting and brutalist architecture, to Pound's glorification of masculinity, and to Hemingway. Simpson's conception of music as permanently moving, never resting is discussed from the perspectives of Schopenhauerian and Heideggerian thoughts about "will" and "being", thoughts which fit well to the Ninth Symphony, a work concluding with a soft dissonance after 50 minutes of manifold developments (p. 523). Concluding Phillippo looks on the changes of aesthetic discourse in music during the last third of the 20th century and compares Simpson's music to postmodern ideas of traditionalism.

This fine book is completed by a philological text by Martin Ratcliffe who tries to reconstruct the first concept of the opening of Symphony No. 3, by reports of friends and colleagues about their relationship with Simpson, for example Harold Truscott's entertaining description of the composition of the First Symphony, and by a detailed index of all extant compositions. The volume may be intended foremost for an English speaking public. But German musicologists should let it not unread, too. Robert Simpson can ask us many questions, worthy to think about.

Florian Schuck

Die Tonkunst 8/4 (2014), pp. 585-7; transl. FS

LIONEL PIKE
ROBERT SIMPSON'S 'GOTHIC SYMPHONY'?

Simpson's First Symphony was completed in 1951: it was not his first symphony, for he had destroyed others, including a serial one. The Symphony No. 1 was the work that partly gained him the degree of D. Mus. at Durham University;¹ and it is a symphony basically in one movement (a type he well knew from Sibelius's Seventh Symphony), for although there are changes in the length of note-values, etc, the basic pulse is constant throughout and the music is continuous. Simpson had a life-long interest in momentum, and it is that fascination that causes him to use a pulse that does not change at any point in the work. Nevertheless the symphony falls into three distinct 'movements' – moderately fast–slow–fast. I shall refer to them as First movement, Slow movement and Finale respectively, even though the work is basically a single movement: to put inverted commas round each one would make the text look unnecessarily fussy.

The basis of the work was *Cathedral Music*: this was written before the rest of the piece, and it became the slow movement.² It is a Palestrina-like (but not a pastiche) passage mainly for strings. The composer said 'I like writing calm music': his further description of this as being in madrigal style reminds one that there is little distinction between the sacred and secular music of the late sixteenth century. Imitations of the music of a far-distant time by twentieth-century composers have several different manifestations. One – as is the case with Robert Simpson – is an appreciation of medieval (Gothic, and particularly ecclesiastical) architecture, a pinnacle of building that has its musical equivalent in late sixteenth-century polyphony. Another (perhaps also found in Simpson) is an appeal to a distant time when the problems of contemporary life had not yet sprung up: indeed, in musical terms, a time before the advent of serialism and other forms of contemporary music. There is also the sheer joy in the beauty of ancient music; and a deep appreciation of the craftsmanship of the old masons, even when they carved gargoyles.

Cathedral Music is a largely E^b passage, devoid of imitations and (at first) free of dissonance: it provides a contrast with the first movement, for that lives on the conflict of seconds and a grinding of chords that move by contrary motion. The *Cathedral Music* is really the heart of the work, and it infests the Finale in a powerful way.

Simpson himself considered the work a discussion of the relationship between E^b and its opposite pole, A major – a relationship he also explored in the early string quartets.³

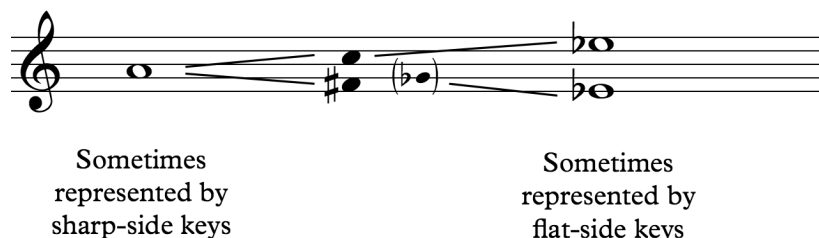
¹ Simpson tells – with a wry smile – of the viva-voce examination for the degree in which he was made to sight-sing a trombone passage from a Vaughan Williams symphony.

² Harold Truscott maintains that the work started out as a piano sonata, but he persuaded the composer that the music was too powerful for that instrument, and required orchestration. See Truscott, *The origin of the First Symphony*, in *Robert Simpson, composer – Essays, Interviews, Recollections*, ed. Jürgen Schaarwächter, Hildesheim 2013 (Studien und Materialien zur Musikwissenschaft, vol. 74), p. 47.

³ Simon Phillippo, in *Symphonic momentum and post-tonal drama: Simpson's First Symphony*, in Schaarwächter, op. cit., pp. 49–56, shows that the semitone is also of great significance to the structure of the piece.

There are two pitches that bisect that pair of notes, keeping them in balance: C^{\sharp} is one, and F^{\flat} (or G^{\flat}) is the other: thus all the main pitches are equidistant by minor thirds (see Example 1).

Example 1



We will see that these two bisecting pitches play a role in the work, if not a large one.

First movement

Exposition

Robert Simpson says that the first bar of the whole piece – a dyad on d'' and f''^{\flat} played by two D trumpets (an individual addition to the two B^{\flat} trumpets) – was added as an afterthought; ‘like the *All Clear* sounded [after an air-raid] during the war’. This opening is an inspired choice: it is slow-moving (stationary, in fact), and could thus refer to the slow motion of *Cathedral Music*; it is consonant, and could thus make the same reference; and it could be either part of the subdominant of A (the eventual tonic of the entire work) or part of the dominant of E^{\flat} (the rival key). The listener cannot, of course, know this at a first hearing; and even by hindsight one is unsure which key it represents: in fact it represents both. As often as not the rival tonal areas of the work are stated merely as keys on the sharp side or the flat side of C, one of the notes that bisect the two rival areas, as shown in Example 1.

