

ROBERT SIMPSON

COMPOSER



Essays  
Interviews  
Recollections

Edited by Jürgen Schaarwächter

With a foreword by Angela Simpson

Olms

Jürgen Schaarwächter (ed.) – Robert Simpson: Composer

# Studien und Materialien zur Musikwissenschaft

Band 74

Jürgen Schaarwächter (ed.)

Robert Simpson: Composer



Georg Olms Verlag  
Hildesheim · Zürich · New York  
2013

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Umschlagmotiv:  
Robert Simpson, *Eppur si muove*, 1985, p. 29 of the MS score,  
The Robert Simpson Archive at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

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Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation  
in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten  
sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.



Gedruckt auf säurefreiem und alterungsbeständigem Papier  
Umschlaggestaltung: Barbara Gutjahr, Hamburg  
Herstellung: Beltz Druckpartner GmbH, 69502 Hemsbach  
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Printed in Germany

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[www.olms.de](http://www.olms.de)

ISBN 978-3-487-15003-1

ISSN 0176-0033

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Robert Simpson, photograph by Peter Musgrave.

## Foreword

### Angela Simpson

When I opened the parcel containing this 500-page marathon on Bob's music, I was overwhelmed by all the hard work that had produced this book. What comes through, over and over again, is the expertise and musical insight into Bob's creative life. I knew him as a man of humanity and integrity – he never felt he had to conform to the latest fashion and he always lived by his principles. I think he would have been very touched by all the understanding of the music and the man that this book reveals. Thank you all.

## Preface

### Jürgen Schaarwächter

Robert Simpson was a composer whose thinking sometimes was alarmingly uncompromising. Most straight in thinking, his sincerity did not always make him friends with those who thought they knew better. Hence it was not at all surprising when he took opposition to those who considered ‘avant-gardism’ the only solution to post-World War II compositional challenges, when he expressed himself loudly against BBC policy, when he was outspoken in his pacifism. It is well known that he was a keen amateur scientist and a passionate astronomer, and the dedications of several of his compositions display a man much more widely read than many others. His political and personal statements could be brusque but were always based on most profound knowledge. Interested in a vast variety of topics as well as musical repertoire, he had clear favourites in the music of the past, some of whose music influenced him deeply – we may but name here Haydn, Beethoven, Bruckner, Sibelius, and Nielsen; and without Robert Simpson the name of Havergal Brian might well much-less known nowadays than it is. Both as a broadcaster (particularly with his much-loved radio programme *The Innocent Ear*) and as a ‘communicator’ on music (both in public talks or as a writer of music), it was always his intent to widen the listener’s understanding of music. His programme notes for concerts were of immense scope, and are sadly not all preserved in the Robert Simpson Archive at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Also his own compositions sometimes deeply reflect his analytical approach to music by others. But of course they are far more – they are important utterings in a still far too much neglected history of late twentieth-century British music. Undoubtedly one of the core figures in the creation of both symphonies and string quartets during this era, his œuvre was much more diversified and still offers ample opportunity for musicians, audience and scholars alike to uncover hitherto hardly known treasures.

In the present volume Robert Simpson’s music itself is scholarly assessed (complemented by an essay on his writings on music as well as several interviews and recollections of friends and companions, the largest part of the latter giving a kind of general introduction). Only thirty years ago the composer might have been somewhat

averse to being treated as a ‘historic matter’, though the research of the music of Robert Simpson has begun most carefully and non-speculatively. One of the earliest and keenest of researchers was Lionel Pike, who has, together with Graham Melville-Mason, been the instigator of the present book, which however took several years to reach its present form. The research of the music of Robert Simpson is still in its very beginnings, and it was especially Lionel Pike, a close friend of Robert Simpson’s, who has, in his capacity as Lecturer (and later Professor) of Music at the Royal Holloway University of London, not only conducted intense research in the matter himself, but also invited and encouraged several younger scholars to work on this subject, including Edward Green, Simon Phillippo, John Pickard, Martin Ratcliffe and the editor. Other authors, such as Matthew Best, Hans Keller†, Andrew Keener, Malcolm MacDonald, John McCabe, Kevin Norbury, Michael Oliver†, Jennifer Parkes, Harold Truscott†, John Underwood and Eric Wilson had been companions through some areas of life and often close personal friends of Robert Simpson’s. Finally we have some authors who had not known Robert Simpson personally, but who for one or another reason agreed to the editor’s invitation to contribute to the present volume, including Paul Conway, who did his doctoral thesis on late twentieth-century British symphonism, and Terry Hazell†, the editor’s predecessor as Chairman of the Robert Simpson Society.

Since it was clear from the beginning that we would not go for a more superficial survey of all areas of Robert Simpson’s music it was necessary to limit ourselves to only a comparatively small portion of his output – leaving a sufficient number of works to an equally deep discussion in the future. It is intended that a full bibliography on Robert Simpson be always available on the website of the Robert Simpson Society, so that any future research be facilitated.

We are particularly grateful to all authors, some of whose texts had only restricted circulation in *Tonic*, the annual publication of the Robert Simpson Society, available solely to members and hence, although frequently quoted in reference sources, not at all widely available. Several of these texts have been revised by the authors, some of them considerably, others were given extensive editing due to the restrictions *Tonic* required, particularly with respect to music examples. Also we would like to express our gratitude to the estates of Hans Keller (Milein Cosman Keller), Michael Oliver (The Michael Oliver Trust) and Harold Truscott (Guy Rickards) who have most kindly given permission to (re-)publish their respective texts. Angela Simpson has most kindly given permission to reproduce any musical or written matter included in this volume. According to German copyright law, music examples in scholarly publications are copyright-free; the (conjectural) reconstructions provided by Martin Ratcliffe remain the author’s copyright. Copyright of Robert

Simpson's printed music remains with his publishers, who are named in the Catalogue of Works. The music examples were typeset by John McCabe, Alan Marshall†, Mark Henegar, the editor and not least professional music editor Gal Hartman. Lionel Pike was the most thorough and encouraging of proof-readers imaginable, in spite of deteriorating eyesight, and David J. Jones most kindly prepared the index. But our gratitude goes particularly to the Robert Simpson Society without whose generosity the publication of this book would not have been possible.

It is hoped that this publication, long overdue and still only covering part of Robert Simpson's output, will help to a deeper understanding of the composer and his œuvre, and to inspire involvement in Robert Simpson's output on any conceivable level.



The man and the music



## Robert Simpson: a biographical note

### Jennifer Parkes

Robert Wilfred Levick Simpson was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1921 in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire. His father, Robert Warren Simpson, was of Scottish descent, while his mother, Helena Hendricks (*née* Govaars) was of Dutch stock. Robert Simpson senior was proud of the putative, though unsubstantiated, family connection with Sir James Simpson, who pioneered the use of anaesthetics, and hoped that his son would pursue a medical career. In fact, after finishing his education at Westminster City School, the young Robert Simpson did study medicine in London for two years, but happening to hear Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony at a BBC Promenade Concert, he decided that he would rather be a composer than a doctor, though during the Second World War Simpson, a confirmed pacifist, put his early medical training to good use by working with an ARP mobile surgical unit, thus making a valiant, albeit non-combatant, contribution to the general war effort.

From 1942 until 1946, in spite of the difficulties occasioned by the war, Simpson studied harmony and counterpoint privately with Herbert Howells in London. He had enormous respect for his teacher, particularly Howells' ability to write fugue, a form of composition which never ceased to fascinate Simpson. He recalled how, at one tutorial, he had taken along a fugue of his own, one with which he was quite pleased. He reported that Howells simply took out his fountain pen and, in his exquisitely neat manuscript, wrote a new fugue, using his pupil's material, but exploring it in ways Simpson himself had never dreamed of, and all with as much ease as if he were writing a letter. It was a lesson Simpson never forgot: to the end of his life he never stopped trying to find new ways to explore musical material.

His early life was by no means devoid of music. His parents were both members of the Salvation Army, and Robert Simpson played the trumpet and cornet in Salvation Army, and other, brass bands. The love of brass band music remained constant throughout his life: he revelled in the power and energy so often embodied in this kind of music. Politically, too, he was inclined to sympathize with the factory and

colliery bands of the industrial north. He wrote several pieces for brass band, starting with the *Canzona* of 1958. Some of these pieces were written specifically for competitions. His last work for brass band was *Vortex*, written in 1989.

Robert Simpson's early musical career was in journalism, writing for such publications as *Music Review* and *Music Survey*. He also gave lectures on music: in all these activities, his ability to communicate complex musical processes to the layman was the hallmark of his success. In 1947, together with Harold Truscott, he founded the Exploratory Concert Society in order to promote works which were unfashionable at the time but which were of a high musical calibre. In particular, works by such composers as Carl Nielsen, Anton Bruckner and Havergal Brian were brought to the notice of the concert-going public.

1951 was a particularly important year for Robert Simpson. He had written and destroyed four symphonies, but now his fifth – officially his First Symphony – earned him the degree of D.Mus. at Durham University. Furthermore, Sir Steuart Wilson, musical director at the BBC, had taken notice of the young composer and journalist, and in particular had been attracted by the ethos of the Exploratory Concerts Society. So it was that, in 1951, he invited Robert Simpson to join the music division of the BBC. Thus began a thirty-year long association with the Corporation, during which Simpson worked with various other musical luminaries of his generation, notably Deryck Cooke and Hans Keller. Many Radio 3 listeners from that era will remember with particular pleasure and affection the series *The Innocent Ear*. Here Simpson would introduce listeners to a piece of music, probably not well known but certainly of excellent quality, by talking about the music and giving pointers as to what to listen for (another example of his ability to communicate effectively with the musical laity). He would then play a recording of the piece, and only at the end would he reveal the name of the piece and the identity of its composer.

It might be thought that a busy work schedule at the BBC, together with writing and lecturing on music, would inhibit any compositional activity, but, in fact, during this time Simpson composed more than half of his symphonies and eight of fifteen string quartets, as well as various chamber works and pieces for brass band.

1980 was a turbulent and decisive year. As a result of the musicians' strike, a significant number of the BBC Promenade Concerts were cancelled. Simpson, who had been becoming increasingly frustrated and disillusioned by what was happening, resigned from the BBC and wrote *The Proms and Natural Justice* (published 1981) as a protest against the system where one director's individual preferences were allowed

to influence the Proms programme year after year: he was especially concerned that many fine British composers and performers were being neglected.

His resignation from the BBC gave Robert Simpson more time to compose. By now, he had already decided that he had said all that he wanted to say about music in words. Those who had read his books on Bruckner, Nielsen *et al* might be forgiven for being dismayed at this decision. After all, Simpson's work on these two composers, in particular, had been acknowledged at the highest level: in 1956 Denmark awarded Simpson the Carl Nielsen Gold Medal, and in 1962 he was awarded the Medal of Honour of the Bruckner Society of America. Nevertheless, Simpson was adamant that anything further he wished to say about music would best be said in music itself.

Shortly after his resignation from the BBC, Robert Simpson suffered the loss of his wife, Bessie (*née* Fraser), whom he had married in 1946, but in 1982 he married Angela Musgrave. On holiday in Ireland in 1986, the couple fell in love with a house overlooking Tralee Bay, bought it, and moved there from Chearsley in Buckinghamshire. With them went Simpson's personal astronomical telescope, which was relocated to the hill above his new home. Simpson was a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, and his interest in matters astronomical is acknowledged in the title of his virtuoso organ piece, *Eppur si muove*. Enjoying the tranquillity of his rural surroundings, Robert Simpson settled to a life of composing and lecturing. He also became involved with Irish broadcasting and Irish performances, and he was able to continue his astronomical observations. Sadly, this idyllic lifestyle came to an abrupt end in 1991, when, during a lecture tour in England, he suffered a severe stroke. With the help of his wife, Angela, who acted as his amanuensis, he was able to complete his Second String Quintet (published 1995), but undertook no new compositions.

Though physically incapacitated, Robert Simpson remained mentally as alert as ever, and friends on holiday in the vicinity would receive a warm welcome, in return for which they would be expected to render up a detailed account of the day's doings, all of which their host would relish. He died on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1997, in the home he loved, and, typically, gave his body to the medical science unit at the University of Cork.

Robert Simpson made a great impact on the twentieth-century musical scene in many ways. His broadcasts, books and lectures have provided the scholar and layman alike with great insight into the music of symphonists such as Nielsen, Beethoven, Bruckner and Sibelius. His musical scores are a source of great riches for the student of music, since his annotations demonstrate the ways in which he thought about compositional processes. In his own music, he pushed the boundaries of mainstream com-

position to new limits: whereas most tonal music, even during the twentieth century, had been concerned with exploring relationships between keys, Simpson, especially in his later works, concentrated more on exploring relationships between intervals. This often resulted in music which does not sound – and indeed, is not – conventionally tonal, yet Simpson was decidedly not interested in writing atonal music. In fact, he once remarked that it was listening to serial music by Schoenberg that told him exactly what he did *not* want to do. If Simpson had little time for serial music, he had even less for the so-called aleatoric ‘music’ of the 1970s. He told, with malicious glee, the story of how one piece required a performer to throw eggs at a blackboard. All went according to plan during the afternoon rehearsal, but, to his great delight, someone had sabotaged the evening performance by hard-boiling the eggs.

One aspect of music which especially attracted Robert Simpson as a composer was the manifestation of energy in music. This ‘energy’ or ‘current’ in music he likened to an expressive life force. As a self-styled ‘ferocious anti-pessimist’, the concept of this life force was crucial to Simpson’s whole outlook. ‘We all know how a tree can split a rock,’ he said.

Robert Simpson’s appreciation of music included an interest in the properties of the instruments for which he wrote. For example, when writing *Eppur si muove* (1985), he was keen to find out what an organ could – or could not – do, and to tailor his writing accordingly. This same care for the possibilities and limitations of instruments is to be found in his writing for brass bands and, above all, in his writing for string quartet, where he consistently shows a concern to treat the players as four individuals rather than simply as a group of four people playing the same kind of music. If Simpson had a favourite stringed instrument, it was almost certainly the cello. He said that the sound which gave him the deepest thrill of satisfaction was that of a bow being drawn across the cello’s open C string.

Although composing music was Robert Simpson’s passion, he was a man with wide-ranging knowledge and interests. His intellect was razor-sharp, yet he was not above sitting cross-legged on the floor to play a game with a small child. His dry sense of humour and fund of amusing stories made him an attractive companion and a first-rate *raconteur*. Fiercely loyal to his friends, he could be an implacable opponent, especially towards perpetrators of injustice in any form. Humane but unsentimental, of catholic but simple tastes, Robert Simpson is remembered with great warmth and affection by his wide circle of friends and by those whose cause he championed. Short of stature he may have been, but in every other way he was one of the giants of the twentieth century.

## The man *and* the music<sup>1</sup>

Hans Keller

To the English-reading intellectual, Friedrich Schiller is a second-rate poet and a playwright who seems to have stimulated a great composer or two, and that's about it: the mistranslated 'Ode to Joy' is, perhaps, all he knows. To educated Germans, Schiller is one of their two or three leading literary geniuses – but even they don't know enough of his output; his plays and his poetry are all that is common knowledge.<sup>2</sup> In point of fact, however, he was an important post-Kantian philosopher too – and only philosophical circles are aware of the fact.

So far as his aesthetic writings are concerned, and although he did not examine music, he is, or should be, an indispensable mind for us musicians: what he has to say about the nature of art in general and the literary arts in particular is, quite often, more relevant to the art of music than are the reflections of sundry musical aestheticians, despite the fact that music is more unlike any other art than is any other art.

His treatise *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (*Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*), though it never mentions music, is the most important musical characterology I know – a basic means of defining, and differentiating between, creative character types. The only incomprehensible thing about it is its English title. For one thing, that is to say, 'Dichtung' isn't 'poetry': the concept extends over the whole of creative writing, and there is no English word for it. For another, 'sentimental' isn't an English word – but then, it wasn't a German one either before Schiller invented it (i.e., 'sentimentalisch'), and God knows why he did: 'sentimental' is the same word with the same meaning in both English and German, and 'sentimental' doesn't give one any inkling of what Schiller means by it.

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in *Tonic* 1/2, 1981, pp. 7–11; Hans Keller's text was also reprinted in Hans Keller, *Essays on Music*, ed. Christopher Wintle, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 114–117. Reproduction by kind permission of Milein Cosman Keller.

<sup>2</sup> Keller had emigrated to England in 1938 and while the situation concerning the knowledge of Schiller's output may have been as stated before the Second World War, many of Schiller's writings, particularly *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, have become very well-known. [Ed.]

But he does explain. He means, creatively speaking, the opposite of ‘naïve’ – and the ‘naïve’ artist he considers to be in tune with nature, expressing it, its laws, its truths spontaneously – a mouthpiece, as it were, of physical, metaphysical, and psychological truth. The ‘sentimentalic’ artist, on the other hand, is in search of lost nature: he is the perpetual striver who thinks it is better to travel than to arrive – who suspects arrival itself as an illusion, an excuse for not continuing to strive. In short, if one doesn’t arrive, one travels further.

And just as C. G. Jung discovered his personality types when he compared Freud’s personality with his own, so Schiller discovered his artistic personality types on the basis of what he felt to be the sharp contrast between Goethe’s artistic personality, which he thought ‘naïve’, and his own, which he knew to be ‘sentimentalic’, striving; he forgot in the process that the entire history of art, any art, cannot boast any striver, either amongst its creators or amongst the figures they created, who can be remotely compared to that striver *par excellence*, Goethe’s own Faust. Nor would it do for Schiller to retort that the ‘sentimentalic’ Faust is Goethe’s ‘naïve’ creation, for the poet’s lifelong obsession with his hero *cum* anti-hero was a measure of his autobiographical involvement: the more we know about Goethe, the more we realise how much we can learn about him, the character of his creative mind, through Faust’s.

Let that pass. Schiller’s illusions about Goethe, his works and his psychology are one thing; the searching validity of his thesis is another. For he did apply his differential diagnosis not only to the artist but – aesthetically immeasurably more importantly – to his art, as witness his very title. And again, the differentiation does not only apply to Schiller’s chosen art, which is poetry and literature, but also to music. I would, in fact, go much further than Schiller did, in proportion as I am more musical than he was: I would suggest that his eminently practical theory applies more purely to music than to any other art – and that it is music, alone among the arts, which is the ideal touchstone for any aesthetic theory, for the elementary and elemental reason that music cannot contain anything inartistic, extra-artistic, without ceasing to be music altogether.

So far is music as such removed from any pictorial or conceptual thought that it is almost impossible to talk about it without distorting it. If, nevertheless, music is a successful touchstone for Schiller’s theory, his theory must be an equally smooth key to one particular aspect of music – its aesthetic typology: for once, that is to say, one may hope that concepts, words, though by their nature static, will not distort the dynamic essence of music.

One aural glance at the best-known part of our history of music convinces us that an otherwise inexpressible, profound difference between musics and musics suddenly becomes verbally clear in the warm light of Schiller's theory, to wit, the fundamental characterological contrast between Mozart and Haydn or Mozart and Beethoven, between Bruckner and Mahler, Britten and Wagner, or Stravinsky and Schoenberg – so much so that one need hardly spell it all out: Schiller's theory applies without our having to apply it – which is the highest and rarest compliment we can pay any theory, i.e., the inevitability of its practice. They fall from our ears as if they had been scales: the music of Mozart, Bruckner, Britten and Stravinsky is 'naïve', as indeed are the composers themselves in their creative attitudes; whereas Haydn, Beethoven, Mahler and Schoenberg are prototypically 'sentimentalic'.

Nor need readers of this journal be told into which of the two categories its patron saint falls, and if it be objected that saints tend to be 'naïve', my rejoinder is that while St Teresa, revelations and all, may have been 'naïve', Joan of Arc was a striver, who'd never have attained her sainthood without striving. It is not suggested, of course, that the 'naïve' artist must needs be without striving elements, and *vice versa*; and even Beethoven, the striver of strivers, achieved 'naïvety' at the very end – in his last quartet and in what was, chronologically, his last quartet movement, the second finale for Op. 130. Our own composer, likewise, has his 'naïve' moments, the least developmental of his symphonies being one of them, but the striving centre of his creative character remains unaffected by his 'naïve' insights.