The tonal contradictions are made clear in bar 2, where a strong B^{\flat} (which would help define the opening dyad as part of the dominant of E^{\flat}) is immediately countered by B^{\sharp} (nearer to sharp keys than flat ones). At the outset conflict is apparent. The sharp side is immediately strengthened by the repeated-note fanfare on F^{\sharp} (scored for horns, oboes and clarinets). A bass figure in parallel seconds (mostly whole tones) sounds beneath it, starting slowly (in minims) but moving into crotchets. The end of the bass phrase, on C^{\sharp} and D^{\sharp} , prolongs the ambiguity of key (a factor emphasised by the octave leap), for C^{\sharp} might refer to A major while D^{\sharp} is simply another spelling of E^{\flat} (see Example 2).

Example 2

The image shows a musical score for Example 2, consisting of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The music is in common time (C). The treble staff begins with a dynamic marking of *ff* and features a triplet of eighth notes in the first bar. The bass staff has a similar triplet in the first bar. The score continues with various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. A bracket labeled 'x' is placed under the bass staff in the final two bars of the excerpt, indicating a specific section of interest.

This conflict is clearly maintained by the semiquaver figures in the strings in bars 5–6, which use sharps in the ascending form but cancel them while descending. In bars 7 and 8 the pedal E^bs allude strongly to the sharp side, while the upward-rushing scales attempt to contradict those sharps at first, but then themselves use sharps.

At the top of these upward-rushing scales, in bar 9, an ornamental version of the d''-f'' dyad recalls the tonal conflict suggested at the opening. The high B[♯] pedal stated by the D trumpet – an unexpected sound, just as was the scoring of the opening dyad – attempts to settle matters, only to set off an even more massive set of scalic runs: there are two sorts in contrary motion, and they expand the idea of bar 5, but this time the descending scales use flats while the rising ones have sharps.

This is the end of the first subject, which has been short and concise but laden with material: the composer commented that it is useful to have various ideas to draw on at the start of a big work.⁴ It overlaps with the start of the second subject on the two D trumpets; the unusual scoring emphasises the structural significance of that point. There are two further observations to be made about this. One is that the whole first subject has been more like a classical development section than a first subject in style and content; it does not have a settled theme in a settled tonality.⁵ The second point concerns momentum: the opening dyad – motionless in bar 1 – has become full of energy in bar 9, and the semiquaver motion is elongated into minims and crotchets as the contrasting second subject begins in bars 13 and 14. The new slower motion is only possible as part of an ongoing argument because of the increase in tension and the multiplication of semiquavers in the preceding bars: the slower pace is a precursor of the *Cathedral Music* that makes up the central slow movement. The shift in note-values without creating a decrease in tension is all part of the exploration of momentum that so concerned Robert Simpson.

The second subject should, according to the conventions that Simpson knew and appreciated, be in a contrasting tonality as well as a contrasting style. Here it suggests E^b, but soon moves to F. The style of this new subject is much nearer to that of Renaissance polyphony at first, for the note-values are quite even (and white) and there are two suspensions treated in pure sixteenth-century fashion. The material, however, is a close rel-

⁴ See Schaarwächter, *op. cit.*, p. 436.

⁵ This point has been well made by Simon Phillipppo, *op. cit.*, pp. 49ff.

ative of the grinding bass figure from bars 3–5 (see Example 3, where it is marked 'x').

Example 3

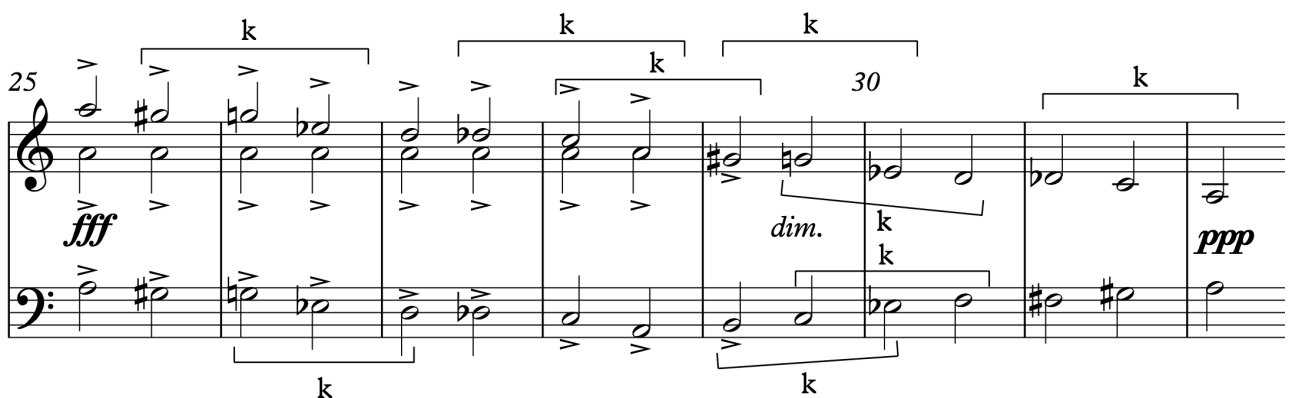


The opening of the second subject leads to a long multiple pedal – a chord of F major that recalls the upper note of the initial dyad.

Against the static background of the multiple pedal, rising flourishes move from flat to sharp keys until the F-major chord is replaced by a shift towards E (in bars 20–21), with a fanfare-like style in the higher parts. In tonal practice a firm F followed by a strong E has a particular meaning; the former will act – at least in the subconscious – as $\flat VI$ and the latter V of a tonal area (in this case it will be A).⁶ The idea is destined to be heard again, much more powerfully, towards the end of the work, in bars 815–819.

The slow multiple pedal is now on E and B in the brass, and the rest of the orchestra fling fast-repeated chords much more on the flat side against it. The final part of the second subject reverts entirely to minim motion – a giant descending ladder; this prefigures the style of the slow movement as far as rhythm is concerned, but the internal pedal A supporting a vast (somewhat chromatic) falling scale makes the overall sound quite unlike that later movement (see Example 4).

Example 4



These massive, slow-moving strides are a clear marker of the close of the Exposition, and are utterly memorable – a feature of which the composer makes use later. The striding minims at bars 25f combine the sharp (perhaps A major) and flat (perhaps mixolydian E \flat) sides, and culminate in contrary motion – an idea already heard several times – that

⁶ The semitones referred to by Simon Phillippo (see footnote 3) have relevance here.

homes in on an octave A in bar 32, though the listener is unsure of the tonal goal, despite the insistent pedal A, until the end. The whole giant staircase starts *fff* and ends *ppp*, and contains a number of statements of a figure shortly to be described as ‘knight’s move’ (see below): they are marked as ‘k’ in Example 4 whether they are in *recto* shape, inverted shape, or reversions.

This has been an extremely concise and very closely argued Exposition: its very brevity gives Simpson license to write a much more extensive Development Section.

Development Section

The Development Section (letter A, bar 33) opens with a fugue whose subject is later inverted. It starts very high up on strings alone, with only half the players on each line being used: the contrast in scoring with what has gone before is useful to mark the start of the new section. The material has three main features. One is a falling third (f'''-d''', recalling bar 1); another is a figure that rises and falls through a third (‘y’: see Example 5), an idea that is also inverted, and was derived from a similar idea in *Cathedral Music*; the third is the sequential pattern of falling thirds, which have the same derivation.

Example 5. ‘Fugue 1’



Later a semiquaver rising scale – with some notes repeated – is used (it is the figure shown in the lower part of the upper staff in Example 8). The start of the subject is virtually motionless, but shorter notes gradually increase the momentum. The interval of a falling third, however, begins with a ‘knight’s move’ shape (a leap of a third followed by a step in the same direction, or that idea backwards) – a''-g''#-e'' – which is perhaps a contraction of part of the string figure in bar 9, and is destined to play a significant role later on. I shall continue to describe it as the ‘knight’s move’ figure, and to mark it ‘k’ in the examples. The pull towards E^b is strong from time to time.

Alongside his life-long love of symphonic form Simpson had a deep love of fugue, and wrote a great many himself such that towards the end of his life I suggested to him that he write his own *Grosse Fuge*. But the dynamics of the two forms are utterly different (though, confusingly, both have what is usually described as an ‘Exposition’). The discussions about tonalities and themes that are in the nature of sonata form are not the same as the demonstration of contrapuntal devices that is the very nature of fugue. The introduction of fugue into a movement in sonata form thus requires a new dynamic – a ‘change of gear’ – that is useful at the beginning of a Development Section of a work that started out by sounding as if it was itself a symphonic development. The sense of momentum in the two forms is different, so the contrast is useful to Simpson for a while: but the ‘change of gear’ cannot be maintained for too long.

To make the point about the 'change of gear' the motion is mostly in short note-values until the longer notes of the second subject – very much in sharps – stop the forward flow of the fugue in bars 50–52. Angry chords (a very unfugal element) intervene in bars 53–55, and the material of bars 3–5 (again stated in parallel seconds) is then accompanied by runs in octaves in the strings (the 'knight's move' figure is much used) and by chord progressions in alternating woodwind and horns veering between sharp and flat keys. The notable thing in these bars is the simultaneous combination of various speeds, and the refusal to embrace a settled tonality.

A repetition of the foregoing, unfugal, material leads to a passage in which the slow-moving theme is removed, the brass instead joining in with the alternating pairs of chords: these are destined to be 'capped' in the main transition to the Finale. This is the passage that leads up to letter C (bar 70), the point at which the slowest motion presses its claim once more: a long pedal G (in various octaves) is placed against fast (sextuplet semiquaver) runs in octaves in the strings. That G[♮] cannot belong to the key of A, and is more likely to pull towards E[♭], though both tonal poles are hinted at in the strings, soon to be joined by the woodwind. All parts eventually coalesce on F[♯], which is perhaps more in the realm of A than of E[♭]. But F[♯] is significant in another way, as I have described above.

The loud, vigorous and climactic passage is followed by a sudden return to the fugal material that had started the Development Section. This new version of the fugue (at bar 76) begins a third lower than the previous statement, on F[♯] (bisecting the tonal poles), and in the woodwind rather than the strings. Again it is quiet, but this time there is a (violin) inverted pedal (on a high F[♯]) and a slow countersubject in the viola. The whole dynamic of momentum is thus changed back once more.

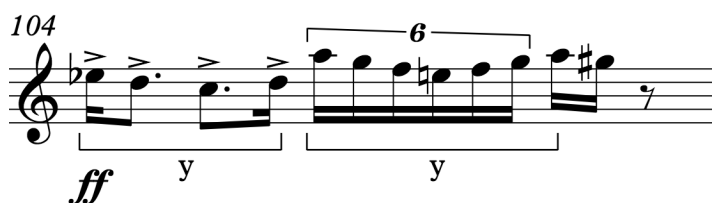
A third element, borrowed from the first five bars of the piece but now made to stand alone and stopping the progress of the fugue, is the quiet fanfare on a repeated open fifth (f[♯]-c[♯]) in the horns. Again this draws attention to one of the pitches that bisect the two poles, and it is a non-contrapuntal idea – contradicting the fundamental nature of fugue – which prevents that form from becoming too classical and formalised: indeed, it prevents fugue from dominating the 'first-movement form' dynamic. And yet it starts anew in bar 83, this time beginning on a dissonant F[♮], the (fugal) exposition involving strings and a trumpet as well, and being accompanied by a relatively slow-moving set of dyads in the bassoon, starting out from the open fifths of the preceding quiet horn fanfare but breaking away from them.

Again the progress of the fugue is stopped by the 'fanfare' – quiet and in repeated open fifths – this time on flute and bassoon (letter D, bars 97–98). The pitches here (d[♭] and a[♭]) are much more evidently on the flat side. So when the fugue starts up yet again it is with decidedly flat-side intentions, though after only two statements of the subject the progress is again halted, this time by trumpets using the soft repeated-note 'fanfare' on g[♭] and d[♭]. Yet before this latest interruption the fugue subject had blossomed into semiquaver flourishes that rise and fall through a third, a faster rhythmical development of part of its initial statement.