Not by chance did I mention his least developmental symphony (which, incidentally, is the one I least understand): strictly musically, development is indeed the hallmark of the striver – and between ourselves, we may remind ourselves that even a Mozart wasn't all that fond of it, found various inspired, masterly ways out of it, or else didn't even plunge into it in the first place – as, say, in the *Figaro* Overture. The 'naïve' composer's revelations are, naturally, *statements* (Bruckner's themes), whereas the striver's statements, far from being revelatory, are material for development, which is his creativity's centre of gravity. In this context, it is fascinating to remember that our own composer, in an argument about melodic invention, once asserted that virtually anything can be used as the basis of symphonic momentum. Beethoven would have agreed; Mozart wouldn't. There is no argument: the statement is true for Beethoven, and not for Mozart.<sup>3</sup>

Its musical applicability apart, I have one contribution to make to Schiller's theory: in the case of the 'naïve' artist, the relation between the man and his art may be remote or – as in the case of Mozart – virtually non-existent. If you know the 'naïve' artist with-

out knowing his work, it is impossible to make any meaningful guesses about its nature. In the case of the ‘sentimentalic’ artist, on the other hand, the relation between him and his creations is intimate: knowing Beethoven the man, one could have got a shrewd idea about the nature of his art, its ethical and philosophical function. It is, in fact, the striver who puts his art at the service of something, even though it may not be ‘committed’ art in the banal sense: that something will be, simply, his philosophy. The ‘naïve’ artist, the ‘vessel’, couldn’t care less about commitment; he simply expresses what he has to express, the way he eats in order to stay alive.

But intimate though the relation is between the striver’s art and his life, his extra-artistic thought, the entire history of music does not, to my knowledge, show a single instance of as close an integration between the two as is our composer, whose conceptual, verbal articulateness is, of course, an enormous help in this continuing process of striving integration, and integrated striving. His integrity as a man is quite exceptional; normally, that is to say, one would expect substantial art, rather than a substantial man, to show such flawless and consistent integrity. He treats his life with the uncompromising thematicism of a work of art, and he does not allow his art to grow without equally rigid reference to the purpose of life. Beethoven would know what I am talking about; Mozart wouldn’t. Not unnaturally, Simpson’s<sup>4</sup> understand-

<sup>3</sup> A kind of discussion on the matter of the development – with special regard to Mozart’s *Figaro* Overture – took place in Tonic 1/3, 1981, pp. 11–13 & 16–17, with a letter by Brian Duke, the essence of Hans Keller’s reply (in Tonic 1/4, 1982, pp. 23–24) being the following paragraph: Keller stresses that Duke’s argument offers ‘me a chance to substantiate it in terms of the polarity between the “naïve” Mozart and the “sentimentalic” Haydn. Mozart’s adventurous wealth of melodies and his conservative economy of keys and harmonic destabilisations is the “naïve” counterpart to Haydn’s sentimentalic wealth of keys and harmonic destabilisations and his conservative thematic economy. Haydn’s developments, even outside his development sections, achieve veritable climaxes of instability, just as Mozart’s melodies, his stable statements even outside his expositions and recapitulations, achieve veritable culminations of stability. There are in fact outstanding Mozartian development sections which start with the very opposite of development, i.e., with firmly defined, new tunes in the stressedly confirmed and reconfirmed dominant – *statements* par excellence. Readers who will immediately think of the opening of the development section in the first movement of the “big” A major Piano Concerto [K488] are warned that what I have in mind are far more outspoken, extended, and extreme contradictions of development – repeated, complete sentences, periods in fact, 16 bars of them in every instance. Curiously enough, they tend to happen, most frequently, in the mature Mozart’s B♭ [K595] – or rather, in its dominant: hear, for instance, the opening of the “Hunt’s” development section, or the equally anti-developmental tune at precisely the same juncture in the second B♭ Piano Trio [K502]. There is no conceivable, intra-musical reason why such statements in the “wrongest” possible place should appear, preferably, in F major: the fact throws a fascinating light on a genius’ possible subjective associations between certain keys and certain structural innovations; there is considerable evidence in the works of all the great masters.’ [Ed.]

ing of Beethoven is far more immediate than his understanding of Mozart – though one quickly ought to add that the striver often admires the ‘naïve’ artist (see Schiller’s *vis-à-vis* Goethe, Beethoven and Schoenberg *vis-à-vis* Mozart, or Simpson *vis-à-vis* Bruckner), whereas the ‘naïve’ artist will do without striving admiration, though he may admire the striver’s art as art, regardless of its nature and the nature of his own work. Mozart’s admiration of Haydn’s music is a case in point; it never turned Mozart into more of a developer.

Other things being equal, this unity between life and art produces developments in either dimension which would not be possible without it. For the ‘naïve’ artist, any such unity would not only be senseless, but unachievable in the first place: you can’t treat life as a vessel – and, mind you, the artistic ‘vessel’ need not happen on Mozart’s level, but occurs, with crystal-clarity, on less exalted planes of creativity, George Gershwin being an outstanding example – whose music, needless to add, Simpson doesn’t understand at all, though he would violently disagree with my verdict and, instead, relegate the authentic revelations of this minor genius to the rubbish dump of phoney art.

If one knows Simpson the man, then, one knows Simpson the artist – the artist’s character, anyhow, and if one knows Simpson’s music, one knows more than the character of the man: one realises the consistency of his words and his actions – some of which would, without the music, merely seem anti-conventional, rather than positively subservient to his aims; and the striver’s aims are, inevitably, ideals.

Those of us who have had discussions with Simpson about music in general and, ineluctably, symphonically striving music in particular, are struck by one word he never tires of using in this context, a word which seems to have almost magic significance for him – and one which, at the same time, is not part and parcel of our normal critical vocabulary, though I have advisedly used it in the present essay.

It is the word ‘momentum’, and once one knows one’s Simpson well, both musically and verbally, one realises that it is the ideal word for the kind of intra-musical striving that lies, or rather moves, at the centre of both his own art and the music he most admires. The concept not only covers the quantity of motion, but also the product of a body’s mass by its velocity: no mass without velocity for Simpson, and no velocity without mass, without substance. For the truly creative striver, all developing is transitive: something is being developed, both in the man and his music. Mov-

<sup>4</sup> The fact that his name here occurs for the first time is due to an experiment: I am dictating this essay to a highly musical secretary, whom I wanted to guess which composer I was talking about; it was at this stage that she guessed – a circumstance which, itself, may be of relevance to the validity (or otherwise) of my argument.

ing substance is the essence of his art, ever-changing without being transient. And it is because the man and the artist are so harmoniously striving that one feels his antipathy to 'naïve' art to be downright creative: there are aggressive elements in Simpson's music which are directed against what he wrongly thinks is the nature of the art of, say, a George Gershwin. I say 'Gershwin' rather than 'Mozart', although I would suspect that even Simpson's admiration for Mozart is relatively cool – relative, that is to say, to his boiling identification with Beethoven. For the striver, life is striving; strifeless life, strifeless art can only be admired to the extent to which anything lifeless can be. So long as he is alive, that is, he can't identify, though he generously promises that once he's dead, he will – even with the superhuman Mozart.

Meanwhile, his art carries an element the 'naïve' artist's revelations have to, want to do without – the element of conviction. A revelation convinces the way a perception does: it simply *is*; it is not itself convinced. We may be convinced that this is a table – but the table doesn't go out of its way to convince us, nor, therefore, does our perception of it.

Now, the striving work has to turn the listener into a striver, too; otherwise, there is no understanding. And in order to make the listener strive, the work has to be convinced of its case and thus convince him of it – its case being, paradigmatically, the theme and its fate, which is thematic evolution and striving development.

When the man and the music are – almost uniquely – one, the music does not only carry its own conviction, but insistently reflects the man's: Robert Simpson's music does not persuade, tempt, seduce, as Richard Strauss' does, for example – that failed striver's. In a word, Simpson doesn't get you round. Instead, he invites you to share his convictions, confiding to you what convinced him to begin with – which, ultimately, is life as strife.

There is a single, highly significant inconsistency in his life and his output – an inconsistency that proves that singular consistency of his total personality that is the subject of my piece. Again and again, Robert Simpson has said that he won't resume writing – words, that is; composing will remain his sole mode of expression. And again and again, his outstanding verbal thought processes are breaking the promise: the man and the music remain one in the words and the notes – strive as one. In fact, an important verbal manifesto is about to appear.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The author here refers to Simpson's *The Proms and Natural Justice*, London: Toccata Press, 1981. [Ed.]

## Working with Robert Simpson<sup>1</sup>

### John Underwood

In 1954 or so I was asked by the BBC to play a Sonata by Martinů. This pleased me because I had long been worried that such an admirable and prolific composer was so seldom heard in this country despite his seven Quartets and a great deal of other music. I duly turned up to the studios at Maida Vale and for the first time met Robert Simpson. Immediately I felt at home with his warm and enthusiastic personality: he had the aura of a person you know you could work with, in, say, a quartet – someone who thinks along the same wave-length. I had already heard some of his symphonic writing and was most impressed by the musicality, and – an important point, sadly lacking these days – the craftsmanship of it. But it was hearing a broadcast from Birmingham (I think) that I heard for the first time his quartet writing. It was geared very much to this special medium – music *for* the instruments rather than *against* them. This means that modern devices such as ‘noises’ of an ‘extra-mural’ nature, padding, in fact, all those things that smack distinctly of lack of knowledge and artistry, can have no place in his particular scheme of things.

The fact that this Quartet had an immediate rapport with a professional player, that it was something you had to listen to, put Robert Simpson very high in my book. As you all know, we have to play and listen to far too much music and this can have an advantage in that your ears will select only things of an interesting and worthwhile nature.

I shall now jump forward quite a few years to the ‘sixties when I realised Bob’s sympathy for the medium much more; this came about through Haydn. Here is a common denominator which influences a man like Bob and players like ourselves enormously. His appreciation of this immortal composer is quite extraordinary and, of course, a player is bound to take advantage of his knowledge in working upon these

<sup>1</sup> The first third of the text was originally published in *Tonic* 1/3, 1981, pp. 18–21, the last third in the Robert Simpson Memorial Book, London: The Robert Simpson Society, 1998, pp. 3–4 and are reprinted here by kind permission of the author. The second third was written in 1997 but apparently never published.

masterpieces. I'm sure that if I say the joy of working as interpreters of these works, composed by the most under-rated of the Classical composers, and feeling involved with us, really does spark Bob off.

I can illustrate this by a simple story. One day in 1980 we were preparing one of Bob's Quartets for performance; and when we reach the 60% stage, we like to ask him along to rehearsal to clarify points. Having sat through the work and 'clarified' various points, you would expect that as a busy man he would then want to go home – but we couldn't get him to go, because he knew we were rehearsing the Haydn A major. He insisted on sitting there whilst we rehearsed – of course, his opinion was constantly sought, and he in his turn was concentrating upon, I think, the methods we have for ensuring ensemble and a degree of unity of musical thought. At the end of this, some two hours later, he had become as involved as we were with the music and remained quite silent and said suddenly in his rather lovely gruff voice: 'FFFascinating'. Just in passing, I might add that he often shows more interest in, say, Haydn than his own pieces, which shows how modest (he would say something else) he is about his own great achievements.

We have now played all his Quartets [up to this date] and I should like to mention a few thoughts about them. The problems in doing so for the amateur writer are enormous – it is bad enough for the professionals to try to write about an abstract subject like the beauty of music.

Nor is it easy for the professional player to write for the amateur reader. Unless you're involved in the rehearsal and technical method of preparation (I am now talking of the actual playing technique), it is practically impossible to understand the problems. The first thing, of course, when dealing with any composer of note is essentially his style and the musical background from which it has grown. You cannot perform Simpson without taking into account, from a *playing* point of view, Beethoven and Haydn. This means that chording and key relationships must have the same understanding as in the two composers mentioned – a simple matter if quartet intonation were tempered like a piano. But it's not, so one's attention to key, chord changes and their intonation becomes a critical part of interpretation. Time to get around a musical corner might well be governed by a chord change, for example, just as in any classical piece. Secondly, one must play his music with a beauty of sound – simply just 'what comes to hand' will not do. For instance, Bob always likes a fairly heavy *sforzando* sound, even in, say, the slow movement of the Sixth, his third 'Rasumowsky'. This can take quite a degree of culturing because if you're not very careful, with just four of you doing it, the result can be crude and ugly, not powerful.

One's consideration of these types of problem brings one much closer to the music, and I think you will see that the soloist or orchestral technique is very different from that of a quartet. Another point is that the accompanying lines in Bob's music must be shaped according to the musical phrase, not merely rhythmic, metronomic 'chunks'. Once again, the shape of the phrase – where it's going and where it finishes – must be considered by everyone in the quartet. Sometimes the same phrase, for example, if recurring later in the piece, might need reshaping in order to accommodate another figure added to it, perhaps something fugal underneath.

Of Bob's 'Rasumowskys', his Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Quartets, the one I prefer at the moment is No. 6. Perhaps the thoughts and moments in it are more related to Beethoven Op. 59, No. 3 than the two earlier quartets. One can take the opening Introduction, for instance. Knowing of Bob's interest in the extraordinary sequence of searching chords at the opening of the Beethoven, I feel his thoughts must have been kindled by that in his own piece. Just think of the first six bars of Beethoven and then listen to Bob's piece. Bob exploits this 'searching' in his piece, and he also uses the 'resolution' of the chord immediately preceding the Allegro. Thus, as a player one can identify straightaway with that type of procedure because it is closer, from a musical viewpoint, to Beethoven's Third 'Rasumowsky' rather than being, perhaps, a musical comment on an abstract idea inspired by Beethoven.

With all Bob's Quartets, as in the great classics, one's musical spirit wanders. At one time you associate more with one work than another, whereas an academic person will, perhaps, have worked out theoretically which is the best work, and will be bound by that logic. However, as an interpreter, the one you're working on will quite often seem to be 'the one'. But I must say that we do like Nos. 7 and 8; they are both fine works that we enjoy playing.

No. 7 is in many ways very delicate and, because of this, the more tone colour you can find in the writing, the better. Blend of musical sound and a controlled imagination are very important to the interpretation of this piece. In fact, in all Bob's pieces, you are allowed (as in Haydn) to use your own fantasy and imagination so long as you bear in mind that all the time the writing is very definitely 'quartet' as an instrument in itself. The problems arise in that four people are required to play it!

The No. 8 is a robust piece, full of contrast – like we are, sometimes sad, sometimes very humorous, as in the mosquito-like Scherzo. The writing, of course, is clever and cultured; the use of the beauty of the instruments has all his usual understanding and, of course, he uses this to great advantage, building up through contrast, all the way to the high climax of the last movement – and yes, at the moment it's my favourite.

As a quartet we have often discussed the things that might have happened had Bob been a professional player, as was Suk, for instance, who played second violin with the Bohemian Quartet for fifty years. Bob seems to be such a musician – some-one whom we as players would have loved to have had in our side of the profession. But it was not to be, and I daresay that he might not have had time to write the works he has, if he had been involved with performance. So we do like to see him at rehearsals – although there's one big snag: it makes time pass too quickly.

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I have known Bob Simpson for more than forty years. During that long relationship, music was always the main direction of our conversation. Sometimes religion would be brought in as a pointer to some work, such as Haydn's *Creation* with its wonderful opening number, and Bob's other interest, astronomy.

In working with Bob, as a quartet player, Haydn was quite inescapable. The enormous respect Bob had for Haydn influenced his thoughts on composition, namely for three important reasons:–

Firstly – the mood of the movement was vital.

Secondly – the instrument being written for i.e. Quartet, an instrument played by four people or an orchestra played by sixty.

Thirdly – the fact that a listener should not be aware of the techniques of a composition.

I will enlarge a little upon these factors.

Mood obviously must be a large factor in contrast for a composer. Bob greatly admired the careful technical and musical mood of the first movement of Haydn's 'Quintet' quartet with the unusual idea of the 'fifths' to which the instruments are tuned, yet achieving emotional interest at the same time. The beauty of the slow movement that contrasts with the country style *Menuette*. Bob did these sort of things in his own writing.

He often talked of what I would call a 'thumping' *sf*. If he wished to convey a violent passage, he would incorporate not only volume but heavy *sforzando* accentuation. I didn't always agree with him, for example, in his third 'Rasumowsky' second movement. We argued about this and his reason was that in the course of Beethoven's melody, the dream-like mood of the listener should be shattered. He had a point but equally he acknowledged my point about *sfs* having many levels, from stress points to accentuations.

An interpretative musician senses various points in the selection and shaping of a phrase, and in this discussion Bob would often request us to make a longer phrase after we had broken it up by a heavy *sf* – we would then laugh and he would say ‘it sounded all right on the piano’ which he did not play! Being aware of the instrument you write for is so important. He maintained that string instruments were melody instruments, percussion for effects; winds for melodic colour and so anything other than a really musical approach was not in his dictionary. Modern gimmicks like scraping behind the bridge of the instrument or banging the back of it, made Bob go absolutely mad. We often talked about the way Haydn would write for the piano, for example, which was quite different from a string quartet. Bob’s knowledge in this respect was the same. The continuity of a line in his quartets was evident in his early Quartet No. 2 with its long melodic lines and unusual harmony and rhythmic figures.

We talked during our rehearsals about problems of musicality in both quartets Nos. 8 and 9. No. 9 being palindromic, presenting many technical problems which Bob relied upon us to solve in order to partly disguise the palindromic means used by Haydn (in his *Menuette*) and Bob, in his quartet, to make a satisfactory musical whole, which would sound more and more beautiful as the work unfolded. We talked about the sensitivity of performance required to be similar to Beethoven’s 32 Variations on an Original Theme in C minor, WoO 80 (incidentally, one does not hear much about emotion or sensitivity these days in music). I had remarked to him that the last quarter of his No. 9 reminded me so much of Beethoven’s Variations. He immediately agreed and we both noted that the sensitivity in Bob’s variations increased in beauty as the work progressed. He was never too happy to discuss his methods of composition, maintaining that for the people playing some analytic knowledge might be useful, but using the following analogy, ‘when looking at a great painting, you don’t need to know about the undercoat’. Of course, this is all relative, when in No. 9 he writes one note of the theme on each instrument, rather like Beethoven in the Scherzo of his String Quartet in C# minor, Op. 131. If it is not featured, no one would appreciate what was going on. However, of paramount importance to Bob was the spirit and commitment of the works in hand. And as musicians, we could not escape from this view.

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One aspect of a great composer, I am sure, is the lack of interest in his own composition after the work is finished. I can remember vividly his coming to one of our rehearsals, to point us in the right direction for a series at Brunel University, where his Quartets were to be performed. It was with the greatest difficulty that we managed

to prize him away from listening to one of the more unusual Haydn Quartets (Op. 55, No. 2) in order to give us advice. He just kept on saying 'I heard it when I wrote it, I might not hear this Haydn for a long time'. His modesty was one of his greatest attractions to us, because we knew the immense musicality it was 'wrapped up' in.

His ideas for the presentation of music were unusual. We did Beethoven's 'Rasumowsky' Quartet No. 3 with him for TV. In order to make the whole thing comprehensible to the audience he arranged the score in four colours, the red line going through each stave in turn, as the theme took its various routes. This completely solved the problem of following Beethoven's thoughts, whilst the audience could watch us playing.

Of course, his work with us on the recordings of his Quartets for Hyperion was invaluable. This association with Ted Perry and the Robert Simpson Society is probably the most useful thing I have achieved in my lifetime! This project has resulted in allowing us all to have the [near] complete recordings of Bob's chamber music, which we in the Delmé regard as being milestones in music for all time.

## Recording Robert Simpson Andrew Keener<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes, in the noisy aftermath of an orchestral session which has just ended with seconds to spare, I find myself marvelling, like the ill-natured Samuel Johnson at women preachers, that not only do we probably have a good record, but that we have made one at all. An intermittently grumbling woodwind microphone, a single distinguished player having an off-day, audible hailstones on the roof or even cancellations on the Northern Line may be invoked by the Spirit of Accidents Waiting to Happen as it looks balefully down on those presumptuous enough to attempt any large-scale recording to a tight, rehearse-record schedule.

In such circumstances, the otherwise welcome presence of additional interested pairs of ears in the control room – a soloist's musically intelligent wife or partner, or the composer – can dissipate rather than intensify a recording team's concentration.

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Keener, Independent recording producer, was intensely involved in the Hyperion project of Robert Simpson symphonies.

Not so with Bob. Sitting beside me at sessions, he invariably brought with him a reliable memory of what he had written and a complete aural grasp of the score; would that all composers ‘heard’ what they wrote as accurately as this. Remarks were sometimes dry, often funny, always to the point – and thin on the ground. No wasted currency here. Thus Bob would immediately make an orchestra well-disposed towards him. With this trust established, the current of the playing would run high, take after take, in scores which, like much other cogent and uncompromising music, are from the inside frequently hard to grasp tonally and architecturally (I can think of no other magnificently-structured symphonic repertoire which poses this player-listener dichotomy to such an extent; perhaps Bruckner).

With such respect, an orchestra will move heaven and earth to make a ‘good show’ under the most unusual of circumstances. I recall the leader of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra remembering with affection how, in Southampton at the second performance of Symphony No. 9, Bob appeared without warning (and with corduroys) on the rostrum to replace an ailing Vernon Handley (knowing of Tod’s health that week, Angela had jokingly asked Bob whether he would be prepared to conduct. ‘Absolutely not!’, was the shocked reply). Lifting his hands with a murmured apology for what was to follow, the orchestra responded with an account of this huge work which passed without serious mishap.

As a former BBC producer, Bob provided a telling balance to my commercial record producer style during the sessions for the same symphony in Poole a few days later. Where I became pre-occupied with the intonation of a single woodwind chord, a voice from my right would remind me plainly but without patronisation of the shape of the 8-bar phrase that enclosed it. At sessions for the Eighth Symphony eight years later, the sixth attempt at the difficult crescendo transition to the finale Presto was becoming progressively less urgent and therefore potentially hazardous to cut in to the main take that we had recorded three months earlier (discrepancies between parts and score for this passage had halted proceedings). Phoning Bob in Ireland to make absolutely certain that we were now using the correct version of this transition, he not only quoted the correct bar numbers off the top of his head, but urged me to make sure that the passage had the urgency of the previously-recorded (wrong) version. Ill for the past four years, the equal awareness of detail and the larger sweep had clearly not deserted him. Yet his comments on a first edit would largely be devoted to what might best be described as long-term dynamics or pacing: was I able to enhance the diminuendo from bar 40 to bar 100? Was the take which I had chosen of the second Adagio convincingly related to the tempo of the first?

One thing that rarely needed artificial adjustment from us in the control room was balance. In this, Vernon Handley, expert orchestral balancer, was helped by the scores themselves. However dense to the eye, the handwriting fastidious and closely-packed as if scorning the computer-generated possibility, Bob's tuttis invariably struck the microphones with lucidity as well as power.

I know that Matthew Taylor, whose knowledge of these scores is unsurpassed and who took the composer's place beside me for the symphony recordings during his last illness, shares my regret that Bob was unable to be present to ease my task at the difficult sessions for Symphony No. 8 (Angela's description – "Bob's un-eco-friendly symphony" is as good as any); the more so since I remember his bitter words to me as he sat, seething, in the emptying Festival Hall stalls after the carelessly-prepared premiere in London 14 years earlier by Jerzy Semkow and the Royal Danish Orchestra. Notwithstanding immeasurably stronger and more sure direction by Vernon Handley at the recording, the players started to exhibit signs of shell-shock after the second take of the hammering finale tuttis, merciless to embouchures and bowing arms as bar numbers run past the thousand mark. No trace of fatigue is evident in the final result – a tribute to the RPO's professionalism and the indestructible force of the music – yet I know that Bob's un-giftwrapped entreaties down the talk-back would have added spice and renewed vitality to my more producerly requests for re-takes.

Better, perhaps, to recall the 1994 sessions for Symphony No. 5 to be reminded of the capacity of Simpson's orchestral writing to renew and perpetuate energy well past the point at which good results would seem possible. Every factor seemed to promise ill: it was a bitterly cold and snowy February day (all warmth inside St Augustine's Church in Kilburn rose and collected just below the high, Victorian ceiling), Vernon Handley was far from well and the whole piece was scheduled to be completed in a single three-session day (that's almost nine hours of playing). Afterwards, I returned to my car with an RPO violinist friend who, bright-eyed and shiny-faced, told me that he was going to cancel a visit to the gym that evening; the day's playing had been better for him than three work-outs on an exercise bike. The CD of Symphony No. 5 bears him out: it boasts some of the most single-minded, athletic playing of the cycle.

Alas that Bob's stroke put paid to his attending more than half of the sessions for his symphonies. I missed him beside me at the sessions for No. 1, not least because here was a man who, while at the BBC, worked with and admired Boult, whose quick-pulsed pioneer recording offers an interesting alternative view to Handley's graver approach (would Bob have thanked me for suggesting that two characteristics less in evidence later on – delicacy and vulnerability – are touchingly present in much of this work?).

Looking back over the sessions which Bob did spend at my elbow, I initially felt a little dismayed by what seems my poor memory of specific anecdote, the telling turn of phrase. Then I realised that this is how Bob, master of the written word, was in the studio. Not unlike Boult who, during his years as chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, described himself as “a jobbing conductor; I’m here to present as wide a range of music as possible”, Bob was not given to revealing the range of his character or indulging in quotable quotes when actually at work. Better, perhaps to venture outside the confines of the orchestral sessions themselves for one of my most vivid recollections of working with him – to the session which I arranged for the spoken introduction to the Ninth Symphony which follows the complete performance on the Hyperion CD. Urged to remember that this part of the disc was out with the overall budget, I made my flat into an improvised recording venue. Bob sat with his script on the edge of my bed while I and the engineer, crouching over a portable digital recorder in my living room, shouted through the wall for him to start and stop. I should have known better than to fear irritation from this former BBC producer. After all, this was the man who had uncomplainingly sauntered down to his local grocer’s photocopier in Tralee to supply me with a score to his Seventh Symphony when – shamefully – his publisher could not.

## Working with Robert Simpson<sup>1</sup> Matthew Best

Although I met Bob Simpson on only a very few occasions, I was fortunate enough to enjoy a friendship with him (based round a regular correspondence) that lasted well over ten years. I will always regard this friendship as one of the most important of my life. Although our letters normally started with musical matters that needed to be discussed, they invariably carried on into a wide range of subjects, and it was as a result of going off at various tangents that I was able to catch a few glimpses of what made Bob tick, most notably his unshakable musical integrity and his deep sense of fairness and justice for people the world over.

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in the Robert Simpson Memorial Book, London: The Robert Simpson Society, 1998, pp. 10–11 and here re-published in a version slightly amended by the author.

I was first introduced to Bob by Ted Perry of Hyperion back in 1986. I had embarked on what was to become a Bruckner choral cycle for Hyperion, and I needed advice on one or two things. Bob was an established authority on Bruckner, and had just enthused in the press (one of the only ones to do so at the time) over my first Bruckner recording, so I think that each was quite curious to meet the other. Even though I misjudged our first meeting completely (Bob seemed rather embarrassed to be taken out to lunch and would perhaps have preferred a trip to the pub) there quickly emerged a number of shared musical passions, notably the music of Beethoven and Bruckner, that were to form the basis for our correspondence over the years. Bob's advice was always invaluable, never intrusive – often no more than a passing observation that would act as a catalyst for a new line of approach – and he was always hugely encouraging and supportive of all my work.

It was soon after our first meeting that Bob sent me scores of his two choral works, *Media morte in vita sumus* and *Tempi*, immediately dismissing them in his typically self-effacing way with the claim that he knew neither how to write for voices nor how to set texts. However, it was immediately clear that although some of the choral writing was instrumentally conceived and demanding in a rather Beethovenian way, both works were nonetheless tautly constructed, vigorously written and musically substantial – a refreshingly far cry from the bland wallpaper nature of much contemporary choral music. *Media morte*, with its accompaniment for brass and timpani, turned out to be an ideal companion piece for the Bruckner E Minor Mass, and I was therefore able to schedule a number of performances with Corydon Singers and Corydon Orchestra, including at the 1994 Proms. After some initial suspicion at rehearsal, both choir and players were quickly won over by the compelling musical argument and sheer exhilaration of the piece, and it will have a firm place in our repertoire for many years to come.

*Tempi*, on the other hand, posed quite a problem. Bob knew just how considerable the technical difficulties were, but was very keen for Corydon Singers to have a go at it. However, I was adamant that I would only tackle it when I was sure that I could secure sufficient preparation time and suitable performance conditions, but these were impossible to achieve for many years (although a studio recording with the BBC Singers was a distinct possibility at one point). It will always be a very great disappointment to me that by the time conditions and preparation time were finally achieved, and both *Media morte* and *Tempi* were recorded for Hyperion in October 1997, Bob was unable to hear even an early edit of *Tempi*. My caution continually got the better of me, and we were just too late.

After early performances of *Media morte* I approached Bob with the idea of writing a major work for chorus and orchestra. Bob's response was that he had had it in mind to write a choral symphony for many years, that much of it was in his head and here was the ideal opportunity. So plans for the 12<sup>th</sup> Symphony were made, even to the extent of lining up possible premieres at Aldeburgh, first in 1994 and again in 1996. What a work that would have been! Bob was very clear in his own mind as to the length (approx. 50 minutes) and structure. The work would have been scored for chorus and Beethoven-sized orchestra, with one soloist (probably bass or baritone) who would carry much of the text. The text would have been Bob's own, and would have had a strongly contemporary relevance, although he was keen that it should be translated into Latin (as in *Media morte*) in order that it should be accessible to people of all nationalities and backgrounds. I argued that to use an archaic language might dilute the strength of Bob's message, but the matter was never resolved. Bob's stroke came at quite an early stage of planning, and although we were optimistic for a while that he would recover sufficiently to be able to commit to paper what had been in his head for so long, it eventually became clear that this would remain one of the great unwritten works. I will always feel deeply honoured that Bob had entrusted me with the premiere, and will continue to treasure his sound advice and encouragement, his integrity, humanity and wisdom.



# Symphonies



## Simpson's symphonic appetite<sup>1</sup>

### Malcolm MacDonald

If 'the symphony' as a form has truly proved a 'survivor' in the world of contemporary music, then a most powerful force in that survival has been the symphonic output, and symphonic commitment, of Robert Simpson. There is certainly no unpleasing irony in the fact that the erstwhile leaders of the British avant-garde (including last year's Reith Lecturer, Professor Alexander Goehr) have turned back to that most tradition-encrusted of forms, and with it to tonality, as they attain their years of discretion. But Robert Simpson did not have to rediscover its relevance; he has stuck to it all through, with the result that his symphonies – nine of them so far, with a tenth in the offing – now sound rather less 'anachronistic' than theirs. It is over 40 years since he began writing his 'official' First Symphony, about the time that his contemporaries, the young serialists of Darmstadt, thought they were discovering Webern. While he was composing it Robert Simpson, instead, discovered Nielsen: and such was the impact of the great Danish symphonist that he found himself unable to finish his own work for some time. Later Robert Simpson wrote the first and still the only authoritative English study of Nielsen;<sup>2</sup> and people have been seeing Nielsen in his music ever since. But Nielsen's example of tonal expansion and organic growth simply gave him massive confirmation of what he was already doing instinctively. Robert Simpson's First Symphony really drew its inspiration from much further back, and its unhackened blend of almost pure Renaissance polyphony with a Beethovenian rhythmic pulse sounds completely of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and yet fundamentally timeless. Listening to it, it is hardly surprising that he was to become one of the most penetrating advocates for the then unfashionable symphonism of Bruckner.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This illustrated talk, which is available on CD from Divine Art Dunhelm Records (DRD0011), was in a revised version originally published in *Tonic* 3/3, 1989, pp. 3–6.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Simpson, *Carl Nielsen, Symphonist*, London: J.M. Dent, 1952, 2nd edition 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Simpson, *Bruckner and the Symphony*, London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1963, and *The Essence of Bruckner: An Essay Towards the Understanding of His Music*, London: Gollancz, 1967, 3rd edition 1992.

Beethoven, Bruckner, Nielsen: hostile critics (and there have been some) like to invoke these names as a sort of Holy Trinity in whose shadow Robert Simpson has conceived his music. He might even agree – though he would probably insist that Haydn should be named as a fourth guilty party. But he once confessed that his initial, cardinal inspiration about symphonic form came from none of these, but from listening to Schoenberg's Piano Concerto. A sudden insight – or possibly creative misunderstanding – about what Schoenberg was or wasn't doing with a hidden tonal centre led him to conceive of a work with two opposed tonal centres, a tritone apart, reacting to one another: and that is one of the things the First Symphony is 'about'.<sup>4</sup>

Creative conflict between tonalities became an essential principle of Robert Simpson's long-range structural thinking. And in the foreground it was mirrored by the moods and textures of the musical events. Right up to today, his music tends to be polarised around well-defined extremes: diatonic simplicity against the challenge of fierce harmonic density; still serenity against furious rhythmic action. There is a very witty example of these extreme polarities in the second movement of Robert Simpson's Fourth Symphony, a big scherzo with a little trio. The trio is built around an actual quotation from Haydn – an innocent, carefree scrap of tune from his Symphony No. 76. Robert Simpson lures it into his symphonic stream only to throw at it much darker, more dissonant, mid-20<sup>th</sup> century elements. Yet the tune glides on its way quite unaffected, or perhaps the right word is 'uncorrupted'.

The extremes of Robert Simpson's music are not the sort that lend themselves to easy, emotive labelling. He has written few works with any overt programmatic intention, and his polarities seldom encompass moods that can crudely be described as 'despairing', say, or 'triumphant'. 'Despair', indeed, is never expressed: Robert Simpson is no shallow optimist, but admits to being what he calls a 'ferocious anti-pessimist'; and his basically positive stance is embodied in the fact that his music still discovers enduring value in the essential elements of the symphonic tradition.

What he is passionately concerned with is music as organic growth. Revealingly, one of his very rare avowed programmes is that for the Sixth Symphony, which he describes as tracing the evolution of the human organism from the moment of conception, through birth and childhood, on into vigorous maturity. From this I think it is not too far-fetched to suggest that Robert Simpson's music in general, in its constructive processes, provides a metaphor of the currents of human development – in the individual rather than the mass, and in both the physical and spiritual senses. As the most

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the contributions by Harold Truscott and Simon Phillippo on the First Symphony, in this volume pp. 44–56.

highly-developed instrumental form, the symphony has always been the most appropriate embodiment of this metaphor; and Robert Simpson's mastery of movement – not just the extremes of slow and fast, but the gradual transformation of one into the other, sometimes without perceptible change of pulse – makes him a master of the symphony's largest-scale effects: the build-up and release of tension over extended paragraphs – sometimes enormously extended, as in the vast single movement of the Ninth Symphony. (With its huge central scherzo and cosmically slow outer sections, the Ninth seems like an enormous mirror-image of No. 1.)

It is here that the comparisons with Beethoven – not in quality but in method – are most relevant. Robert Simpson has said that he finds 'more force of life' in Beethoven than in any 20<sup>th</sup>-century composer, and that he would rather learn from him than from anybody. The debt is often most apparent in the sheer physicality with which Robert Simpson, like Beethoven, invests his symphonic structures, keeping them in close contact with the pulse of sheer human excitement. He is fond of very quick, almost manic *moto perpetuo* writing, and if his symphonies scorn easy triumph they often culminate in breathtaking explosions of sheer obstreperous energy.

Until the Eighth and Ninth Symphonies I would have said that Nos. 4 and 5, both big works, were probably Robert Simpson's finest achievements. I still think the Fourth may be my personal favourite: 'may be', not because it has been superseded, but because a few years ago Robert Simpson decided he was dissatisfied with its slow movement – which I, and many other people, thought was one of the most beautiful things he's ever written – and he replaced it with a new one. Much as I regret the demise of that deeply expressive Adagio, he was clearly within his compositional rights in suppressing what he felt to be sub-standard work, and it was none of our affair to protest.

That action was as characteristic of Robert Simpson's hard-headed adherence to the highest artistic standards as the occasion on which he returned a commission fee, and demanded the reciprocal return of his score, when he felt the commissioning body had reneged on agreements about its performance.

But this uncompromising artistic scrupulousness goes hand in hand with a concern for human contact. In his music: typified by the Eighth Symphony, which was written expressly for the enjoyment of a close friend who, at Robert Simpson's invitation, provided him with a general outline of the kind of symphony he would like to hear.<sup>5</sup>

In the past decade or so Robert Simpson has become less interested in large areas of tonality than in the generative power to be found in the basic intervals of music. In the

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the discussion on the genesis of the Eighth Symphony between Michael Oliver and Robert Simpson, in this volume pp. 179–183.

Eighth Symphony nearly all the thematic material seems to grow in a wonderfully organic way from the simple opening interval of a major second. One of the grounds of Robert Simpson's well-ventilated dismissal of Schoenbergian twelve-note technique is that the twelve notes cannot possibly be equal to one another because of the difference in intervals between them. Whether twelve-note music is actually governed by a series of pitches or a series of intervals is a deep analytico-philosophical conundrum that need not concern us here: but it is undoubtedly a fact that in diatonic music, certain intervals can be used to create situations where the twelve chromatic notes really are equal – if you arrange them in a continuous chain of rising fourths, or descending fifths.

Robert Simpson has been showing increasing interest in these special cases. For instance, a chain of twelve rising fourths is a kind of *cantus firmus* for the first section of the Ninth Symphony. Descant in fifths is even more ubiquitous. As Robert Simpson once memorably said, it doesn't matter if you, the listener, can't tell a fifth from a rissole: but anyone can hear the sense of cadence in a falling fifth, and a chain of them creates the effect of a continued cadence, each note becoming the dominant of the one that follows. Robert Simpson's music is full of such figures and cadences made up of short chains. And in the finale of the Eighth, there is an extraordinary passage where the music swings through two-and-a-half complete cycles of perfect fifths, like some fantastic musical equivalent of a perpetual-motion machine.

It may be felt that so far I have begged some important questions. Can an attachment to a quasi-Beethovenian vitalism and a post-Nielsenesque harmonic vocabulary really make much sense in our contemporary musical world? It is a fair question, since Robert Simpson has on occasion been a witheringly trenchant critic of many of contemporary music's pretensions. But usually questions such as this are debated more by critics than composers, and in terms loaded with moral implications – 'responsibility' to the audience or to 'sane values'; 'realistic acceptance' of the logic of history; or a 'duty' to explore still further the frontiers of musical experience.

All such debate is essentially cant. True creativity is a matter of appetite. In music, it's a matter of discovering the music you enjoy most, feeling there ought to be more of it in the world, and going ahead and writing it; and if you're a substantial creative personality in your own right, the result will be a new and personal thing, whatever its derivation. In some of his writings Robert Simpson has tended to cast Schoenberg as a kind of negative pole to the positivism of Beethoven – yet Schoenberg surely learned as much from Beethoven as Robert Simpson has himself. Maybe he learned different lessons, or more likely the same lessons, which he interpreted in a wholly different way. There can be no such thing as an objective assessment of what Beet-

hoven's music 'means'; we all reconstruct Beethoven for ourselves, even if we're mere non-performing listeners. There are no objective listeners, any more than objective analysts or critics; and there was certainly never such an animal as an objective composer. We shouldn't ask them to be fair-minded, or responsive to a non-existent historical logic, but to indulge their creative appetites to the full. Robert Simpson's appetite has yielded some wonderfully impressive results, and I, for one, look forward to the Tenth Symphony with keen anticipation.

## The origin of the First Symphony<sup>1</sup>

Harold Truscott

On Sunday, October 5th 1945, I attended the Stoll Theatre, Kingsway, for the first public performance in the British Isles of Mahler's Fifth Symphony, which was wrested, with blood and sweat, from an unwilling London Symphony Orchestra by the sheer will-power and determination, coupled with his unshakable belief in Mahler's music, of a very great conductor, Heinz Unger. After that performance the finale still humming in my brain, I met for the first time Donald Mitchell, who had also attended. I had for many years been a devoted admirer and student of the music of Max Reger, and had recently seen a letter in the *Musical Times* from Mitchell, asking for any material concerning Reger, since he was planning a biography. I had written to him through the *Musical Times*, and told him that I had no material for him, except the bulk of Reger's music, which I assumed (in my innocence) that he would already know. But I conjured him, when he wrote his book, not to repeat the rubbish which was the norm for English music critics writing about Reger and a number of other composers, such as Bruckner and Mahler. (Some of the music journalists who were at that time most vitriolic on the subject of Bruckner and Mahler, and on any attempt to perform even a single movement from any one of their symphonies, were later, from what they wrote, among the most devoted admirers of these composers – but, of course, since the period of their anti-attitude they had, presumably, got to know some of the music they had so severely castigated; although one cannot be sure. Band-wagons do not demand knowledge as a password before they begin to roll.)