This leads to a change in the fugal writing, for the latest open-fifth interruption is followed by a *stretto* on the new semiquaver rising-and-falling figure ('y' in Example 5). It is played softly, mainly by half the string players, though with some woodwind too. It is like an awakening of bird-song in the early morning (though the composer would certainly reject any such programmatic ideas). For some time the texture is fully laden with these figures, the fugal *stretto* being brought more closely into line with the idea of symphonic development.

But once more the fugal development is moving on too fast, and must be checked: the checking is this time applied much more dramatically, with a loud unison passage on all the brass. It is a version of the second subject, but faster and rhythmically-altered. The first version of this theme (at bar 103) is tonally on the sharp side, but two imitations which continue the fugal idea are given in *stretti* that are nearer to flats. The fast motion is somewhat balanced by slower-moving chords that start out as open fifths (an idea derived from the 'soft fanfares') but break out into other dyads. This proves to be a second fugue, very much more energetic than the first. I shall refer to it as 'Fugue 11', and to the fugue that had started the Development Section as 'Fugue 1' (see Example 6).

Example 6. 'Fugue 11'



The subject – slightly different from the brass statement of bar 103 – makes full use of the falling and rising stepwise motion through a third and of falling semitones, and it contrasts markedly with Fugue I, being much faster and more dynamic: it thus fits more comfortably than does Fugue I into the feeling of symphonic development.

All this use of fugue suits Simpson's purpose well in this opening movement. The form presupposes conflict in a way that the other classical type of polyphony – sixteenth-century counterpoint – does not. And yet, as mentioned above, it is not the kind of conflict that is found in the classical symphony. There are nevertheless points where fugue and classic symphonic form touch. Fugue can embody a conflict of tonalities – the kind of thing endemic to the classic symphony – by virtue of having entries of the subject at various pitches, even within a (fugal) exposition: and there can be conflict and contrast between a subject and a countersubject. But the fundamental nature of the fugue, differing markedly from sonata form, is that it has contrapuntal imitation, as is also the case with sixteenth-century polyphony; so fugue is an appropriate way of introducing the *Cathedral Music* section.

The entries of the subject in Fugue 11 use both sharp-side and flat-side tonalities: a background of slow motion sounds behind these entries, until that too dissolves into

quick notes, forming a set of simultaneous inversions with the sextuplet portion of the subject. Some influence of Bruckner (the *Te Deum* and other works) is perhaps evident in the passage that then interrupts Fugue 11, with the strings in octaves (at bar 120) in a style somewhat like organ toccata figuration. Against this the woodwind and trumpets provide a two-part slow-moving idea including suspensions and resolutions that might well derive from sixteenth-century practice (though the treatment is, naturally enough, not exactly like that of the earlier period). Whatever the truth of this, there is most certainly a combination of fast and slow motion, helping to set up the *Cathedral Music* section.

A further interruption, at letter F, is the most powerful and dramatic yet. It consists of a series of triads in dotted-quaver-semiquaver rhythm counterpointed against a series of syncopated chords that dovetail with them. That element of rhythmic contrast is joined by a contrast of speed, for the second subject (from bars 14f) is introduced in the horns and trombones in bar 131. But after just one statement, very much on the sharp side, Fugue 1 resumes, though this time the material is in inversion. The rhythm of the preceding chords continues, though the texture is thinned out to two single lines, one high and one low, all the while maintaining the sharp-side tonality.

The retransition starts at bar 141, though the listener cannot be aware of this, for Simpson has disguised the moment. The new subject is magically transformed to become a fairly long horn solo, later doubled by the clarinet. This is the last idea of the Development Section, and is the exact opposite of the many classical transitions where the excitement is at its highest, prefacing the recovery of the initial material. But in this symphony that initial material was not so much a 'first subject' in feeling as a type of development; thus the retransition needs itself to be in contrast with the oncoming material, or there is the risk of the point of return being overlooked. The lyric beauty of this passage is shattered by a quite unexpected and unprepared repeat of the opening dyad in enhanced form. This has been a large-scale Development Section, using up much of the space not taken by the short Exposition.

Recapitulation

The Recapitulation begins at letter G (bar 148), simply crashing in with the opening *All Clear* dyad, but now played in octaves by all four trumpets, and on G[#] and B[♯]. The tonality of the dyad is as ambiguous here as at the opening; but, while on the page looking like a sharp key (another fact of which the listener cannot be aware) and following a lyrical solo in a settled sharp key, it can act as the minor subdominant of E^b.

Now the first subject is rewritten in a more forceful manner than at first, though the elements are the same: there is, however, a strong flat-side feeling on this occasion. The second subject (bar 160ff – the material shown in Example 3) is also rewritten, being announced in imitative entries this time and continuing the flat-side feeling. There are three regular *stretto* entries at the distance of a bar-and-a-half, as if in a classical fugue, the imitations replacing the *tremolandi* etc. of the Exposition version. But there is more to this *stretto*, for the note-values are generally slow, the provision of suspensions and resolutions is fairly classical, and thus the whole might be more readily considered a foretaste

of the neo-Renaissance music that is about to start. This is the kind of preparation that was missing at the retransition. The first movement is rounded off by a repeat of the striding downward minim chords of the giant staircase, which are an utterly memorable way-marker. Here the A tonality of the end of the Exposition (shown in Example 4) is turned into its most distant rival, E \flat .

Slow movement: Cathedral Music

The slow movement, which begins at letter H (bar 180), does not change the basic pulse of the preceding music, but is simply written in the longer note-values that have been pre-figured there. This is the first time there has been a settled tonality in the symphony, even though elements of sharp-side and flat-side keys have been in evidence in the first movement. Dyneley Hussey rightly said of it that it contains ‘a serene contemplation of ideal beauty such as none of this composer’s contemporaries has imagined’.⁷ As mentioned before, it was this *Cathedral Music* that was Simpson’s initial idea, and it was with this part of the work that he began composition of the symphony: as in sixteenth-century music generally there are many white notes (see Example 7).

Example 7. ‘Cathedral Music’

The image shows a musical score for 'Cathedral Music' in E-flat major. It consists of two systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system begins at bar 180 and ends at bar 185. The second system begins at bar 185 and ends at bar 190. The music is marked 'pp cantabile'. Brackets labeled 'x' and 'y' indicate specific melodic lines. The first system shows a three-voice texture with a settled tonality of E-flat. The second system continues the melodic lines with various note values and accidentals.

The settled tonality (even if it has a spattering of accidentals) is accompanied by a settled minim pulse, and by an almost classical (in the sense of ‘late-Renaissance’) use of suspensions and resolutions. The conflicts of the first movement are here forgotten in quiet music with a three-voice texture. At this stage there is no attempt to announce the material in imitation, the natural language of church music of the sixteenth century.

The first movement was written to enshrine this *Cathedral Music*, its material being invented so as to prefigure it, so it is instructive to discover how the composer adapted

⁷ See Donald Macauley, *The Power of Robert Simpson. A biography*, 2013, p. 60.

the material. The sequential thirds of Example 5 are inverted from bars 181–182, and figure ‘y’ of that Example is at first partially suggested in *Cathedral Music* and then fully stated. The ‘knight’s move shape’ (‘k’) is the figure that starts the slow movement: and the octave leap of bars 186–187 is destined to achieve great prominence, but in the Finale.

Why is this *Cathedral Music* here? First of all, it is not an imitation of choral music: such an idea would more probably have been scored for woodwind (though Simpson disliked the sound of English Cathedral choristers, likening them to recorders – though that would not have precluded him from imitating a continental choral style). Second, it does not use the imitative language of Renaissance polyphony. It is more likely that the composer was intending to represent cathedral architecture: he loved Gothic (and especially the Isle-de-France Cathedrals), and that for him the musical equivalent was something approaching the Palestrina style.⁸

Coming after the conflict of the opening movement, this *Cathedral Music* must represent the peace and quiet (even the impression of Eternity) of Gothic cathedrals, an impression that must have affected Simpson even though he was not a believer.

E^b is not maintained unsullied for long, for an A[♯] (which in no way tries to move the tonality back to the home tonic) and some D^bs soon occur, and there is a distinct move towards G major at one stage. The bass line is uncharacteristically given to the viola for quite some time, and the range of the top part soars very high above that of any human voice: yet the *cantabile* marking might well make one think of some ethereal choir. Figure ‘y’ is much used, and made to sound like the ornamental resolutions of suspensions in sixteenth-century polyphony (at bar 190f, for instance: see Example 7). At letter I (bar 213) the cello joins in; but this is still an unusual sound for a string orchestra since the double basses are silent, and one always misses their fundamental contribution when they are absent. Perhaps this is another appeal to the choral style: certainly the opening of *Cathedral Music* is yet another place where the orchestration acts as a way-marker.

Horns take over the argument at bar 246, and they do so in two parts that make clear reference to the dissonance treatment of Renaissance polyphony: there is, however, still no imitation. But beneath it the cellos and (at last) the double basses make reference to the faster material of the outer movements, though in a pedal that is ‘stationary’ as far as ongoing motion is concerned. This is a reminder of the rhythmical relationship between *Cathedral Music* and the two outer sections that book-end it.

The essence of this symphony is the treatment of momentum, of Time: it is a notion that concerned Simpson throughout his composing life. In the First Symphony there is perhaps, the impression that the *Cathedral Music* material represents Eternity, while the material with a greater sense of forward propulsion stands for Time. At all events, the composer is very careful to dovetail the various types of motion. He had introduced long notes into the first movement, and now, at letter K (bar 253) there is a very soft preview of the Finale’s motion and its opening theme. This is derived from the second subject of

⁸ Sibelius’s Sixth Symphony, which starts with a somewhat similar appeal to Palestrina-style counterpoint, is discussed in Pike, *Beethoven, Sibelius and ‘the Profound Logic’*, 1978, pp. 188ff. Towards the end of his life Simpson turned again to Palestrina, and was contemplating working on the *Song of Songs* cycle of motets.

the first movement (bars 14f, shown in Example 3), but presented in a much quicker, even scherzo-like form. It continues with a canon by inversion, a C-minor ascending scale being imitated by a descending scale of A major (as shown in Example 8, which is actually the beginning of the Finale), the pair combining flat- and sharp-side keys. But all the time the *Cathedral Music* continues in the horns as if nothing has happened, unaffected by this attempt to initiate a Scherzo or Finale.

Woodwind gradually take over the *Cathedral Music* material, so the sound might be said to become nearer to that of a choir. The oboe starts the process in bar 259, using the 'knight's move' shape ('y') in diminished note-values. There are certainly more black notes from here to the end of the slow movement, as the whole woodwind choir and horns join in; and now the sharp-side keys are mixed in with flat ones: but the steady pulse of suspensions and resolutions is maintained.

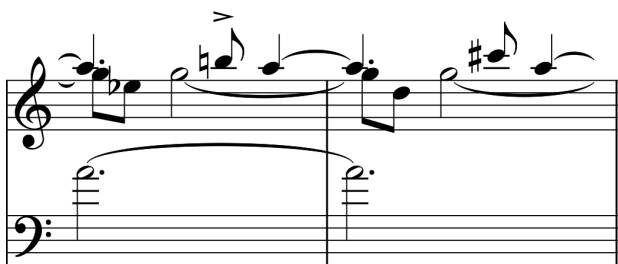
The lack of any real sense of form in this slow movement is explained by its position in what is fundamentally a single-movement work: *Cathedral Music* forms part of an extended 'First-movement form', and it is prepared as early as bar 14. In a sense it is an extended 'second subject', so it will require recapitulation in due course. But there is more to it than this: its very uneventfulness imbues it with a sense of calm lacking in the first movement. In the latter a large number of events crowding in on one another – even the beginning sounds like a development – create a feeling of dynamism that contributes greatly to the impression of momentum. *Cathedral Music* provides the opposite pole.