In the event, Mitchell never wrote his book on Reger; but he wrote to me and said he would like to meet me, which would be possible if I were going to the Stoll Theatre on October 5th, which I was; wild horses would not have kept me away. So witness me wandering round the foyer with the score of Reger's Op. 141a Flute Serenade under my arm, so that Donald would know me. We met, and talked, and eventually I

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in *Tonic* 1/2, 1981, pp. 11 & 14–16 and republished here by kind permission of Guy Rickards on behalf of the Harold Truscott estate.

visited him at his home in Alleyn Park, Dulwich. Among other things, he mentioned a young man named Bob Simpson, with whom, he said, I should get on like a house on fire. 'He's mad on Bruckner, too,' he assured me. I was prepared to meet and like anyone who was mad on Bruckner. This sort of thing is the quickest passport to friendship I know, however disparate other tastes may be.<sup>2</sup>

I met Bob, and we talked until the cows came home. But it was not all talk. I played to him, on the piano, all sorts of music by composers he had either never heard of, or had heard of but had heard nothing by them. A great and completely neglected English composer, Algernon Ashton, was one of them. Another was Alkan, of whom Bob had heard but, as he told me, had nothing of his, and had never imagined that he would one day be sitting by the piano while someone actually played the four studies from Alkan's Op. 39 which form the Symphony. [Havergal] Brian, too, was among the composers whose music he encountered for the first time. I played him the *Kelly Variations*, a 2-hand version I had prepared myself of *Wild Horsemen* and the Ballet of *Gargoyles*, all from the opera, *The Tigers*.<sup>3</sup> None of these Brian extracts, I am forced to say, seemed to impress him very much; but, to be fair, he was hearing them on the piano, a medium for which they were neither intended nor suited. I also played him the *Four Miniatures* and the *Three Illuminations*, which were designed for piano (although the second and fourth of the *Four Miniatures* were rewritings of songs, *The Birds* and *Land of Dreams*). When they came along, later, in 1948 (they were published just 24 years after they were composed) I played Bob Brian's two Preludes and Fugues, in C minor and D minor, and the Double Fugue in E♭;<sup>4</sup> these certainly interested him more, which could have been due to their contrapuntal content.

One of Bob's biggest enthusiasms among the composers to whom I thus introduced him was Medtner, who had, until then, been a closed book to him. And Schubert

<sup>2</sup> To follow up this point: back in the 'sixties a very fine organist, William O. Minay, used to broadcast regularly from St Cuthbert's, Edinburgh. He frequently included one of the mighty organ works of Franz Schmidt, who had been (and still is) in my estimation one of the truly great composers, without question. I taped all Minay's Schmidt performances, which were superb. Some years ago an organist colleague of mine returned from a visit to Edinburgh and said that he had met Minay and told him of my love for Schmidt and for his broadcasts of the latter's organ works. 'Tell him that anyone who likes Schmidt is a friend of mine,' Minay told my colleague, who duly repeated this to me. And, to cap it, a year or two later, when I was playing for a student in a Trinity College examination, one of the examiners turned out to be Minay, who, when he learned who I was, enthusiastically repeated what he had told my colleague in Edinburgh.

<sup>3</sup> The entire opera *The Tigers* had been re-orchestrated in 1969, but was premiered only as a BBC studio production in 1983 (broadcast on 3 May 1983). No public performance of the entire opera has ever taken place, only orchestral excerpts have been performed in concert and for LP. [Ed.]

<sup>4</sup> Harold Truscott transcribed Brian's Double Fugue in E♭ for organ. [Ed.]

sonatas, especially the great Unfinished C major [D840] of 1825. In 1946, apart for Schnabel's advocacy, no-one played Schubert's sonatas in public as they do automatically today. One of my musician friends lamented the fact that Schubert 'had wasted so many fine ideas on a form of music he did not understand'. And he was only echoing a view which was prevalent at the time and for quite some years afterwards.

I apologise in advance now if I seem to perform a solo on an instrument I do not really play – that is to say, blow my own trumpet. It is not done for its own sake, but because it has a bearing on my subject. It has to do, also, with the fact that the only instrument Bob plays (or did play) is a trumpet – his own, only in the sense that he owned it. The piano he did play, although I once caught him finding his way through some of the first movement of that Schubert Unfinished C major Sonata, rather in the manner of someone fighting their way through a thick jungle. The point, is, as he said, that meeting me stimulated his interest in the piano. Piano music, such as the Beethoven and Mozart sonatas, later on Schubert, he enjoyed listening to, but the piano as a medium for his own composition he had not thought about before. Now he did. He wanted to provide some music for me to play. And this is where my own trumpet, blown in as subdued a manner as possible, comes in. One of the things I have been able to ever since I could play a piano at all, from about the age of eight, is to sight-read any piano music I came across, or arrangements of orchestral and chamber music, accurately and at about the speed the music demanded. Stumbling through fast music, hesitantly and at about a quarter of the proper speed, which usually passes for sight-reading, is simply not sight-reading at all, any more than crawling along, like a tired snail, can be called running a cross-country race. When I was 10, I made a vow to myself that I would never play at sight any fast music slower than the tempo which I judged was right for it, or slow music faster than it should be; either, so far from being sight-reading, is a distortion of the music, and therefore not that piece. I have kept that vow. Now, this fascinated Bob; he had never met anything like it before. The immediate effect was shown in two ways: he began to write a piano sonata in E major, and he also began to devise all sorts of pieces and passages, designed to test my sight-reading powers. On one occasion, when his *Variations and Finale on a Theme of Haydn*,<sup>5</sup> dedicated to me, were broadcast, he talked about them first, referred to my sight-reading and his attempts to beat it and admitted that he never succeeded. My trumpet-blowing is over.

<sup>5</sup> The *Variations and Finale on a theme of Haydn* for piano (1948) was apparently not premiered by Harold Truscott but rather only on 14 December 1955 in a BBC broadcast by Lamar Crowson. [Ed.]

The important point is that all this stimulated Bob's imagination. He finished the sonata, of which I gave the first performance;<sup>6</sup> I also recorded it for him. Later it was played by Ronald Smith. It is a very fine work, and the fact that its texture is largely contrapuntal hides the further fact the Bob's writing for the piano is not the most pianistic one could imagine. The same is true, mainly, of the *Variations*. But the music, as such, is splendid, and with a good contrapuntal style one can get away with a lot – and Bob did. But one does not always write contrapuntally for piano – even Hindemith did not always. Sooner or later the lack of a real piano technique, which means, for the composer, an intimate knowledge of the piano keyboard, which, in the last resort, can only be garnered from actual experience of playing the piano, all let one down. And there came a time when it let Bob down. He rang me one day in a state of great excitement. He had begun a new sonata for piano, and wanted me to try what he had written; when could I come over? I was as excited as he was and I got across to Crofton Park (I lived then in Ilford, Essex) as soon as I could. I played what he had written, about a couple of pages of manuscript, stopped and thought about it; I played it again, and yet a third time. He was listening and watching my face, I could feel it. At last I shook my head. It was magnificent, I told him, but not for piano. The kind of power it required the piano could not give, not the best instrument one could find. *That* sort of power the piano has not got. I had often played through the abominable two-hand arrangement of Bruckner's Eighth Symphony by August Stradal, because I loved the music so much, and there was little or no chance of hearing it being performed; the result was like trying to paint a great mural with the kind of small brush with which flowers are painted on china. I had the same feeling playing Bob's opening for this sonata; the difference was that it did not go on so long; there was considerably less of it. I demonstrated it to him, and sadly he agreed; it was not piano music. So what could he do with it? I thought about this a lot during the next few days, and at last the nature of the music gave me an idea; it was not only orchestral power that was wanted, but it was symphonic.<sup>7</sup> Now, when I first met Bob he had been work-

<sup>6</sup> The Piano Sonata of 1946, Simpson's first surviving composition, was dedicated to the composer's first wife, Bessie Fraser. Harold Truscott premiered the work in 1947 in Simpson's own Exploratory Concerts Society. [Ed.]

<sup>7</sup> This may ring a bell with some readers. In *Monsieur Croche the Dilettante Hater*, Debussy puts in M. Croche's mouth the words! 'Beethoven's sonatas are very badly written for the piano; they are, particularly those that came later, more accurately described as orchestral transcriptions' (Dover, 1962). RS is in good company. [Martin Anderson, editor of *Tonic* in 1981.] Harold Truscott replied to this note in a letter to the editor in *Tonic* 1/3, 1981, pp. 25–26: '[...] you quote Debussy, via M. Croche, as saying that Beethoven's piano sonatas are very badly written for the piano, and that they are more accurately

ing slowly on an orchestral piece which he called, tentatively, 'Cathedral Music'. It was not finished; indeed, it was a wandering fragment, for it had no proper beginning, either, as yet. I thought of both these things: the symphonic nature of that 'sonata' beginning and the hazy 'Cathedral Music'. In the event, as it happened, there was no need for me to mention it first. He, too, had been thinking hard about this, and he had thought of the connection, too. It did not happen all at once, but this is what it came to eventually. That 'sonata' beginning became the beginning of Robert Simpson's First Symphony, and, with extension, gave way to the 'Cathedral Music', which at last found its rightful home, in a work the completion of which was still quite a long way ahead. It was the result of his desire to provide me with a second sonata, when in fact, his orchestral mind, which was much more natural to him, took over.

described as orchestral transcriptions. I take it that this, with its concluding remark "RS is in good company", was meant jokingly, but there is a serious point behind it. To take the last item first: others have had the idea that some, at least, of Beethoven's piano music would find its most fitting home on the orchestra – Weingartner, for instance, who orchestrated Op. 106, with the noble idea of liberating this masterpiece from its piano shackles, only to have to admit that he was wrong and that Beethoven actually knew what he was doing in the first place. As for the rest, when Beethoven wrote badly for the piano, he did so from the standpoint of an expert pianist, not from that of one who is not a pianist, and this makes all the difference. (Badly, here, = unusually, and, as with Schubert's piano writing, it also means that bunglers are not encouraged – except, of course, by those who continue to set such works as examination and competition test pieces.) Last point: Debussy was an expert in his own brand of pianism which was a million miles away from any classical or German romantic concept – not better, but just different; and there is plenty of evidence in his comments on the classical sonata to show that that he never understood it, and that, being human, he damned what he did not understand. But this does not make his observations on either the sonata or those who did understand it authoritative, but merely the irritable outburst of one who knows he does not understand.'

Symphonic momentum and post-tonal dramas:  
Simpson's First Symphony<sup>1</sup>  
Simon Phillippo

Robert Simpson died on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1997, leaving behind him an impressive body of works. At its core are eleven symphonies and fifteen string quartets; also three concertos, two string quintets, sonatas, some choral music, even some much admired pieces for brass band. While a thoroughly individual, music-as-process modernism imbues all he wrote, the prevailing image of Simpson is that of the conservative classicist, clinging to the apparent certainties of antiquated forms and diatonic tonality — a view that begins to some extent with the composer himself. He is widely known for his influential writings on Beethoven, Nielsen, and Bruckner among others; writings that, along the way, fiercely and polemically extol the enduring virtues of symphonic composition, manifestly swimming against the tide of contemporary music of the mid-century. Simpson's symphonism was always ideologically opposed to the post-war trends towards total mechanization, as much as to the experiments with extreme irrationality and chance in the 1960s.

His crusade did not stem, as might be assumed, from a personal need to defend any cosy traditionalism in his own music. True enough, Simpson was most interested in predominantly classical media, quartets, sonatas, and so forth; and certainly the rhetorical stock is that of the Beethovenian symphonic model. But the appropriation of these historical elements is not entirely a reactionary, or, as Simpson himself often put it, a 'conservationist' enterprise; there is no bland filling-in of historical forms with modern notes. When modelling of any kind takes place, there is an active dialogue with the sonata tradition, motivated above all by a desire to create for his large-scale designs a sense of structural dynamism, a logic of temporal unfolding that so-called post-tonal music finds very difficult to convey (if indeed it is even concerned to, which is another matter altogether). This he developed into a concept of

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in *Tempo* 209, 1999, pp. 2–6, and reprinted in *Tonic* 15, 2005, pp. 13–18. Reproduced with acknowledgement to Cambridge University Press, the current publishers of *Tempo*.

modern symphonism, at the heart of which lay the metaphor of organicist evolution taken to extremes, the apparent inner conviction and self-motivation of the musical work. His emphatically linear symphonic paradigm differs markedly from the essentially rounded forms of classical models, and also in respect of the single-mindedness of the musical process, with its relative lack of surface contrast. To stand still and enjoy a sound, a texture, or a tune for its own sake would run counter to Simpson's musical aims, and would interrupt the teleological effort (which may, of course, be enjoyable in itself). Such things must form a suitable link in the 'evolutionary' chain: we might say that the 'development section' has become the whole form.

Simpson's structural goals may appear to be eminently apropos, even retrospectively inevitable, but in post-classical symphonism a work's conclusion is in no sense preordained: within certain generic limitations, anything could happen. So teleology as such is illusory, yet faith in it remains crucial to our mode of listening, implicated as it is by the classical-tonal symphonic tradition that forms the background to these new pieces. Directed motion is not necessarily progress towards a goal, but it may nevertheless remain as an aesthetic characteristic. Particularly in Simpson's later music, it is the movement itself that matters, the 'striving' that Hans Keller recognized as the life-blood of Simpson's art:

'[...] "momentum" ... is the ideal word for the kind of intra-musical striving which lies, or rather moves, at the centre of [...] his [...] art [...]. The concept not only covers the quantity of motion, but also the product of a body's mass by its velocity: no mass without substance for Simpson, and no velocity without mass, without substance. [...] Moving substance is the essence of his art, ever-changing without being transient.'<sup>2</sup>

Simpson's later music, in the creation of the teleological illusion, might be said to essentialize the structural and expressive properties of tension and release inherent in traditional tonality; while the music he composed between 1946 and 1956, comprising his first two symphonies and first three string quartets, is more overtly key-orientated, and the dialogue with the sonata tradition more explicit and more intense. Yet the standard assessment of Simpson's tonal language in his early works, the notion that specific tonal oppositions fuel the momentum and generate a sense of teleology, is seriously problematic. In post-tonal music, in which no common-practice harmonic procedure supports the individual work, tonal structure, as well as form, must be invented anew for each piece. Even then, it is doubtful that in music as harmonically wide-ranging and often ferociously chromatic as Simpson's any background structure

<sup>2</sup> Hans Keller, 'The man *and* the music', in this volume p. 23.

will have prolongational value, in the Schenkerian sense. Once obscured, an initial tonic can no longer be said to underpin the diversity of harmonic activity on the music's surface. It may be reinstated, or it may never return. The logic of either option will emerge only in retrospect, and we can only hope to claim that, given sufficient strength of recurring tonal patterns within a piece, a tonal-structural resolution is the most likely out of a number of possible outcomes. Contrasting key areas will still be valuable as a means of architectural organization, but the difficulty lies in regarding these notional tonal antagonisms as dialectically active, as harbingers of large-scale closure, and thus as the source of the all-important momentum.

Simpson's single-movement First Symphony (1951) makes use of A and E $\flat$  as counter-tonalities, and is generally considered a prime example of his use of opposing keys. Yet there is not the same 'vivid expression of energy' in this tritonal duality as Simpson finds in Nielsen's Third Symphony, due simply to the fact that Simpson's music, with all its chromatic and whole-tone possibilities, may connect these two pitches by step with no difficulty whatever. The tonics A and E $\flat$  are alternatives, not active opponents. If there is any real dynamism to be heard in Simpson's tonal relationships, as the motivation for a teleological structure, its agents are to be found in middleground intervallic tensions. The antagonism lies less in the tritone separating A and E $\flat$  than in the semitonal dissonances between constituent pitches of the triads on these roots. As the following voice-leading analysis will reveal, this symphony may be summarized more precisely, not as a dramatic conflict of A and E $\flat$ , but of A and its flattened supertonic, B $\flat$ .

This opposition comes into focus gradually in the First Symphony, though the use of the semitone as a disruptive force is immediately apparent: the opening B $\flat$  flourish is met with a grim B $\natural$  in bar 2. Not until bar 25 is A declared the tonic, from which point a large-scale progression towards E $\flat$  takes place, cadencing on this new 'tonic' at bar 171. This remains the pitch centre for the start of the 'slow' section which follows, but is left for C by bar 260, a minor-third shift which is then repeated, returning to A in time for the change of metre at bar 286. Instead of regarding this whole series of deep-structural pitches as an elaboration of A, it is preferable to refer to such a background process as an 'excursion', implying the departure from and return to a single pitch centre, the route of which is mapped out through successive middle-ground reductions. Example 1 gives an outline of the First Symphony's tonal excursion thus far.

## Example 1



In conferring any real tonicity upon a particular pitch, either as a goal tonic or as a suitably stalwart counter-tonic, the cadential definition provided by the dominant proves to be very helpful in this music. In fact, as an active tonicity marker, a properly articulated dominant can become more important than the tonic itself, assuming that the context does not exclude such a harmonic possibility. (More commonly in 20<sup>th</sup>-century music, tonicity comes of sheer insistence, rather than this kind of cadencing.) The two parallel cadences on A and E $\flat$  in the first ‘movement’ of the symphony are each prepared by their respective dominants. But in such an ‘excursive’ tonal structure as this, neither a perfect cadence alone nor any number of them will be sufficient to end the work in a state of tonal security. Such final closure must be unequivocal in all respects, if the possibility of continued vagrancy (beyond the end, as it were) is to be disallowed. The symphony moves towards a definitive use of both the perfect cadence, with its inherent leading-note resolution, and the  $\flat^2-\hat{1}$  progression. Their suitability at the critical moment depends on effective contextual preparation, to ensure that these devices do not sound disingenuous. The main tonal business of the ‘finale’, then, is to establish the means of its own ending.

Example 2 (p. 53) consists of two successive middleground reductions of this finale, beginning at bar 439. This shows only the bass line, and so is far from being a thorough explication of the music’s processes; however, the sketch contains all the major progressions and is quite sufficient as a basis for tonal investigation here. (Surprisingly perhaps, the bass seems to retain its syntactical privilege in all of Simpson’s early tonal works, despite such contrapuntal and chromatic complexity, as the principal means of harmonic and linear definition.) Occasionally this connective line may be conceived as migrating into other voices, as in the fugue from bar 903; the graph at this point plots the successive entries, the means here of sequential organization, rather than the bass.

The finale may be divided conceptually into two parts. In Example 2, the upper graph shows groupings into numbered sections, 1 to 3 comprising the first part, 4 to 7 the second. Each section in the first part corresponds to its equivalent number in part 2: sections 1 and 4 involve a movement away from the tonic to the dominant, and a perverted stepwise return in both cases; 2 and 5 broadly consist of a movement from

## Example 2

The musical score for Example 2 is presented in two systems, each with a melody (mgd) and a bass line (bgd) in bass clef. The notation includes measure numbers, fingerings, and performance markings.

**System 1:**

- mgd:** Measures 1 (440, 447), 2 (510, 544), 3 (579, 600), and 639. Fingerings include 1, 6, #6, 2, 2, 2, 2, #2, #2, #2, #2, 6, 5, 4, 3. Performance markings include *p*, *V - I*, and *N*.
- bgd:** Measures 1, 2, 3, and 639. Performance markings include *V - I* and *N*.

**System 2:**

- mgd:** Measures 2 (744, 766), 4 (822), 5 (865), and 919. Fingerings include #6, 4, #6, 4, #6, 4, #6, 4. Performance markings include *V*, *I*, *N*, and *I*.
- bgd:** Measures 2, 4, 5, and 919. Performance markings include *V*, *I*, *N*, and *I*.

**System 3:**

- mgd:** Measures 7 (1043), 8 (1062), and 1062. Fingerings include #6, 4, #6, 4. Performance markings include *V*, *I*, *N*, and *I*.
- bgd:** Measures 7, 8, and 1062. Performance markings include *V*, *I*, *N*, and *I*.