Finale

Exposition

The Finale breaks in without a gap at bar 246, using the material that had attempted to start this section some time earlier, and helping to clarify the fact that the tempi of the two movements are related. This, however, is the first time that triple rhythms have been used in the work (though they were foreshadowed during *Cathedral Music*). The leaps in the melodic material and the return to the use of seconds in the harmony immediately give a fresh feel to the music: the upper instruments present what can only be described as a 'canon by inversion', a motif whose interlocking dotted rhythms help to provide momentum (see Example 8);

Example 8



but nevertheless the 'knight's move' shape continues to occur (for example at letter M). This last movement will prove to be partly scherzo (because of the fast triple rhythms), partly Finale, and partly development section for the whole work: it is also a recapitulation of the first movement and also of *Cathedral Music*.

The opening, upper material of the Finale (see Example 8) is soon underpinned by a striding bass in dotted minims, providing a slower counterpoint. It moves between natural and flat-side keys, but heads towards a more rhythmic tucket, derived from bar 2 of Example 8, that concentrates on A. But at first this is only the foundation of a theme that uses parallel thirds rather than the parallel seconds of the first movement; so the more mellifluous, more consonant, type of music heard in the slow movement affects the harmony at some points. A theme – or more than one – spelled out in parallel thirds is destined to fill up much of the Finale. At bar 310 a part of the opening theme – the rising scale, a feature borrowed from bar 20 – is combined with a slower version of the 'canon by inversion' (shown at the end of Example 8) which follows that theme: and the two lines proceed in parallel thirds, veering between the keys of A (?minor) and E^b. There is then a mixture of quaver leaping figures (derived from the 'canon by inversion') in the violins and slower syncopated chords in the woodwind and lower strings, very much based on flat-side keys but heading for G.

But as G is reached all four horns enter on e^b and g', recalling the start of *Cathedral Music*: the scoring provides a firm reminder of the passage in the Slow movement at bars 246ff, where horns had used the *Cathedral Music* material against a fast triplet pedal on the lower strings. While the rest of the orchestra continues as if nothing had happened, the horns (immediately joined by a solo trumpet) take up the slow movement material in long notes. This yet again suggests that the Finale material has started too soon, and that the *Cathedral Music* is not yet ready to give way: but it also further emphasises the point about the relationship of the Finale's motion to that of the slow movement; and it acts as a recapitulation of the opening of the *Cathedral Music* in a re-scored form. There is thus clear dovetailing of the two movements. Furthermore, the very absence of events in the slow movement's material helps apply the brake to the energetic opening of the Finale, at least for the time being.

It was at about this point – 'just after the beginning of the finale, at the brass chorale in the slow version' – that Robert Simpson first discovered Nielsen. Before this point Bruckner had been his main influence, especially teaching him 'how to handle great blocks of loud and soft without transitions'.⁹ He heard the *Sinfonia Espansiva* and it knocked him

⁹ See Schaarwächter, *op. cit.*, p. 436.

sideways ('What a way to start a symphony', he observed). He said he had always felt that there should be music like this, but he had never previously encountered it, and it stopped him in his tracks for some time. One of Simpson's most important discoveries in Nielsen was the notion that music must have a 'life force', a 'current' – Nielsen's description – and it was some time before he could take up composing again. There is no discernible break in style at this point in the symphony, though eventually a new – short and quite tuneful – melodic idea occurs that has not been used before (it does, however, grow organically from the preceding material). Perhaps, however, the 'life force' takes over from this point (Simpson was fond of observing, apropos the 'life force', 'we all know how a tree can split a rock'). Yet we must be clear that all the features of the symphony up to this point – the E^b-A dichotomy, the treatment of momentum, the use of 'First-movement form' spread over the whole work, the integration of the material – were already in place before Simpson's discovery of Nielsen.

The *Cathedral Music* continues in the brass, clearly emphasising the flat-side keys, and in a powerful expression indicating most forcibly that this idea wishes to dominate the material specific to the Finale. It is as if the architecture one had seen from afar is now close at hand and absolutely dominating. There is now more imitation, particularly of the figure that leaps up an octave before moving down and up stepwise through a third (as in bars 196–197 in Example 7). Naturally, the addition of imitation brings the style nearer to that of sixteenth-century polyphony than had previously been the case; but, more to the point, we now understand why imitation was not used earlier. The octave leap injects a sense of power not felt in previous statements of *Cathedral Music*, and the quiet of the earlier neo-Renaissance passages is here transformed into one glowing with exultant triumph.

At letter R (bar 389) the woodwind and strings attempt to start the Finale's initial material yet again, but the *Cathedral Music* is now so powerful, so absolutely dominating, that it cannot be shifted. Nevertheless it is forced to move into a cadence on A major at bar 436; but A is reached from a chord of B major, whose third is only another spelling of E^b. This cadence follows shortly after one in D major (at letter T, bar 420) that is strongly emphasised by the timpani and lower strings in a rhythmic figure that had been heard for a short while against the *Cathedral Music*. That D is strongly stated since it recalls the opening d''-f''^h proposition, and in the Finale (where it is turned into a major third at this point) it acts as the subdominant of the final goal, A.¹⁰

This has been a massive insertion of the *Cathedral Music* motion into the Finale, and it dovetails the two movements impressively: but in order to do this it was necessary that it be a bold and forceful statement. Eventually the Finale's material resumes, somewhat timidly because of the utter dominance of the foregoing neo-Renaissance music, at the bar before letter U (bar 439). It is changed as compared with its first appearance, being shorn of the 'canon by inversion', being in octaves in the first violins and violas instead, and having a new pendant that includes both the 'knight's move' shape and the stepwise rise

¹⁰ It becomes a powerful part of the final cadence.

and fall through a third. This is the 'new Robert Simpson', coming after his encounter with Nielsen's *Sinfonia Espansiva*.

An oboe solo (at bar 448: see Example 9) introduces what sounds like new material (though its elements have been heard before), and it is accompanied by repeated-quaver dyads in thirds in the strings, derived from the opening d''-f'' of the whole piece.

Example 9

The attempt to turn this idea into a fugue by imitating it on the solo flute and bassoon is immediately halted by a quick rhythmic insistence on octave E[♮]s, though the new subject is picked up again at letter V (bars 459ff). It is scored more fully this time, and it has an additional two-part counterpoint on the flute and piccolo that provides a slower-moving idea using suspensions and resolutions in almost classical (in the sense of 'late-Renaissance') fashion.