A whole-tone scale (8-prg) is indicated for the bgd part in the final system.

A to B $\flat$ ; and 3 and 6 effect a return from B $\flat$  to A. The sections of part 2 are more concise than those of part 1, in keeping with the usual practice of structural contraction in the latter stages of a large-scale work. But the second part also functions as a restoration of order to certain features of part one: the A–B $\flat$ –A excursion of sections

2 and 3 involves a complex series of linear connections, often far from clearly audible. Furthermore, the arrival of B $\flat$  at bar 710 is a misfiring attempt to recapitulate the opening of the symphony. In part 2, the excursion is effected through more familiar sequential methods, culminating in the fugue from bar 903, and B $\flat$ 's appearance at bar 865 at last forms a successful reprise of the opening material.

The significance in the finale of B $\flat$ –A is suggested at the outset, by the violas' melodic incipit at bar 286 (see Example 3).

### Example 3



The flattened leading note, G $\sharp$ , is also present here; Simpson is partial to such Phrygian-mode flavouring, though in this work the voice-leading neutrality of G $\sharp$  is later called to account. The sharpened leading note, essential for a perfect cadence, is not provided at the return to A at bar 744 (a moment of understated significance in any case). Neither is a G $\sharp$  in the 'perverted stepwise return' to A of section 4. The perversion is diatonically rectified only at the very end of the symphony, as the dominant's G $\sharp$  is supplied in a marked mutation of the fugue subject, at bar 1034, and a major-key diatonic  $\wedge 5\text{--}\wedge 6\text{--}\wedge 7\text{--}\wedge 8$  effects the work's closing progression (above a tonic pedal — a genuine prolongation). The structural obfuscation of this standard device, along with the surface proliferation of Phrygian sevenths, creates a tonal 'need', such that the provision of the leading note becomes a major *telos* of the finale. B $\flat$  itself has been a central player throughout the work, and this movement in particular. The final sidestep onto this pitch, following the double-speed return of the first movement's memorable cadence figure (bar 1045), is heard against a pounding tonic on the timpani. The gravitational pull of the  $\flat\wedge 2\text{--}\wedge 1$  progression is by now deeply established as the symphony's primary cadence. Once this has been provided, and the seventh sharpened again in bar 1067, the D–F dyad from the symphony's very first bar is finally integrated within A major, the F $\sharp$ , turned into F $\sharp$  to form a I $\sharp 4\text{--}\sharp 3$ , signifying the thorough defusing of the work's main structural dissonance.

But one further process is completed in these closing bars, providing a third source of resolution and finality. The fugue has passed through a virtually complete cycle of fifths, arranged in the second reduction of Example 2 to reveal a conceptual whole-tone progression from A at bar 919. Missing from this progression is E $\flat$ , the 'key' which began the 'slow movement', only heard later at bar 1062, by which time A is

so securely in place that E♭ is not the danger to it that it might have been, had it been included within the harmonic cycle of the fugue. The completion of this whole-tone linear progression, the return to A via a descending fourth (D provided by an inner voice), may be heard in the closing five bars of the symphony.

These tonal processes are given further driving force in the First Symphony by the work's virtuosic demonstration of 'composed flexible pace'.<sup>3</sup> The initial crotchet pulse is maintained throughout, though it undergoes two transformations: becoming a subdivision of the minim in the *alla breve* slow movement, and of the dotted minim in the one-in-a-bar finale. Such tempo relationships are nothing new within single movements, and have even been suggested as a means of unifying the numerous movements of entire symphonic works.<sup>4</sup> In the First Symphony, however, Simpson not only maintains a common pulse for his material, with all its apparent variety of tempo, but uses this to generate a kind of sophisticated metric counterpoint at both ends of the finale.

Although the swift 3/4 begins at bar 286 with the return of A, as early as bar 328 the slow movement material returns at its original tempo, and the triple-time of the finale literally recedes to *niente*. This coincides with the return of E♭ as tonic, combining to suggest that, in fact, the finale began prematurely, and has been no more than an interpolation, a larger version of the intrusion of finale material heard between bars 246 and 258. The finale proper begins at bar 439.

The lack of a clear start to the finale not only helps the symphony to resist easy division into movements (a subtlety Christopher Ballantine overlooks in his somewhat bland description of the work as a 'compound sonata form'),<sup>5</sup> it also establishes a regime of metric overlapping. At bar 865, the material from the very start of the symphony returns at its original speed, but this time the finale continues against it, withdrawing slowly only once the mammoth fugue has got under way, from bar 903. Solid V–I harmonic functionality is adumbrated throughout this section in the sequence of fifth-related fugal entries, a contrast to the quicksilver stepwise motion of the rest of the finale that suits the monolithic expansiveness of this fugue. The return of the characteristic ♩ rhythm, supplied by the timpani, coincides precisely with the symphony's tonality-defining perfect cadence and adds to its dynamism. The reprise of the weightier first-movement material has temporarily sapped the energy of this fi-

<sup>3</sup> Robert Simpson, 'Introduction', in *The Symphony*, ed. Robert Simpson, vol. 1, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> See David Epstein's 'temporal umbrella' theory in *Beyond Orpheus: Studies in Musical Structure*, Cambridge (Massachusetts): MIT Press, 1979, p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Ballantine, *Twentieth-Century Symphony*, London: Dobson, 1983, p. 119.

nale, and the reversion to the livelier rhythmic state is felt to be desirable — the symphonic ‘carrot’, as it were.

The resolution of the semitone, and of B $\flat$  to A in particular, is also set up by the slow movement. This section, with its archaic polyphonic style, makes use of a cadential cliché involving a 4–3 appoggiatura, and as this is first heard on the supertonic of B $\flat$  at bars 190 and 191, the pitches in question are b $\flat$ ’ and a’:

#### Example 4

Example 4 shows a musical score for measures 188–191, featuring Violin (Vn.) and Viola (Va.) parts. The score illustrates a cadential cliché involving a 4–3 appoggiatura. The Vn. part begins with a half note F $\sharp$  (measure 188), followed by a quarter note B $\flat$  (measure 189), and then a half note A (measure 190). The Va. part begins with a half note B $\flat$  (measure 188), followed by a quarter note A (measure 189), and then a half note G (measure 190). Both parts are marked *mf dim.* and feature a fermata over the final measure (191).

Such an unproblematic, easily assimilated use of this figure not only gives a clear hint of the later structural use of this same resolution, but it neatly reverses the tendency of the first movement to subvert such expectations.

In post-tonal symphonic music, to talk of tonal oppositions as the engines of a teleological structure is to assume too easily the intrinsic potency of such relations. Deep-structural voice leading, as this brief analysis of Simpson’s First Symphony has shown, provides a stronger tonal reading than those which assume the continued sufficiency of traditional, triad-orientated tonal procedures in 20<sup>th</sup>-century music. Yet pitch structure will still not manage it alone. Style, metre, and rhythm are also essential factors in generating a telos of resolution for the primary dissonance, the timely fulfilment of which provides the work with a convincing, ‘inevitable’ conclusion.

The sources of Simpson's Third Symphony:  
a reconstruction of the earliest stage of composition  
using Beethoven's Ninth Symphony as a model<sup>1</sup>  
Martin Ratcliffe

Investigation of the Third Symphony's manuscript and printed sources presents a unique starting point for examining typical and atypical aspects of the composer's style by identifying particular musical influences upon Simpson's revisions, and to shed light on both the internal features of the work in isolation (e.g., how one passage relates to another), and external ramifications (e.g., whether the revisions and other evidence in the manuscripts suggest a relationship with another work or works). From an analysis of the modelling of the first movement of Simpson's Third Symphony upon the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, this study offers a reconstruction of music lost from the earliest stage of composition.

## **1.1 The manuscript and printed sources**

Some might doubt the value of manuscript investigation to an understanding of Simpson's Third Symphony: the composer himself vigorously maintained, for example, that the final version of any work, rather than the earlier rejected attempts, should be the criterion by which the earlier efforts, the composition itself, and its relationship with other works, are judged.<sup>2</sup> This ideal, however, raises questions about the status of the most recent published version of the Third Symphony as a representation of the work itself.

Although it is convenient to equate this most recent version of the Third Symphony with the 'work', this source, like any other written version, is merely a set of instructions. These instructions indicate particular sounds and silences. Performers, for

<sup>1</sup> This text is partly based on research undertaken in connection with the author's *Robert Simpson's Third Symphony: sources and influences*, Ph.D thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Telephone conversation between author and composer, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1992.

example, must execute their interpretation of the music, and the listener must interpret what the performers play. The latter aspect involves more subjectivity than the former. The ‘Third Symphony’ is, therefore, more than any notated version, as is apparent already in the inconsistency between the durations of its two commercial recordings.<sup>3</sup>

More seriously still, it is impossible to know the accuracy of the final text as a representation of Simpson’s conception. Many passages in the manuscript and printed sources reveal minor inconsistencies (inconsistent accents, rests, and dynamics, for example, are particularly common). These features undermine, albeit to a small degree, the authority of even the most recent score. It should therefore first be remembered that what one calls the ‘Third Symphony’ is not only its latest physical source, but also the realization of subjective processes of interpretation. These processes transcend written formulation. Secondly, just as there is no ideal performance, so there is no ideal written representation of the work either. However, the most recent physical source is the most legitimate witness of Simpson’s text of the work, and each of the earlier scores represents a particular stage in that text’s gestation.

The non-equivalence between the ‘Third Symphony’ and its most recent notated version helps one to appreciate the significance of the work’s physical sources and the alterations which occurred while the symphony was being composed. Moreover, there is no other Simpson work with either this richness of different manuscript and printed sources, or alterations written by the composer. The revisions reveal ideas formulating in Simpson’s mind, help us to understand Simpson’s compositional processes, and indicate features of structure which Simpson considered important. One can therefore assess Simpson’s ways of improving – at least in his own eyes – his music. The highest authority for assessing these improvements is the most recent physical source, even though this score is not a complete representation of the ‘work’.

<sup>3</sup> On the UKCD 2028 recording – Unicorn Records, London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Jascha Horenstein, 1990 – the first movement lasts for 15 min. and 1 sec., and the second movement lasts for 15 min. and 53 sec. However, the corresponding times of the CDA66728 recording – Hyperion Records, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Vernon Handley, 1994 – are 14 min. and 36 sec., and 16 min. and 9 sec.

### 1.1.1 Source A<sup>1</sup>

The earliest autograph of the Third Symphony is now part of the Robert Simpson Collection at the British Library, a photocopy of it being located at the Robert Simpson Archive at the Bodleian Library Oxford.<sup>4</sup> I have labelled this manuscript A<sup>1</sup> – ‘Symphony No. 3, first autograph’. The source is unbound, but contained within a folder. A<sup>1</sup> primarily comprises irregularly gathered sheets of gatefolded, eighteen-stave manuscript paper. Each opening is noted, and consists of two consecutively numbered pages. The page numbers, which are encircled, are written in the upper right-hand corner of recto pages, and in the opposite corner of verso pages. The first movement is written on pages 1–105. The second movement occupies pages 106–206. The inscriptions on the first and last pages of the first movement reveal that Simpson began writing this source on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1961, and finished the first movement at 12.05 a.m. on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1961; the inscription at the end of the second movement shows that A<sup>1</sup> was finished at 12.55 a.m. on 12<sup>nd</sup> November 1962 at Cedar Cottage, Chearsley, near Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. The contents of A<sup>1</sup> are written in pencil – Nielsen’s gold propelling pencil which was given to Simpson by Nielsen’s daughter when Simpson visited Denmark in 1952. A<sup>1</sup> is the earliest complete record of Simpson’s thoughts.

Source A<sup>1</sup> represents two stages of composition. This situation is suggested primarily by the deleted music written on the verso of A<sup>1</sup>/10.<sup>5</sup> This verso, which will be identified as A<sup>1</sup>/10<sup>v</sup>, may have survived either because of a temporary shortage of paper, or because it seemed too extensive to erase, and contained, on its recto, music which Simpson wished to retain, but which he did not wish to write out again. Although there is a crossed-out page number 13 on A<sup>1</sup>/10<sup>v</sup>, the music on this page neither follows logically from the music on A<sup>1</sup>/12, nor leads to the music on A<sup>1</sup>/14. Instead, the music on A<sup>1</sup>/10<sup>v</sup> passes to the music on A<sup>1</sup>/10 in the same manner as the corresponding bars – numbers 43–44 – of the later sources. It is thus likely that both A<sup>1</sup>/10<sup>v</sup> and A<sup>1</sup>/10 are remnants of an earlier working. This situation is confirmed by consecutive, deleted page numbers (13 for A<sup>1</sup>/10<sup>v</sup> and 14 for A<sup>1</sup>/10). The fact that A<sup>1</sup>/11–26 were also originally four numbers higher suggests not only that Simpson

<sup>4</sup> Most of the surviving autographs of other works (e.g., Symphonies Nos. 1–5) are now in the British Library Robert Simpson Collection, although some of them have remained with the dedicatees to whom Simpson had given them. The autograph of Simpson’s Sixth Symphony (1976), for example, is in possession of the gynaecologist, Professor Ian Craft.

<sup>5</sup> A<sup>1</sup>/10 denotes page 10 of stage A<sup>1</sup>.

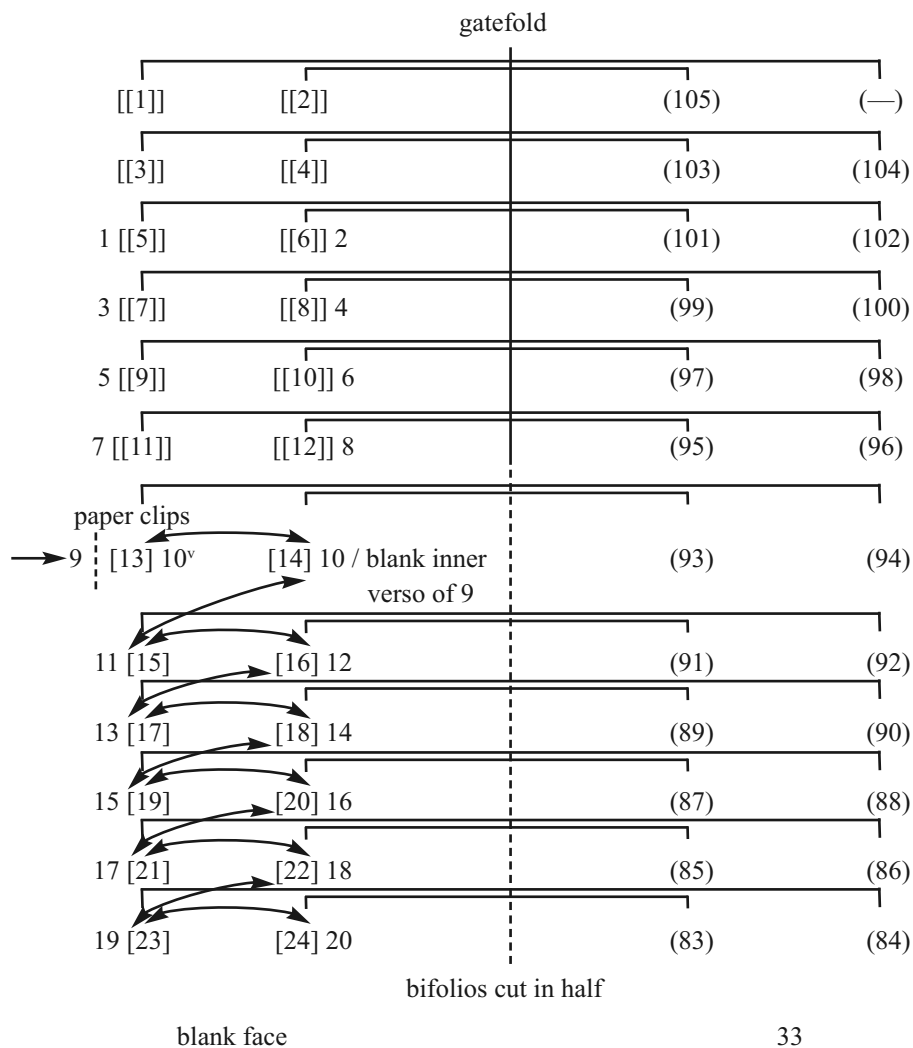
had proceeded as far as page 30 of the earlier stage before renumbering his pages, but also that A<sup>1</sup>/11–26 were once part of the same earlier working as A<sup>1</sup>/10<sup>v</sup> and A<sup>1</sup>/10. This first stage of composition revealed by source A<sup>1</sup> will be subsequently identified as A<sup>0</sup>, and the lost music on A<sup>0</sup>/1–12 as [A<sup>0</sup>].

Stage A<sup>0</sup> pre-dates stage A<sup>1</sup> by days or weeks, rather than by months or years. This hypothesis is suggested by the following facts. First, there is no evidence to suggest that composition of the symphony was interrupted for any substantial duration of time. Secondly, Simpson usually composed one work at a time. Finally, Simpson clearly reorganized the gatherings between stages A<sup>0</sup> and A<sup>1</sup>, rather than beginning the work again: A<sup>0</sup> comprised A<sup>1</sup>/10<sup>v</sup> (this page was originally A<sup>0</sup>/13) and the ensuing seventeen pages – A<sup>0</sup>/14–30 (these pages were renumbered, and became A<sup>1</sup>/10–26). The lack of revisions to the page numbers of A<sup>1</sup>/1–9 confirms that these pages were replacements for A<sup>0</sup>/1–13.

The relative locations of the pages between stages A<sup>0</sup> and A<sup>1</sup> are suggested by A<sup>1</sup>/10 and A<sup>1</sup>/10<sup>v</sup>. Because Simpson wrote out the instruments of his orchestra on the left of the inner verso of his folios at stage A<sup>1</sup>, the lack of any such designation to the left of A<sup>1</sup>/10<sup>v</sup> suggests that this page was originally the outer recto of a bifolio. This conclusion is supported by the location of the crossed-out page number in the upper right-hand corner of A<sup>1</sup>/10<sup>v</sup>, and the frayed edging of the side of the paper to the left of the music. Because A<sup>1</sup>/10 was originally A<sup>0</sup>/14, and stage A<sup>0</sup> thus comprised four extra pages of music prior to the music written on A<sup>1</sup>/10, A<sup>0</sup>/1 was the outer recto of the first manuscript sheet of stage A<sup>0</sup>, as was A<sup>1</sup>/1 at stage A<sup>1</sup>. (See Diagram 1.)

The first exception to the continuity of the music at stage A<sup>1</sup> results from the fact that A<sup>1</sup>/9 – the last page which replaced A<sup>0</sup>/1–13 – contains only two, rather than the usual five, bars of music, and lacks any music on its left inner verso. The introduction of this single bifolio caused Simpson to consider how to eradicate the three empty bars and the blank page without altering the pagination. This concern with the musical continuity is evident in two ways. First, a horizontal arrow on the seventh stave from the top of A<sup>1</sup>/9 indicates that the three empty bars should be bypassed. Secondly, a cross written above the topmost stave between bars 45 and 46 marks the end of the third bar of A<sup>1</sup>/10, the last bar of music which should have fitted into the three empty bars on A<sup>1</sup>/9.

Having inserted A<sup>1</sup>/9, Simpson altered the pagination in order to maintain the semblance of consecutive folios. He attached the folio which contained A<sup>1</sup>/10 and A<sup>0</sup>/13 to A<sup>1</sup>/9, so that the blank verso of A<sup>1</sup>/9 lay against A<sup>0</sup>/13. This attachment is revealed by impressions from paper clips not only on A<sup>1</sup>/9 and A<sup>1</sup>/10, but also on the pages

Diagram 1: Comparison between the organization of the pages of stages A<sup>0</sup> and A<sup>1</sup>

[[ ]]: lost pages of stage A<sup>0</sup>

[ ]: surviving pages of stage A<sup>0</sup>

( ): position, denoted by a hypothetical page number, of the outer recto and verso folios which were originally attached to A<sup>0</sup>, pages 1–24

unbracketed: page numbers of stage A<sup>1</sup>

which lie next to them in the source – A<sup>1</sup>/8 and A<sup>1</sup>/11. Simpson then began to divide up the bifolios which contained A<sup>1</sup>/10–20 into single sheets, so that each page of A<sup>1</sup> could be moved forwards by a single face relative to its original position. The division of the bifolios was to be completed on reaching the single, blank, inner-verso folio attached to A<sup>1</sup>/33. However, having divided up the bifolios from pages 9–20 – A<sup>1</sup>/20 is the last single sheet of this group – Simpson decided to stop cutting the bifolios in half, perhaps fearing that he might increase the risk of losing pages if he produced too many unattached, single folios. Although Simpson was still left with the three empty bars on A<sup>1</sup>/9, the following objectives were achieved. A<sup>0</sup>/13 could not be seen, but it was available for his subsequent reference; the music on A<sup>1</sup>/10 did not have to be rewritten; and, both the continuity of the music and the semblance of consecutive folios were maintained.

The second exception to the continuity of the music results from the absence of A<sup>1</sup>/99–102. These pages, which contained the original version of the music found in bars 474–492 of the later sources, were missing before A<sup>1</sup> was deposited in the archive. It is possible that Simpson deliberately discarded these pages because of an error – perhaps the pacing of the brief *accelerando* through this music caused him problems. It is likely, however, considering the predominant continuity of the remainder of the source, that Simpson replaced these pages with a corrected version at some stage. The lack of revisions in the corresponding bars of the next stage of the symphony's genesis, moreover, suggests that this music had already been finalized at stage A<sup>1</sup>. Because there are no paperclip impressions on A<sup>1</sup>/98 and A<sup>1</sup>/103, one reason for this loss could be that A<sup>1</sup>/99–102 comprised a bifolio which was not gathered within other pages; another is that pages 99–102 were individual folios from different bifolios – perhaps the right-hand sheets which were once attached to A<sup>1</sup>/1–4.

The third and final discontinuity was responsible for the reorganization of the pages of the second movement into irregularly gathered bifolios. This reorganization is evident from paper clip impressions on A<sup>1</sup>/136–140. In his efforts to conceal the substantial crossing out of bars 203–242, on pages 137–141, Simpson inadvertently joined two bars of music together with paper clips, bars which he intended to retain (bars 201–202). The paper clip impressions on A<sup>1</sup>/135 and A<sup>1</sup>/142 are therefore from the paper clips which joined A<sup>1</sup>/136 to A<sup>1</sup>/137, and A<sup>1</sup>/140 to A<sup>1</sup>/141, rather than from any sheets which were attached to pages 135 and 142 themselves.

### **1.1.2 Source A<sup>2</sup>**

The second archive source, S3-A<sup>2</sup>, which I shall abbreviate to A<sup>2</sup>, is a fair copy of the symphony, copied by Simpson from A<sup>1</sup>, and written in ink. A<sup>2</sup> contains fewer revisions than A<sup>1</sup>. It is undated and bound.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the page numbers of the source itself, some folios of A<sup>2</sup> contain different page numbers above the topmost staves. These integers, which are either encircled, underlined, or bracketed, denote the page numbers of the published scores. A<sup>2</sup> contains 106 pages of 26-stave manuscript paper. The first movement occupies pages 1–52; the second movement is written on pages 53–106. Both movements contain not only corrections, but also memoranda above and below the topmost and lowest staves respectively.

### **1.1.3 Published scores**

There are two published versions of the symphony. The first – Lengnick, 1972 – which I have labelled S3-P<sup>1</sup> – ‘Simpson’s Third Symphony, first published version’ – but which will be abbreviated to P<sup>1</sup>, is a facsimile of A<sup>2</sup>, which Simpson sent for publication. The revised published version (Lengnick, 1974) – S3-P<sup>2</sup> – which will be subsequently referred to as P<sup>2</sup>, emends P<sup>1</sup> with handwritten corrections in red ink in the score and a summary of these corrections on an errata sheet attached to the verso of the title-page. These corrections were made after the symphony’s premiere.

## **1.2 Interpretation of the sources**

Simpson likened composition to improvisation on paper. He used neither sketches nor drafts when composing, writing straight into orchestral score. Simpson erased small errors immediately. Although he joked that his manuscripts often contain a greater amount of rubber than pencil,<sup>7</sup> a comparison between the number of impressions from erased pencil marks and the amount of music which was not revised reveals a fundamentally lucid train of thought.

<sup>6</sup> The binding of A<sup>2</sup> took place in 1984, after the source had been deposited in the archive; funding was provided by the Robert Simpson Society.

<sup>7</sup> Answer to question from Lionel Pike during the Robert Simpson Seminar, held at Siochain, Killelton, near Camp, Tralee, County Kerry, Eire, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1989.

The heaviness of Simpson's hand often sends the manuscript into relief, causing impressions to show through. The piccolo parts of the first movement in bars 85–86 and 83–84 of stage A<sup>0</sup>, on pages 18 and 17 respectively, reveal this tendency. The dark lead of Simpson's pencil, moreover, causes writing to be offset between manuscript faces which lie adjacent to each other when the source is closed. The music for the strings in bars 142–144 of the first movement, at A<sup>0</sup>/29, and in bars 137–139, at A<sup>0</sup>/28, is an example.

Deletions occur when a passage of music which Simpson deemed unsatisfactory is too substantial to be erased. The music which is to be revised may comprise a whole bar (e.g., A<sup>1</sup>, first movement, bar 486) or bars (e.g., A<sup>1</sup>, second movement, bars 241–242) of orchestral score. Such alterations occur at stages A<sup>0</sup>, A<sup>1</sup>, and A<sup>2</sup>. Simpson used one, or several, straight or wavy lines to cross out music. Both methods appear to denote a degree of frustration. Should an entire page be deleted (e.g., A<sup>2</sup>/66) it is seldom discarded, and retains its original place in the page sequence. In this way Simpson's crossings out provide a reference for the reworking. The revised version is then written in the following bars.

This interpretation concerns three principal areas: deciphering music which was revised, interpreting the temporal process of making revisions, and reconstructing discarded music. Each approach is more problematic than the preceding one, and evidence from all of the physical sources must be constantly considered in order to reach the correct, or at least most plausible, interpretation. Reconstruction, for example, is facilitated considerably by the striking fundamental similarity between the music at every stage of the symphony's genesis. This situation indicates that an advanced stage of general consistency of musical thought had been achieved prior to the writing of the earliest stage. It is because of this consistency that, where appropriate, reconstructions in one particular source have been made not only with reference to the musical structure of corresponding passages in the other sources, but also, as I hope to show, from comparisons with Beethoven.

## **2.1 The extent to which similarities and analogies between Simpson's and Beethoven's first movements are relevant at stage A<sup>0</sup>**

Reconstruction of the music from stage [A<sup>0</sup>] of Simpson's symphony can be made, arguably, from the movement's musical similarities with the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. This reconstruction of [A<sup>0</sup>] is governed by one or other of two fundamental assumptions: either Simpson decided to write the Third Sym-

phony's first movement using Beethoven's as a model before he began writing [A<sup>0</sup>]; or he realised during the process of composition that the music which he had composed already possessed some of the fundamental features (e.g. thematic and melodic) that characterize the Beethoven movement.

The connection between the first movements of Simpson's Third and Beethoven's Ninth Symphonies was revealed by Pickard in 1989, when it was described by him as an analogy which is 'not merely gestural'.<sup>8</sup> Table 1 summarises the principal similarities and analogical connections between the opening musical paragraphs of the two sonata form movements. (Subsequent references to A<sup>1</sup> will use Simpson's bar numbering.)

Table 1: Comparison between Simpson: A<sup>1</sup>, bars 1–44 and Beethoven: bars 1–62

Beethoven	Simpson
Bars 1–16:	Bars 1–17:
Pedal, increase in dynamic ( <i>pp</i> to <i>ff</i> ) and instrumentation.	Pedal, increase in dynamic ( <i>pp</i> to <i>ff</i> ) and instrumentation.
Increasingly frequent repetition and expansion of a musical cell.	Increasingly frequent repetition and expansion of a musical cell.
Tonal ambiguity: the music is in neither A major nor A minor, but on the dominant chord of D minor.	Tonal ambiguity: the music may be in C major/minor, or on the enhanced dominant chord of B <sup>b</sup> minor.
Harmonic ambiguity: the sustained pitch classes A and E produce major/minor chord ambiguity because of the absence of the third from the chord.	Harmonic ambiguity: pitch class C (bars 1–11) is accompanied in bars 3–5 by both the major and enharmonic minor mediant of C.
Eight-stage entry of woodwind and brass instruments which gradually anticipates the tonality of the next section by predominantly ascending perfect fourths and perfect fifths.	Two semitonal lines, the second of which enters imitatively a minor third lower in bar 6, ascend through six perfect fifths (eight perfect fifths would reach pitch class C and its leading note, B). This process is an attempt to progress from the mediants of C major/minor to pitch classes G and A <sup>b</sup> . It is foiled by the gradual progress of the second line, by perfect fifths and at four

<sup>8</sup> John Pickard, *The symphonies of Robert Simpson*, Ph.D thesis, University of Wales (Bangor), 1989, p. 80; John Pickard, 'Simpson's Third Symphony – an analysis', in this volume p. 133 (Tonic p. 6).

Movement within stasis created through a sextuplet tremolo which doubles the pedal. This tremolo suggests 6/8 time within the simple duple time signature.

#### Bars 17–27:

Presentation of the melodies which are the origin of all of the subsequent material of the movement.

These melodies derive both rhythmically and intervallically from the musical cell, particularly through the use of the perfect fourth/fifth.

The melodies descend and then ascend, are primarily rhythmical, and are presented *fortissimo* in octaves.

This tune comprises three sections – *x* (bars 16–18), *y* (bars 19–20) and *z* (bars 21–27). These parts are presented one after the other.

Unexpected IV→II change of harmony on the second quaver of bar 24, when a G-minor chord might have been expected for the duration of bar 24. This is a transposed, harmonic anticipation of the modulation between the first- and second-subject groups.

The syncopation of the IV→II progression causes the strong macrorhythmic<sup>9</sup> stress to be lost, because the music in bar 25 cannot be reconciled aurally within a two-bar subdivision of the macrorhythm. This effect is prolonged by three features. First, there is ambiguity as to whether the music of bar 27 is a continuation of the preceding music, or an anticipation of the

beats' distance, from the supertonic and mediant of B♭ minor towards B♭'s tonic and leading note.

Movement within stasis created by semitone-orientated crotchets and a tremolo. The triple-time organization of Simpson's music for the strings in bars 12–17 anticipates the 3/2 metre of bars 18ff.

#### Bars 18–21:

Presentation of the melodies which are the origin of all of the subsequent material of the movement.

These melodies derive both rhythmically and intervallically from the musical cell, particularly through the use of the tone.

The melodies descend and then ascend, are primarily rhythmical, and are presented *fortissimo* in octaves.

Simpson presents *x* and *y* in counterpoint (bar 18), and concludes *x* and *y* with *z* (bar 19).

The first statement of *x*, *y*, and *z* ends on the dominant chord of B♭ minor (i.e., F major), the tonic-major chord of the second-subject group. *y* is then repeated one tone higher, and *x* a minor third higher, so that the pitch classes C and C♯ – the enharmonic, flattened supertonic of C – sound simultaneously.

Simpson inserts a bar's rest for every instrument after the repetition of *x*, *y*, and *z*, and obscures the next strong macrorhythmic stress at the beginning of bar 26 in three ways. First, there are ties from the final two beats of bar 25. Secondly, the next melody begins on another weak beat – the last minim beat of bar 25. Thirdly, subsequent syncopations occur in bar 26.

<sup>9</sup> 'Macrorhythm' denotes rhythm perceived not within individual bars, but covering groups of bars. A strong beat of a macrorhythm often coincides with a strong pulse.

music which follows. Secondly, the sforzandos in bars 31–33 obscure the strong beats. Thirdly, the moment of cadence at the beginning of bar 35 is obscured by both the return, in bar 34, of the sextuplets from the beginning of the movement, and the descending violin demisemiquavers of bars 34–35.

Bars 27–30:

These melodies are based on the musical cell.

Bars 31–35:

Three bars of syncopation (bars 31–33) which anticipate the sextuplet compound motion within the simple duple time of the movement at bar 34.

The melody descends by step through a twelfth.

The demisemiquavers of bars 34–35 are a rapid version of the descending part of *z*. If one agrees with Schenker that this melody is a composed out portamento,<sup>10</sup> then this material is derived from the musical cell.

Bars 35–50:

The opening figurations are repeated in the tonic.

Semiquaver repetitions of pitch class D (bars 49–50) anticipate the return of *x*, *y*, and *z*, and emphasise that the music does not reach the tonic key at the end of the passage, passing instead to B $\flat$  major.

Bars 22–25:

These melodies are based on the musical cell.

Bars 25–27:

One bar of syncopation (bar 26) in which crotchet motion anticipates the C time signature from bar 27.

The lower melody descends stepwise through the inversion of a twelfth: an eleventh.

The melody in the lower brass, which begins at bar 25, begins with the same four intervals which comprise *z*. All of the melodic material of this section derives from the musical cell.

Bars 27–40:

There are three sustained pitch classes: C (C major is the tonic at the end of the finale), B $\flat$  (B $\flat$  major/minor is the tonic at the end of the first movement) and B (pitch class B lies midway between C and B $\flat$  in the circle of fifths).

Semiquaver repetitions anticipate the return of *x*, *y*, and *z*, and emphasise that the music does not reach pitch class C at the end of the passage.

<sup>10</sup> See Heinrich Schenker, *Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, a portrayal of its musical content, with running commentary on performance and literature*, translated and ed. by John Rothgeb, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, p. 37.

This passage is a reference to bar 24 because the harmonic progression between chords which have their roots a major third apart reveals the same relationship as the tonics of D minor and B $\flat$  major, the respective keys of the first- and second-subject groups.

Having possibly expected the same number of ascents from the semitonal lines of bars 1–17 as Beethoven's number of pitch changes by the woodwind and brass in bars 1–16, one might expect Simpson's crotchets in bars 27–40 to rise by nine perfect fifths, because this total would then be consistent with Beethoven's number of pitch changes by the woodwind and brass in bars 35–50. Simpson's semitonal lines of bars 27–40 could therefore have passed from B $\flat$ , the pitch class with which they begin, via F, C, G, D, A, E, B, and F $\sharp$ , to C $\sharp$ , the dominant of the key in which the next statement of *x*, *y*, and *z* begins.

The sustained pitch classes C, B $\flat$ , and B, however, suggest that a passage centred on F might occur from bar 41. F, after all, lies diametrically opposite B, and halfway between C and B $\flat$ , in the circle of fifths. Simpson repeated *x* a semitone higher than expected in bars 20–21, sounding pitch classes C and C $\sharp$  together in bar 20, after using a chord of F major to suggest a connection between bar 19 and the key of the second-subject group. His reintroduction of *x*, *y*, and *z* in bars 41ff. not only a semitone higher than expected, but also a major third below the pitch of the melodies' initial statement in bars 18ff., is therefore no facile gesture to Beethoven's statement of *x*, *y*, and *z* in bars 51ff. a major third lower than the pitch at which his principal melodies were presented in bars 17ff. It is also a reference both to bars 20–21 of his own movement and to bar 24 of Beethoven's movement. This process results from the imitation of the motile line a semitone higher than expected (i.e., at a major third rather than at a minor third), and the orientation of Simpson's Transition around ascending semitones. The revised interval of imitation, moreover, decreases the number of ascending perfect fifths required within the process, thereby shortening the second musical paragraph, and producing an analogy to Beethoven's compression of the musical pacing of bars 1–16 in bars 35–50.

#### Bars 51–62:

By sounding *x*, *y*, and *z* on B $\flat$ , Beethoven anticipates the key of G minor, the key of his Development in bars 179–201, using a harmony whose root is a minor third above the tonic of G minor.

#### Bars 41–44:

Simpson's enharmonic composition of the second phrase of *y* in bar 43 harmonically anticipates A $\flat$  minor, the key of Simpson's Development in bars 203–225.

As Pickard observes,<sup>11</sup> similarities between the two movements occur less frequently after the Expositions because the material of each movement, and therefore the way the movements develop, is different. However, the extent of the musical similarities and analogies between the earliest stages of the two movements, as outlined above, offers a model against which a reconstruction of the music from stage [A<sup>0</sup>] of Simpson's symphony can be made.

Simpson deemed the music of A<sup>0</sup>/14–30 – that is, almost the entire Exposition – worthy of direct transference into source A<sup>1</sup> (i.e., A<sup>1</sup>/10–26). It is possible, therefore, that his decision to write a movement using this Beethoven model was made as late as writing A<sup>1</sup>/10. Nevertheless, Simpson's principal melodies in bars 4–5 of A<sup>0</sup>/13 sound a major third below the movement's eventual tonic. This fact suggests that Simpson already envisaged, subconsciously at least, a definite structural parallel. The parallel lies in the fact that, in the passage with which the surviving music on A<sup>0</sup>/13 formally corresponds, Beethoven also repeats unaltered, in bars 51ff., the melodies of bars 17ff. a major third below the tonic. This feature suggests that Simpson was composing at stage A<sup>0</sup> the same process that is revealed in the later sources. Thus in order to reconstruct the music of [A<sup>0</sup>] we may refer to source A<sup>1</sup>.

This close analogical resemblance between bars 1–44 of the first movement of Simpson's Third Symphony at stage A<sup>1</sup> and bars 1–62 of the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony permits one to attempt a reconstruction of [A<sup>0</sup>] on the basis of the music which survives on A<sup>0</sup>/13. Nevertheless, any such reconstruction must be subject to certain limitations. Although Simpson repeats his principal melodies a major third below their initial pitch (cf. Beethoven, bars 51ff. and 17ff.), and such repetition appears to have been a feature of A<sup>0</sup>, for example, it cannot be assumed that all of the non-structural pitch relationships were treated thus. In any case Simpson uses different tonalities and harmonies from Beethoven's.

Reconstruction of the orchestration of most of [A<sup>0</sup>] is impossible because the connection between Simpson's and Beethoven's movements does not extend to detailed instrumentation. Simpson's orchestration, moreover, had already changed between A<sup>0</sup>/13 and the formally corresponding music on A<sup>1</sup>/8 and A<sup>1</sup>/9. It will be possible, nevertheless, to reconstruct some of the instrumentation owing to the nature of the surviving music.

Reconstruction of the momentum of [A<sup>0</sup>] is possible, because the relationship between the momentum of formally corresponding passages between Simpson's and

<sup>11</sup> John Pickard, *The symphonies of Robert Simpson*, op. cit., p. 87; 'Simpson's Third Symphony – an analysis', in this volume p. 140 (Tonic p. 10).

Beethoven's movements is typically similar (if one understands by this the rates of harmonic change, dynamics, general instrumentation, and phrasing). This is clear if one compares bars 2–3 of  $A^0/13$  with bars 39–40 of  $A^1$ , or bars 4–5 of  $A^0/13$  with bars 41–42 of  $A^1$ .

Because there are melodic analogies between the Simpson and Beethoven movements, it is possible to reconstruct the melodies of the  $[A^0]$  pages. These reconstructions can be realized because of the presence of Simpson's analogy in the fourth and fifth bars of  $A^0/13$  to Beethoven's melodically unaltered repeat in bars 51ff. of  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$ . This consistency suggests that Simpson's music in bars 4 and 5 of the deleted page also comprised his version of  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  at stage  $A^0$ . Most of the  $[A^0]$  melodies can be reconstructed owing to the  $A^0$  principal melodies' analogical relationship with Beethoven's themes; this fact has implications for shorter melodic subdivisions such as phrases, motifs, and cells: they can also be reconstructed analogically.

### 2.2.1 The content of $A^0/13$

The musical content of  $A^0/13$  varies considerably from the version of this music in the later sources ( $A^1$ , bars 38–42;  $A^2$ ,  $P^1$ , and  $P^2$ , bars 39–43; cf. Examples 1 and 2, pp. 71–73). This inconsistency has implications for the reconstruction.

The first bar of  $A^0/13$  contains a unique feature: a sustained chord which comprises three superimposed perfect fifths above pitch class G. This figuration was to have been played by the upper woodwind and upper strings. The fact that this chord had begun prior to the first bar of  $A^0/13$  is attested by the ties which precede the first semi-breve in each part; so the original duration of this chord cannot be known. It could have begun at any particular moment between the  $[A^0]$  music which formally corresponded with the music found at bar 27 of  $A^1$  (i.e., the beginning of the second musical paragraph) and the last bar of  $[A^0]/12$ . It could even have entered in stages, as occurs in bars 454–467 of the first movement of source  $A^1$ , for example. (In these bars a twelve-note dissonance is gradually formed by the successive entries of notes a fifth apart.) The crotchet figurations in the first bar of  $A^0/13$  will be examined later.