This material is interrupted at letter W (bar 477) by a quite new-sounding idea – the nearest thing to a 'tune' in the work so far – which gives a strong impression of being the second subject. It derives from the stepwise movement up and down through a third, and it enshrines a conflict – even if an understated one – between E[♭] and E[♮], so acknowledging the tonal argument of the whole work, if not in any way seeking to settle the matter (see Example 10).

Example 10

The image shows a musical score for Example 10. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble clef staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The melody starts with a slur over the first two measures, with a 'y' marking above it. The bass clef staff provides a rhythmic accompaniment of interlocking dotted rhythms. A measure number '480' is written above the treble clef staff in the fourth measure.

Melodically the tune is also linked with the 4-3-2-3 resolutions of *Cathedral Music*. The slower pace of the tune is possible because it floats on the running quaver motion of the strings that has first led up to it and then sounds beneath it. This idea could be the result of the discovery of the 'life force' in Nielsen.

A short interruption based on material from the opening of the Finale leads to another statement of the second subject, though now cast in decidedly sharp keys. Again the first subject material of the Finale interrupts (at bar 506), but now with the continual throbbing quaver chords beneath it. Here it is stated as a long tune in octaves in the violins, and it clearly emphasises the sharp keys. The whole is presented quietly, with some comments from the woodwind and horns; and it is extended until the motion slows into crotchets.

The second subject tune (that shown in Example 10) reappears at bar 544, again emphasising sharp keys but this time accompanied by the 'canon by inversion' material of the opening theme (see Example 8) of the Finale. This is a quite brief statement of the new tune, and the 'inverted canon' theme outlives it. The 'canon by inversion' device (particularly that shown at the end of Example 8) proves a useful means of propelling the music forwards, the interlocking dotted rhythms being a powerful driving force. It is an idea that is pursued at length, and is soon joined in counterpoint by a third subject that contrasts with it but floats splendidly upon its forward drive. This third subject is heard first of all at bar 565, largely stepwise and in parallel thirds: it starts by emphasising A major, and flows along lyrically – particularly because of a number of syncopations and the slower motion that contrasts with the canon (see Example 11).

Example 11

The image shows a musical score for Example 11, consisting of three staves: a top staff in treble clef, a middle staff in alto clef, and a bottom staff in bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The top staff features a series of chords, some with a 'trmn' (trumpet) marking and a fermata. The middle staff begins with a forte (ff) dynamic and contains a melodic line with slurs and accents. The bottom staff provides a bass line with slurs and accents. A measure number '575' is placed above the top staff. The score ends with a double bar line.

A somewhat 'singing' quality also results from the scoring for woodwind. (Trombones join in for one of the statements.) The third subject material eventually moves towards flat-side keys, and a long sequence of crotchet parallel thirds (with the 'knight's move' shape very much in evidence) prolongs the tune. Eventually the canonic material drops out, but its forward thrust has been powerful enough for the sequential 'knight's move' shapes to survive by themselves, and they continue 'free-wheeling' for some while.

Little asides occur from time to time: there are dotted-rhythm repeated-note octaves (but with rests rather than dots to make them more pungent and persuasive); a rhythmic fanfare; and the rising scalic figure from the Finale's opening theme. But the second subject (the new, 'post-Nielsen' tune shown in Example 10) returns at bar 618, this time played by muted trumpets and one trombone, with the foregoing material dovetailed into it, and with clear opposition of E^bs and E^bs.

The equal-crotchet pendant of the third subject (as in bar 576 of Example 11) takes over from this (at bar 630) in a passage interspersed with elements of the Finale's first subject. At intervals the 'canon by inversion' theme (as at the end of Example 8) crops up to keep the forward motion under way, but now the rising and falling scale elements are separated out rather than being heard in counterpoint. There is a clear leaning back towards the flat side, though a sudden interruption of two chords (a short B-flat one moving to a long C-major one at bar 666) neutralises the tendency. C, as mentioned above, is one of the pitches that exactly bisects the two tonal poles of A and E^b, and its presence here is clearly intended to create a balance between the two rival areas at a stage in the work where it is important that neither shall seem to be dominant. The pair of chords is a reminder of those heard in the first movement at bars 55ff, but now greatly enhanced.

Development, and False Recapitulation

The Development Section is quite short this time; that is because a great deal of the last movement is concerned with development of one kind or another. It begins by pulling in two opposing tonal directions: the 'canon by inversion' (as at the end of Example 8) starts again, this time accompanied by sustained woodwind chords and a further, almost canonic, running semiquaver first-violin idea. The canon then ceases to be in inversion, and the texture thickens (detached two-note figures in the woodwind being added).

There is clearly growing excitement here – indeed, it proves to be a retransition, and the excitement is of the kind missing from the corresponding place in the first movement – until the two chords occur again, this time *fortissimo* in the woodwind and horns, and lead to a Recapitulation. This retransition proves to be the more powerful because of the underplaying of that feature earlier in the symphony; but it is, in fact, a misleading Recapitulation, for the real one comes a little later, and completely upstages it.

This false Recapitulation starts at bar 710, and it consists of a varied version of the opening material of the first movement and – more clearly – of the Finale, though now louder and slower. A real Recapitulation should recover the main tonality; but here the key is in limbo between the two sides, yet the ‘canon by inversion’ is powerfully expressed, the two lines holding the key areas in balance and propelling the music forward most decisively. What sounds like a new subject at bar 742 is derived from the first movement’s second subject (bar 14), and the rising scale from bar 20, though shorn of its imitations. The continuation, however, resembles the material of the Finale’s third subject (that shown in Example 11), an idea made even more evident at bar 761, though that proves to be no more than an introduction to the ‘new tune’ of the Finale’s second subject (see Example 10), in the bar before letter Kk (bar 765). Here the main tonal centre is A, though the lower part contradicts it – if only in passing form – with a flatter leaning.

The solo D trumpet briefly tries to derail the second subject (that shown in Example 10, bars 779ff), but to no avail, and the ‘new tune’ continues for some time until single-note octave fanfares – very powerful since they are in quadruplet rhythms that contrast with the prevailing triple time – sound first on F[♯] in the trumpets and then on E[♯] on the horns, suggesting a tonal movement on to A (a normal ^bVI-V preparation in tonality): it is a greatly enhanced recapitulation of the idea heard in bars 20–21. These fanfares lead to a series of crashing pairs of chords that preface a contrapuntal combination of the first movement’s second subject with a version of the Finale’s opening (bar 825). Here sharp keys are emphasised, and the idea is soon repeated several times, the Finale’s material being sometimes inverted. The tonal emphasis is now strongly on A. This is the retransition for the Recapitulation proper, and it is necessary for it to outdo the two previous ones – that leading to the Recapitulation in the first movement, and that introducing the false Recapitulation in the Finale. That does much to explain the repeated-note fanfares in a quadruplet rhythm that contrasts with the prevailing pulse – an idea that has not occurred in the previous retransitions – and the tumultuous texture.

Recapitulation

Now comes the real Recapitulation – a Recapitulation not just for the Finale but for the whole symphony. This is an indication that the entire piece is a re-thinking of First-movement form: Robert Simpson commented that in a big work ‘balance and symmetry are important, hence the recapitulations in sonata form’.¹¹ It begins at bar 859 with the opening dyad, but now announced by the woodwind and horns on B^b and D. This is some dis-

¹¹ See Schaarwächter, *op. cit.*, p. 456.

tance from A major, though it is an incomplete dominant of E^b (E^bs, however, sound in the strings): as before, then, the listener cannot tell to what key the dyad will eventually lead. At this point it necessarily takes up six bars rather than the four fairly steady beats of the opening, and the extra excitement here is enhanced by the running quavers in octaves in the strings. These runs emphasise the flat side, but use E^bs rather than E^bs.

The subsequent portions of the first movement's opening are then repeated, but the note-values are necessarily different, and the slow-moving trombone figure is now announced in unisons rather than in parallel seconds, with much fuller scoring. The fanfares at bars 896f are not taken from the first movement's opening but from part of its second subject (bars 20f), so telescoping the Recapitulation somewhat and saving a number of bars.

That saving of space – an idea that Simpson has identified in his great predecessors – gives him room to introduce another idea: this is the first movement's second subject (bars 14f; see Example 3) now transformed into the style of the *Cathedral Music*, and here in imitation. The new – and last – portion of *Cathedral Music* begins at bar 903: violin figuration somewhat like the 'canon by inversion' (from Example 8) dovetails into it, but soon dies away, leaving the most powerful piece of *Cathedral Music* yet. It includes little written-out ornaments that help to maintain the rhythmic impetus and also, perhaps, give the impression that we are now close enough to see even the smallest details of the building. This music is loud, dominated by brass (reminding us that the composer was brought up as a brass player), and presents more of a climax than any of the preceding portions of *Cathedral Music*. It is a long passage, and manages to combine both flat and sharp sides of the tonality: moreover, there is much of Bruckner in it (despite the discovery of Nielsen), for Bruckner had himself written many neo-Renaissance pieces of church music, some of them with brass accompaniment.

The long notes of this passage return to the original notion of *Cathedral Music*, but the material is different: it is imitative and with little written-out ornaments. But the connection with the slow movement is very clear, as is the idea that this is an enhanced Recapitulation. Here is the ultimate climax of the work, even though it could not be said to emphasise the final goal of A (it ends on a chord of E major). It is the Recapitulation of the great downward-striding passage – the giant staircase – in equal minims from bar 25, now properly heard again in A, that clinches the matter of tonality at bars 1045ff. As before there are brief mentions of E^b, though they do nothing to divert the attention away from A major. At the same time the strings use an inverted form of the theme from the start of the Finale (the start of Example 8).

A series of syncopated C^bs with off-beat emphasis from the trumpet gives a short feel of the flat side, and briefly introduces the melodic material of *Cathedral Music* (there is, again, an appeal to the ^bVI-V preparation for the tonic here, for C^b would prepare the rival tonal area of E^b). This material had previously only been recalled insofar as its slow note-values were concerned, but now the melodic material is also recalled, if in a rhythmically-altered shape. It is, though, in its original key of E^b. All this time the timpani have been pounding away at the eventual tonal goal, A. The final gesture returns to the opening

dyad, but makes it major (D-F[#]), and this proves to be the subdominant of A.

Perhaps the query in my title needs to remain, for it is not certain that in the end the Gothic matter in the symphony triumphs over the surrounding material. Nevertheless it is the *fons et origo* of the work, and its influence floods over into the final movement. It acts at first as the still centre of the turning wheel – an idea of T.S.Eliot's that seems quite relevant to Robert Simpson's *First Symphony*;¹² but it does not remain as that still centre, for it grows in intensity through the Finale, and attempts to dominate it. In many ways it does so: and yet it is eventually powerless to affect the tonal outcome of the work, despite the final strong C^bs that, following precedent earlier in the piece, might have suggested movement towards E^b. But the symphony has masterful characteristics beyond those connected with the Gothic: and it has an individual character, quite unlike that of any of the composer's other symphonies. It is a demonstration and exploration of momentum on the very largest scale, and of how the number of events – or lack of them – affects the listener's perception of pace; and it demonstrates the use of orchestral scoring to delineate the various stages in the argument. It is an object-lesson in the handling of space, and the 'saving of space' so that it might be used elsewhere. It is a masterly demonstration that First-movement form can be relevant to an entire work – one in several 'movements' cast as a single-movement symphony. This could only have been achieved by a composer with a deep knowledge of – and a deep love of – sonata form; and, moreover, by one who understood the subconscious effect on the listener of certain tonal features, and their use over a large canvas. It is a quite extraordinary achievement for any symphony, let alone a 'first' one.

¹² The idea occurs in both *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) and *Burnt Norton* (1943), but Mrs Angela Simpson has informed me, in a private conversation, that she cannot remember her husband having any interest in Eliot.

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