The second and third bars of the deleted page contain two further melodic fragments. Both figurations are unique to stage  $A^0$ . The subsidiary idea, played by the horns, bassoon(s), contrabassoon, tuba, cellos, and double basses, is a slower-paced variant (in minims, in contrast to crotchets) of the motile figurations of the first bar of the page. The subsidiary semitone-orientated melody of bars 2–3 appears to have

Example 1: Symphony No. 3, A<sup>0</sup>/13

This image displays a handwritten musical score, identified as Example 1: Symphony No. 3, A<sup>0</sup>/13. The score is written on multiple staves, showing complex musical notation including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. A large, prominent diagonal line is drawn across the entire page, from the top left to the bottom right, likely indicating a revision or a section to be discarded. The notation is dense and appears to be a working draft or a composer's sketch. The paper shows signs of age and wear, with some staining and a dark mark in the top right corner. The score is organized into two main systems, each containing several staves. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, key signatures, and time signatures, though they are somewhat obscured by the diagonal line and the density of the handwriting. The overall impression is one of a highly detailed and complex musical composition in its early stages.

## Example 2: Symphony No. 3, A1/8-9

Handwritten musical score for Example 2: Symphony No. 3, A1/8-9. The score is written on ten staves, with various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. A circled '8' is in the top left, and a '40' is in the top right. The score includes annotations such as 'cresc.', 'musical cell', 'pp', 'mf', 'p', 'mp', 'cresc.', 'Tuba', 'Trp III', 'cresc.', and 'abre'.

This image shows a handwritten musical score on page 73 of a manuscript. The score is written on multiple staves, with the left side containing dense musical notation and the right side being mostly empty. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals. A large, stylized 'X' is written above the first staff, and a circled '9' is visible in the upper right corner. A long horizontal arrow points from the left side of the score towards the right, indicating a continuation or a specific section. The handwriting is in black ink on aged paper.

been anticipatory. On  $A^0/13$ , for example, using the leading note and the enharmonic versions of both the tonic and flattened supertonic of  $B\flat$  major/minor, it anticipates the return of  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$ , when the principal melodies sound a major third below the key in which they were presented. Moreover, in bars 132–134 and 408–410 of  $A^1$ , where the subsidiary melody was deleted both times, it anticipated the final cadence of the Exposition and Recapitulation, also using the tonic and flattened supertonic. The presence of this semitonal figuration on  $A^0/13$  was rejected in favour of the sustained  $b/b'$  in the second and fourth horn parts of bars 30–35 of stage  $A^1$ , and the more rhythmically active version of pitch class B, forming part of the musical cell, in the lower strings, lower woodwind, trumpets and timpani in  $A^1$ , bars 35–40. This alteration renders more obvious the presence of the degree a semitone above the tonic.

The more prominent thematic idea in bars 2–3 of  $A^0/13$  was written for the upper woodwind and upper strings. It is also anticipatory, because it is not only rhythmically quicker than the subsidiary melody, but is also orientated around the dominant and flattened submediant of  $F\sharp$  minor, the tonality at the end of the passage. This figuration was replaced after stage  $A^0$  by semitonal music primarily in semiquavers. These semiquavers are organised around the natural and sharpened submediant of  $F\sharp$  minor. See, for example, the flute, oboe, and violin parts of  $A^1$ , bars 39–40.

Bar 4 of  $A^0/13$  has the most implications for the ensuing reconstruction. The later version of this bar (i.e.,  $A^1$ , bar 41) comprises a repetition, transposed a major third lower, of  $x$  and  $y$ , but the version on  $A^0/13$  contains only  $y$ . The absence of  $x$  deprives stage  $A^0$  of one of the principal melodies from which subsequent melodic material is derived.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.2.2 Consequences of the absence of $x$ from $A^0/13$

The absence of  $x$  from bar 4 of  $A^0/13$  was not an accident: Simpson inserted rests in the upper woodwind and upper string parts, the instruments which would eventually play this melody. Moreover, in bar 20 of stage  $A^1$  – a later point during the movement's genesis when  $x$  was written down – the melody was written over semibreve rests in the parts for the flutes, clarinets, violas, and cellos. Simpson may have considered simply deleting the rests before writing  $x$ , as the rest in the clarinet parts appears to have been crossed out. The fact that not all of the instruments in bar 20 (most obviously the oboes, bassoons, and violins) contain similar rests, however, indicates further indecision about

<sup>12</sup> The final bar of  $A^0/13$  was written enharmonically in the later versions. However, this alteration does not affect the reconstruction.

the inclusion of  $x$ . The rests in bar 20 may signify that Simpson considered an echo between the music of bars 18–19 and 20–21 of  $A^1$  by reducing the instrumental forces. This possibility seems unlikely, however, for four reasons. First, echo effects within such a short space of time do not occur elsewhere during any stage of the movement's composition. Secondly, there is no evidence that the accompaniment to  $x - y$  – was also to be presented as an echo. Thirdly, the different instrumentation and dynamic levels of the echo would not match Simpson's treatment of  $B\flat$  (bars 18–19) and  $C$  (bars 20–21) as equally justifiable tonics in the movement. Finally, Simpson does not usually subdivide large sections of the orchestra (e.g., the entire woodwind or string sections) into smaller instrumental combinations in order to play passages in octaves. However, the absence of any trace of semibreve rests in the instrumental parts of bar 18 of  $A^1$  – the first time  $x$  was written during this stage – could also suggest that, although Simpson had already conceived  $x$ , he chose not to write it into bar 18 because he had not yet decided how to achieve his analogy with Beethoven's IV–II progression of bar 24.

It is possible that Simpson did not conceive  $x$  until he had written out almost the entire Exposition – that is, until the end of stage  $A^0$ . This chronology seems evident because the conclusion of this formal section, particularly the music of bars 3–4 of  $A^0/30$ , is the next occasion after the  $F\sharp$ -minor statement of  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  when Simpson's analogy to Beethoven's descending major third, and hence the return of music initially connected with  $x$ , is necessary.

It is most likely that  $x$  was not conceived until bars 41 and 43 of stage  $A^1$ , because these are the first bars in which there is no apparent reason for, nor any evidence of, any revision of  $x$ . Simpson then turned to  $A^{1/4}$  and inserted  $x$  into bars 18 and 20, without erasing from the latter bar the semibreve rests of his earlier working. Simpson was not concerned about inserting  $x$  into bar 4 of  $A^0/13$ , because the genesis of the work had already progressed beyond stage  $A^0$ . Nevertheless, the characteristics of  $x$  were probably inspired by the melodies of the woodwind and strings in bars 4–5 of  $A^0/15$  and bars 1–2 of  $A^0/16$ .

The conception of the musical cell – the music from which  $x$  is derived – was most likely to have occurred, like the conception of  $x$ , after stage  $A^0$ . Unlike the later versions of this passage (e.g.,  $A^1$ , bars 39–40), the cell is absent from the corresponding bars – page 13, bars 2–3 – of  $A^0$ . This absence casts enough doubt on the possibility that this figuration was conceived by stage  $A^0$ , for one to refrain from suggesting any derivations from it in any of the reconstructions.

It is likely, according to the nature of the analogical connection between Simpson's and Beethoven's movements, that Simpson originally intended the melodic material of

his opening movement, and perhaps of the entire symphony, to be derived from a prototype musical cell and melodies  $y$  and  $z$  alone. Having decided that this material was inadequate for subsequent development, he felt the need to introduce another melody and another musical cell, that is, music which was more conducive to development.

The absence of  $x$  has implications for  $y$ . If  $x$  had not been conceived at stage  $A^0$ , could  $y$  have been the  $A^0$  equivalent of  $x$ , and were, therefore, those  $A^1$  derivatives of  $x$  actually derived from  $y$  at stage  $A^0$ ? This situation seems unlikely because the figurations unique to  $A^0$  in bars 2–3 of page 13 are no more closely related to  $y$  than to  $x$ .

### 2.3 The significance of $A^1$ , bar 22.

Reconstruction of  $[A^0]$  begins from  $A^1/10^v$ , but it is affected by  $A^1/5$ . Because  $A^1/10^v$  was originally  $A^0/13$ , there must have been twelve pages of  $[A^0]$  music which preceded it. Simpson's tendency to write five bars of music upon each page suggests that there were sixty bars (i.e.,  $12 \times 5$  bars) of music which preceded the first bar of  $A^0/13$ . This total is twenty-three bars more than the formally corresponding point of the musical process in  $A^1$  – the latter is reached after thirty-seven bars. The real difference between the number of bars, however, is twenty-two. This discrepancy results from the insertion of an 'extra' bar 22 during stage  $A^1$ . The bar was indicated above the topmost stave and below the lowest stave of  $A^1/5$ , but was not accounted for in the pre-written bar numbering. In order, therefore, to account for the surplus two bars of music from the four extra pages of manuscript paper, it is likely that the music in two of the sixty bars of  $[A^0]$  comprised at least a single deleted bar. This deletion was then rectified in the following bar or bars.

### 2.4 Limitations of the reconstruction

Although there is no foundation for reconstructing much of the  $[A^0]$  instrumentation, harmonies and tonalities (as yet), or the melodies derived either from  $x$  or from the musical cell, the analogical consistency between the music which survives on  $A^0/13$  and the formally corresponding music of the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony can be used to reconstruct, from bars 1–40 of  $A^1$ , not only the melodies derived from  $y$  and  $z$ , but also the general momentum of  $[A^0]$ , as this has been defined above.

### 3.1 Reconstruction of the [A<sup>0</sup>] version of A<sup>1</sup>, bars 27–40

#### 3.1.1 The [A<sup>0</sup>] version of the violin music of A<sup>1</sup>, bars 27–40

Extrapolation from the motile crotchet figurations found in the first bar of A<sup>0</sup>/13 is possible because of the similarity between the location of this bar's phrase marks, and phrasing for the first oboe, first horn, and violin parts in the corresponding bars of A<sup>1</sup> (bars 38 and 39). There remains some ambiguity, however, as to whether the A<sup>0</sup> phrase marks began on the preceding page. This uncertainty arises because of the stress above the first crotchet of the bar (stresses are not written out – though they are implied – within these phrases from A<sup>1</sup> onwards), and the fact that in many cases, though not in every case, phrase marks or ties between different pages are written so that they precede the staves.

The instrumentation of the surviving motile figurations cannot be absolutely certain, for two reasons. First, Simpson did not specify the instruments on the surviving page. Secondly, Simpson often writes not only his bassoon and contrabassoon parts, but also his trombone and tuba parts, on the same staves in source A<sup>1</sup>. The semibreve rest above the first bar of the twelfth stave from the top of the page suggests that this music was played not by the third trombone, but by the tuba. This intention is confirmed by the 'Trb III' indication two bars later. It is also likely that the contrabassoon (the seventh stave from the top of the page) was intended, because this instrumentation then balances the lower sonority of the double basses. This deployment of the instruments is comparable with the manner in which the voices of a motile line balance each other – the voices exchange not only pitch classes at stage A<sup>0</sup>, but also actual pitches from stage A<sup>1</sup> onwards. The music on the eighth and ninth staves from the top of the page, moreover, belonged to the first and third horns, rather than their full complement. This organization is confirmed by the 'a 2' indication for the last bar of the page.

The motile voices on A<sup>0</sup>/13 do not continue for a consistent amount of time compared with the revised version of this music; at stage A<sup>1</sup> half of the motile voices are curtailed before bar 39, and half continue for another two bars (bars 39–40). This curtailment results from the introduction of the semiquaver figuration in bars 39–40 of stage A<sup>1</sup>. However, one assumes that every pair of semitone-orientated voices is homologous, because neither voice occurs independently elsewhere in the movement in any other manuscript or printed edition. The motile voices in bars 39–40 of stage A<sup>1</sup> were therefore curtailed merely in order to enhance the anticipation of the return of *x*, *y*, and *z* two bars later, using semiquavers.

Each motile line is subdivisible into two voices. These voices both overlap each other at the distance of a semitone, and ascend sequentially. One voice begins with a descending semitone. The semitone of the other voice begins by ascending. The first bar of A<sup>0</sup>/13 contains the last three or four notes<sup>13</sup> of the two parts: g–f<sup>#</sup>–b–a<sup>#</sup> (horns 1 and 3, doubled by cellos and double basses) and f<sup>#</sup>–g–a<sup>#</sup>–b (bassoon(s), contrabassoon, and tuba).<sup>14</sup>

The A<sup>1</sup> version of this passage (bars 27–40), which contains complete motile lines similar to those at the beginning of the symphony, is shown below. The return of these figurations at the beginning of the Development has not been used as a reference here, because the intervals and direction of the motile lines differ from those in the first-subject group. (See Example 3, pp. 79–81.) A motile line and each of its two voices have ascending ‘connecting’ sections and ‘stationary’ sections. Two ‘connecting’ voices, for example, combine to form a ‘connecting’ part of one motile line. In motile lines and in their voices, a connecting unit typically links two stationary units a perfect fifth apart. Similarly, the number of successive crotchets in the stationary part varies between six (e.g., piccolo 1, bars 16–17), ten (e.g., flute 2, bars 6–8), and twenty-two (e.g., violins, bars 27–32); the connecting part consists of seven crotchets when passing to a different figuration (e.g., violins, bars 37–38) and eight crotchets when connecting two stationary parts with the same figuration (e.g., clarinet 1, bars 5–7).

It remains unclear whether the notes of the motile voices in the first bar of A<sup>0</sup>/13 originally comprised part of a seven- or eight-note line, however. Although these voices lead to different music, the figurations in the following two bars are not entirely new (they are still orientated around the semitone), nor are they the same as other stationary figurations, because the rhythm is both augmented and diminished. Nevertheless, the similar location of the phrase marks in the first bar of A<sup>0</sup>/13, compared with those in bar 39 of A<sup>1</sup>, indicates that each surviving four-note voice of A<sup>0</sup> formed part of a rising seven-note line, ending with b and a<sup>#</sup>. The final a<sup>#</sup> and b of the bar comprised the eighth note, as the two voices cross. This eighth note falls outside the phrase mark.

Having established that the crotchets in the first bar of A<sup>0</sup>/13 were part of an ascending connecting unit of a motile line, that this connecting unit lasted for eight successive crotchets, that a motile line is divisible into two overlapping voices a semitone

<sup>13</sup> This ambiguity depends on the possibility of the final crotchet of the bar (a<sup>#</sup>/b) belonging inside, or outside, the phrase mark of the preceding group of ascending crotchets.

<sup>14</sup> The double basses and contrabassoon sound an octave lower than written. Further discussion about the music for these instruments, therefore, will concern their written pitches, unless otherwise stipulated.

Example 3: Symphony No. 3, A<sup>1</sup>/6-8

The image displays a handwritten musical score for Example 3, Symphony No. 3, A<sup>1</sup>/6-8. The score is written on multiple staves, showing complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings. The notation includes various notes, rests, and articulation marks. Key features include:

- Staff 1 (Top):** Features a series of eighth notes with accents, marked with a circled '3' and a '(F)'.
- Staff 2:** Labeled '8ve', it contains a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 3:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 4:** Similar to the previous staves, with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 5:** Features a more complex rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 6:** Includes a 'dim' (diminuendo) marking and a 'pp' (pianissimo) marking.
- Staff 7:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 8:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 9:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 10:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 11:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 12:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 13:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 14:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 15:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 16:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 17:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 18:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 19:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 20:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 21:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 22:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 23:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 24:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 25:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 26:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 27:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 28:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 29:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 30:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 31:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 32:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 33:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 34:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 35:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 36:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 37:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 38:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 39:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 40:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 41:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 42:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 43:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 44:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 45:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 46:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 47:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 48:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 49:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 50:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 51:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 52:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 53:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 54:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 55:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 56:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 57:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 58:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 59:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 60:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 61:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 62:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 63:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 64:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 65:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 66:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 67:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 68:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 69:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 70:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 71:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 72:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 73:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 74:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 75:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 76:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 77:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 78:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 79:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 80:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 81:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 82:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 83:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 84:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 85:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 86:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 87:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 88:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 89:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 90:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 91:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 92:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 93:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 94:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 95:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 96:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 97:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.
- Staff 98:** Features a series of eighth notes with accents.
- Staff 99:** Includes a 'dim' marking and a 'pp' marking.
- Staff 100:** Continues the rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and accents.

Handwritten musical score on ten staves, organized into two systems of five staves each. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

**Top System:**

- Staff 1: Contains a melodic line starting with a *pp* (pianissimo) marking, followed by a slur over several notes. A circled number "7" is written in the right margin.
- Staff 2: Empty.
- Staff 3: Empty.
- Staff 4: Contains a complex passage with many beamed notes and a *pp* marking.
- Staff 5: Contains a complex passage with many beamed notes and a *pp* marking.

**Bottom System:**

- Staff 1: Contains a melodic line with a *pp* marking.
- Staff 2: Contains a melodic line with a *pp* marking.
- Staff 3: Contains a melodic line with a *pp* marking.
- Staff 4: Contains a melodic line with a *pp* marking.
- Staff 5: Contains a complex passage with many beamed notes and a *pp* marking.

The score is written in black ink on white paper. The notation is dense and complex, particularly in the lower systems. The dynamic marking *pp* is used frequently throughout the piece.

Handwritten musical score for 'The Rose Tree'. The score is written on ten staves. The first staff is a vocal line with lyrics 'The Rose Tree' and 'The Rose Tree'. The second staff is a vocal line with lyrics 'The Rose Tree' and 'The Rose Tree'. The third staff is a vocal line with lyrics 'The Rose Tree' and 'The Rose Tree'. The fourth staff is a vocal line with lyrics 'The Rose Tree' and 'The Rose Tree'. The fifth staff is a vocal line with lyrics 'The Rose Tree' and 'The Rose Tree'. The sixth staff is a vocal line with lyrics 'The Rose Tree' and 'The Rose Tree'. The seventh staff is a vocal line with lyrics 'The Rose Tree' and 'The Rose Tree'. The eighth staff is a vocal line with lyrics 'The Rose Tree' and 'The Rose Tree'. The ninth staff is a vocal line with lyrics 'The Rose Tree' and 'The Rose Tree'. The tenth staff is a vocal line with lyrics 'The Rose Tree' and 'The Rose Tree'. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'cresc.' and 'p'.

apart, and that each voice consists of both a regular sequence of intervals and an unchanging rhythm, an attempt can be made to extrapolate backwards the preceding notes in this line, according to the intervallic composition of each voice.

For the voice in which the semitones descend, the first flute part of bars 36–37 and the first violin part of bars 37–38 of  $A^1$  have been chosen as the model for the re-composition, because they are closest to the pertinent bars of  $[A^0]$  in terms of both the point at which they were composed, and their position within the movement's form.<sup>15</sup> By applying the intervals between the connecting notes of these passages to the four surviving notes of this voice on  $A^0/13$ , an extrapolation occurs as shown in Reconstruction 1.

### Reconstruction 1: Extrapolation of $[A^0]$ music using Symphony No. 3, stage $A^1$ , first movement, bars 36–37, first flute part

Line rises through a perfect fifth.

Flt. 1

36 37

*pp* *cresc.*

tone ↑ minor 2<sup>nd</sup> ↓ diminished 4<sup>th</sup> ↑ minor 2<sup>nd</sup> ↓ minor 3<sup>rd</sup> ↑ minor 2<sup>nd</sup> ↓ perfect 4<sup>th</sup> ↑ minor 2<sup>nd</sup> ↓ tone ↓

Intervals used for the extrapolation of  $[A^0]$

Voice which begins with a descending semitone

Line rises through a perfect fifth.

Cellos, Hns. 1, 3, Bases

8<sup>va</sup> *pp* *cresc.*

tone ↑ semitone ○ ↓ major 3<sup>rd</sup> ↑ semitone ↓ minor 3<sup>rd</sup> ↑ semitone ↓ perfect 4<sup>th</sup> ↑ semitone ↓ tone ↓

Extrapolation of  $[A^0]$

Voice which begins with a descending semitone

( ) : Notes which lie outside the reconstruction

[ ] : Interval between the reconstruction and the preceding / following unit

\* : This progression is absent from bars 1-2 of  $A^0/13$ ;  $A^0/13$  has a crotchet  $a\sharp$  passing to a minim  $b\flat$ .

○ : Some intervals have been simplified enharmonically

A second assumption can now be made. Within the musical paragraph which begins at bar 27 of  $A^1$ , there are two connecting motile units in this voice, because the music ascends through two perfect fifths (e.g.,  $A^1$ , bars 27–34, violins, passing to flute 1 and clarinets, bars 33–40). As Reconstruction 1 represents the second connecting part of this voice, it can be concluded, by extrapolating the first note ( $c\sharp$ ) through a fur-

<sup>15</sup> The diminished third between the second and third crotchets in the flute 1 part of bar 39 of  $A^1$  is atypical of the other connecting lines. (The interval is typically a major third.) This voice has therefore not been used here as a source of reference.

ther descending perfect fifth, that the original stationary part of this voice began not with  $\underline{b}b''$ , moving between  $\underline{b}b''$ ,  $\underline{a}''$ , and  $\underline{b}b''$ , as occurs with the revised version of this music (cf. A<sup>1</sup>, bars 27 ff., violin 1), but with  $\underline{F}\sharp$ , moving between  $\underline{F}\sharp$ ,  $\underline{E}$ , and  $\underline{F}\sharp$  (see Reconstruction 2).

Reconstruction 2: Extrapolation of [A<sup>0</sup>] music using Symphony No. 3, stage A<sup>1</sup>, first movement, bars 32–34, first violin part

Line rises through a perfect fifth.

Vln. 1 *pp*

diminished 3<sup>rd</sup> ↑ minor 2<sup>nd</sup> ↓ major 3<sup>rd</sup> ↑ minor 3<sup>rd</sup> ↓ minor 2<sup>nd</sup> ↑ minor 3<sup>rd</sup> ↓ minor 2<sup>nd</sup> ↑ perfect 4<sup>th</sup> semitone ↓ tone ↓

Intervals used for the extrapolation of [A<sup>0</sup>]

Voice which begins with a descending semitone

Line rises through a perfect fifth.

Cellos, Hns. 1, 3, Basses *8<sup>va</sup> basso*

tone<sup>o</sup> ↑ semitone ↓ major 3<sup>rd</sup> ↑ semitone ↓ minor 3<sup>rd</sup> ↑ semitone ↓ perfect 4<sup>th</sup> ↑ semitone ↓ tone ↓

Extrapolation of [A<sup>0</sup>]

Voice which begins with a descending semitone

For the meaning of  $\left( \right), \left[ \right]$  and  $^o$ , see Reconstruction 1.

An extrapolation can also be made of the voice which begins with an ascending semitone. The second violin part of bars 32–34 and 37–38 of A<sup>1</sup> has been chosen as the model for this recomposition, again because this extract occurs so near to the A<sup>0</sup> passage.<sup>16</sup> An extrapolation from the intervals between the connecting notes of the parts mentioned above and the four surviving notes of A<sup>0</sup> into the preceding bars, is shown in Reconstruction 3.

<sup>16</sup> The interval represented by the first crotchet of bar 33 in the second violin part of P<sup>1</sup>/P<sup>2</sup>, for example, is atypical, as the first note is usually identical with the last note of the preceding stationary voice. This inconsistency occurred at stages P<sup>1</sup>/P<sup>2</sup>, when  $\underline{b}b'$  became  $\underline{a}'$ , and is probably a copying error.

Reconstruction 3: Extrapolation of  $[A^0]$  music using Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage  $A^1$ , first movement, bars 37–38, second violin part

Line rises through a perfect fifth.

Vln. 2

unison (octave) ↓ semitone ↑ tone ↑ minor 2<sup>nd</sup> ↑ semitone ↑ minor 2<sup>nd</sup> ↑ minor 3<sup>rd</sup> ↑ semitone ↑

Intervals used for the extrapolation of  $[A^0]$

Voice which begins with an ascending semitone

Line rises through a perfect fifth.

Bsn(s), Tuba, C. bsn.

unison semitone ↑ tone ↑ semitone<sup>o</sup> ↑ semitone ↑ semitone ↑ minor 3<sup>rd</sup> ↑ semitone ↑

Extrapolation of  $[A^0]$

Voice which begins with an ascending semitone

\* : This progression is absent from bars 1-2 of  $A^0/13$ ;  $A^0/13$  has a crotchet  $\flat$ , followed by a minim  $\flat$ .

It has again been assumed that each voice comprises two connecting motile units, and therefore rises through two perfect fifths, as is the case in this musical paragraph from stage  $A^1$  onwards. If so, one can conclude that the original stationary part of this motile line began not with  $\underline{a'}$ ,  $\underline{b'}$ ,  $\underline{a'}$ , the notes of the revised version of this music, but with  $\underline{F}$ ,  $\underline{F\#}$ , and  $\underline{F}$ . The extrapolation which demonstrates this organization is shown in Reconstruction 4.

Reconstruction 4: Extrapolation of  $[A^0]$  music using Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage  $A^1$ , first movement, bars 32–34, second violin part

Line rises through a perfect fifth.

Vln. 2

unison semitone ↑ tone ↑ minor 2<sup>nd</sup> ↑ semitone ↑ minor 2<sup>nd</sup> ↑ minor 3<sup>rd</sup> ↑ semitone ↑

Intervals used for the extrapolation of  $[A^0]$

Voice which begins with an ascending semitone

Line rises through a perfect fifth.

Bsn(s), Tuba, C. bsn.

unison semitone ↑ tone ↑ semitone<sup>o</sup> ↑ semitone ↑ semitone ↑ minor 3<sup>rd</sup> ↑ semitone ↑

Extrapolation of  $[A^0]$

Voice which begins with an ascending semitone

To the connecting units mentioned above can be added the stationary sections. These stationary sections can also be reconstructed from the passage of stage  $A^1$  which relates most closely to them, whether formally or temporally. For the stationary section which precedes the second connecting unit of this line, bars 34–36 (violins 1 and 2, ten crotchets) and bars 33–35 (flute 1, clarinets 1 and 2) may serve as examples. Bars

27–32 (violins 1 and 2, 22 crotchets) provide an example for reconstructing the first stationary unit (see Reconstructions 5 and 6).

Reconstruction 5: Extrapolation of  $[A^0]$  music using Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage  $A^1$ , first movement, bars 34–36, first and second violin parts

Violins 1 and 2 parts are shown. The first section (bars 34-35) is labeled 'End of the first "connecting" unit.' The second section (bars 35-36) is labeled 'Second "stationary" part.' The third section (bar 37) is labeled 'Beginning of the second "connecting" unit.'

Reconstruction 6: Extrapolation of  $[A^0]$  music using Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage  $A^1$ , first movement, bars 27–32, first and second violin parts

Violins 1 and 2 parts are shown. The first section (bars 27-28) is labeled 'Beginning of the second large musical paragraph.' The second section (bars 28-31) is labeled 'First "stationary" part.' The third section (bar 32) is labeled 'Beginning of the first "connecting" unit.'

### 3.1.2 The $[A^0]$ version of the music played by the first flute, clarinets, and violas in $A^1$ , bars 33–40

From stage  $A^1$  onwards, the intervallic relationship between Simpson's two motile lines in this formal section is atypical of the intervals between stationary sections

within a motile line. When the first flute, clarinets, and violas enter at bar 33 of  $A^1$ , for example, their pitch classes ( $G\flat$  and  $F$ ) are not a perfect fifth above  $B\flat$  and  $A$ , the pitch classes which begin the paragraph at bar 27, but a semitone higher instead. It seems that Simpson intended to create the impression that the motile crotchets within this passage twice ascend by perfect fifths, thereby recalling the process of the beginning of the work, for two reasons. First, the violins in bars 27ff. of  $A^1$  ascend from  $\flat\flat''/\flat\flat'$  to  $\flat'/\flat''$ , the sequential ascent from the latter two pitches being curtailed on the note preceding the expected arrival on  $\underline{c}'''/\underline{c}'$ . (The registral change from  $\underline{c}''$  to  $\underline{c}'$  is a consequence of the transposition of the second violin part down an octave between bars 36–37 of stage  $A^1$ .) Secondly, the motile line which enters in bar 33 of  $A^1$  also rises through two perfect fifths, and overlaps with the ascent through the first perfect fifth by the violins ( $A^1$ , bars 27–34). Simpson is associating the imitative entry, a semitone higher than expected, with the apparent failure of the violin sequence to reach pitch class  $C$ , harmonized by  $A\flat$ , when  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  are restated at  $A^1$ , bars 41–44. This association is intensified when the violins begin in bar 39 of  $A^1$  the more obviously semitone-orientated semiquaver figuration which is unrelated to any further ascent towards the pitch class  $C$ . In this way bars 27–40 of  $A^1$  mirror the first paragraph, where similar figurations lead the music away from  $C$ .

The motile line which enters at bar 33 of  $A^1$  must have been played by the trumpets and trombones during [ $A^0$ ], because all of the remaining instruments were already playing in the first bar of the crossed-out page. Moreover, these [ $A^0$ ] brass parts must have been subsequently curtailed before reaching the deleted page. The voice which begins in bar 33 of stage  $A^1$  with a descending semitone (i.e.,  $\underline{g}\flat'/\underline{g}\flat-\underline{f}'/\underline{f}$ , played by the flute 1 and violas, but to be transposed, and transferred to the trumpet 1 and trombone 1 of [ $A^0$ ]) is located not only a major tenth, but also a major seventeenth, below the first violin part of  $A^1$ , bar 27. The upper pitch of the violin part –  $\flat\flat''$  – has already been transposed into the cellos, first and third horns, and double basses of [ $A^0$ ] as  $\underline{F}\sharp$ . Similarly, the voice which begins in bar 33 of  $A^1$  with an ascending semitone (i.e.,  $\underline{f}'/\underline{f}-\underline{g}\flat'/\underline{g}\flat$ , played by the clarinets, but to be transposed, and transferred to the trumpet 2 and trombone 2 of [ $A^0$ ]) lies both a major third and a major tenth below the second violin part of  $A^1$ , bar 27. The lower pitch of this violin part –  $\underline{a}'$  – has already been transferred into the bassoon(s), contrabassoon, and tuba parts of [ $A^0$ ] as  $\underline{F}$  (see Reconstructions 7 and 8).

### Reconstruction 7: First reconstruction of the $[A^0]$ version of Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage $A^1$ , first movement, bars 33–40, viola and first flute music

Hns.1,2, Cellos, Basses; first note of  $[A^0]$  reconstruction

Major 10<sup>th</sup> (transposed)

*pp* *cresc.*

Trp.1 (sounding pitch), Tbn.1 (8<sup>th</sup> bassa).

Working out of the music which immediately preceded  $A^0/13$

Represents a theoretical scenario, owing to the inclusion of bar rests for the first 3 bars of  $A^0/13$

### Reconstruction 8: First reconstruction of the $[A^0]$ version of Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage $A^1$ , first movement, bars 33–40, first and second clarinet music

Bsn(s), Tuba, C.bsn.; first note of  $[A^0]$  reconstruction

Major 10<sup>th</sup> (transposed)

*pp* *cresc.*

Trp.2 (sounding pitch), Tbn.2 (8<sup>th</sup> bassa).

Working out of the music which immediately preceded  $A^0/13$

Represents a theoretical scenario, owing to the inclusion of bar rests for the first 3 bars of  $A^0/13$

Reconstructions 7 and 8 are problematical because the trumpet and trombone notes cannot be deduced on the premise that the register in which they begin is a major third, a major tenth, or a major seventeenth, below the original version of the violin parts of bar 27 of  $A^1$ ; because, with these violin parts transposed down into the register of the horns, cellos, bassoons, contrabassoon, tuba, and double basses in  $[A^0]$ , the notes a major third/major tenth/major seventeenth below  $F$  and  $F\#$  now lie below the range of the trumpets and trombones.

It could be surmised that the parts which enter at bar 33 of  $A^1$  began with  $d'$ ,  $c\#'$ , and  $d'$  (trumpet 1, sounding pitch) and  $c\#'$ ,  $d'$ , and  $c\#'$  (trumpet 2, sounding pitch) during  $[A^0]$ , and that these  $[A^0]$  voices were doubled at the octave below by the trombones. According to this assumption, the intervallic relationship of the major third and major tenth remains constant between the entries of each motile line, but the music falls in the most comfortable register for those instruments.

It is also possible that the motile voices which commence at bar 33 of A<sup>1</sup> began with  $\flat$  and  $\flat$  in the trumpet parts of [A<sup>0</sup>]. If so, the intervals of the major tenth and major seventeenth are used as a major third, and the first trumpet notes are worked out from above, rather than below, the  $\text{F}/\text{F}\sharp$ . This possibility is less likely than Reconstructions 7 and 8, however, because the lower note one octave below the trumpet part, for example, is beyond the range of the tenor trombone, the instrument which would have doubled the trumpet parts (see Reconstructions 9 and 10).

**Reconstruction 9:** Second reconstruction of the [A<sup>0</sup>] version of Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage A<sup>1</sup>, first movement, bars 33–40, viola and first flute music

Trp.1 (sounding pitch), Tbn.1 (8<sup>va</sup> *basso*).

*pp* Major 10<sup>th</sup>

Hns.1,3, Cellos, Bases; first note of [A<sup>0</sup>] reconstruction

Working out of the music which immediately preceded A<sup>0</sup>/13

*cresc.*

Represents a theoretical scenario, owing to the inclusion of bar rests for the first 3 bars of A<sup>0</sup>/13

**Reconstruction 10:** Second reconstruction of the [A<sup>0</sup>] version of Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage A<sup>1</sup>, first movement, bars 33–40, first and second clarinet music

Trp.2 (sounding pitch), Tbn.2 (8<sup>va</sup> *basso*).

*pp* Major 10<sup>th</sup>

Bsn(s), Tuba, C.bsn.; first note of [A<sup>0</sup>] reconstruction

Working out of the music which immediately preceded A<sup>0</sup>/13

*cresc.*

Represents a theoretical scenario, owing to the inclusion of bar rests for the first 3 bars of A<sup>0</sup>/13

### 3.1.3 Re-evaluation of Reconstructions 1–10

The initial extrapolations were made on the assumption that the incomplete motile line which survived in the first bar of A<sup>0</sup>/13 was part of the original version of the music for the violins in A<sup>1</sup>, bars 27–40. From this point it was assumed that the [A<sup>0</sup>] version of the first flute, clarinet, and viola parts in bars 33–40 of A<sup>1</sup> was played by the trum-

pets and first and second trombones. It is also conceivable, however, that these details of instrumentation were reversed between  $[A^0]$  and  $A^1$ . If so, the eight surviving  $A^0$  notes of the motile line in the first and third horns, bassoon(s), contrabassoon, tuba, cellos, and double basses were part of the original working of the first flute, clarinet, and viola parts in bars 33–40 of  $A^1$ . The violin parts in bars 27–40 of  $A^1$  therefore would have originally been written for the trumpet and trombone parts on  $[A^0]/12$ . Moreover, the atypical connecting unit in bars 38–40 of  $A^1$  – the interval between the third and fourth crotchets of the clarinet parts in bar 39 is a unison, rather than a tone – may have also been present in the  $[A^0]$  music.

Another possible reconstruction of the motile voices on  $[A^0]/12$  would, therefore, involve transposing the first flute part of bars 33–40 of  $A^1$  down a minor fourteenth. This interval occurs between the last note of the first flute part in bar 40 of  $A^1$  (i.e.,  $g^\sharp$ ) and the last note of the first bar of  $A^0/13$  in the first and third horns, cellos, and double basses, (i.e.,  $a^\sharp$ ). The voice which begins with a descending semitone is shown in Reconstruction 11.

Reconstruction 11: Third reconstruction of the  $[A^0]$  version of Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage  $A^1$ , first movement, bars 33–40, viola and first flute music

(8<sup>va</sup> bassa  
Flt. 1, Vlas.  
pp  
Minor fourteenth  
cresc.  
ff  
Cellos, Hns. 1, 3, Bases  
pp  
cresc.  
ff  
Extrapolation of notes comprising the motile line of  $[A^0]$   
Voice which begins with a descending semitone

The voice which begins with an ascending semitone (cf.  $A^0/13$ , bar 1, bassoon(s), contrabassoon, and tuba parts, and  $A^1$ , bars 33–40, clarinets) can be similarly constructed, as shown in Reconstruction 12.



### Reconstruction 14: The [A<sup>0</sup>] version of Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage A<sup>1</sup>, first movement, bars 27–33, second violin music

Trp.2 (sounding pitch), Tbn.2 (8<sup>va</sup> *bassa*).

Major 10<sup>th</sup>

Bsn(s), Tuba, C.bsn.; first note of [A<sup>0</sup>] reconstruction

Working out of the music which immediately preceded A<sup>0</sup>/13

Represents a theoretical scenario, owing to the inclusion of bar rests for the first 3 bars of A<sup>0</sup>/13

### 3.1.4 Comparison between Reconstructions 1–10 and 11–14

The two complete reconstructions of the passage are given as Reconstructions 15 (i.e., Reconstructions 1–10, p. 92–95) and 16 (i.e., Reconstructions 11–14, pp. 96–99). According to the principles governing Reconstruction 16, the notes played by the trumpets and trombones lie in the register which is most comfortable for them, without the necessity for any octave transpositions. Since this is not so in Reconstruction 15, Reconstruction 16 may seem more plausible than Reconstruction 15.

The notes which begin the two semitonal lines in Reconstruction 15 produce a D-major/minor sonority (F–d<sup>♭</sup>, F–c<sup>♯</sup>). This sonority was retained at stage A<sup>1</sup> prior to the C-major/minor chord cadence at bar 27, because bars 25–27 of A<sup>1</sup> comprise a sustained pitch class A, and this A is heard as a dominant when it combines with the prominent pitch classes F and B<sup>♭</sup>. In Reconstruction 16, however, the first notes of the two semitonal lines outline an incomplete A<sup>♭</sup>-major chord (A<sup>♭</sup>–c<sup>♭</sup>) and an incomplete G-major chord (G–B) in alternation. In this way G major, the dominant chord of the key in which the symphony began, is associated with A<sup>♭</sup> major, the dominant of the Neapolitan. This connection is intensified by the sustained chord in the highest register of the orchestral texture. This chord comprises four notes which rise by perfect fifths from the dominant of C. The prominence of all these pitch classes indicates a similar, prominent pitch relationship to the rising (enharmonic) perfect fifths between B<sup>♭</sup>, F, and the approach to C, and G<sup>♭</sup>, C<sup>♯</sup>, and the move towards A<sup>♭</sup>, in the formally corresponding music – A<sup>1</sup>, bars 27–40.

The entry of the second, imitative crotchet line of Reconstruction 16 exactly two bars in advance of that in Reconstruction 15 results from the fact that, at stage A<sup>0</sup>, the

Reconstruction 15: First reconstruction of the [A<sup>0</sup>] version of Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage A<sup>1</sup>, first movement, bars 27–40

Reconstruction of the music which immediately preceded A<sup>0</sup>/13

The score is for a full orchestra and includes the following instruments and parts:

- Flt. 1 (Picc.)
- Flt. 2 (Picc.)
- Flt. 3 (Picc.)
- Ob. 1
- Ob. 2
- Clts. 1,2 (A)
- Bsns. 1,2 C. bsn.
- Hns. 1,3 (F)
- Hns. 2,4
- Tpts. 1,2 (B $\flat$ )
- Tbns. 1,2
- Tbn. 3 Tuba
- Timp.
- Vln. 1
- Vln. 2
- Vlas.
- Cellos
- Basses

The score is in common time (C) and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The dynamics are marked as follows:

- sf* (sforzando) for the first two measures.
- mf* (mezzo-forte) for the next two measures.
- pp* (pianissimo) for the final measure.

The score is a reconstruction of the music which immediately preceded A<sup>0</sup>/13.

Flt. 1  
(Picc.)

Flt. 2  
(Picc.)

Flt. 3  
(Picc.)

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Clts. 1,2  
(A)

Bsns. 1,2  
C. bsn.

Hns. 1,3  
(F)

Hns. 2,4

Tpts. 1,2  
(B)

Tbns. 1,2

Tbn. 3  
Tuba

Timp.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlas.

Cellos

Basses

*pp*

*pp*



This musical score page, numbered 95, contains the third movement of Simpson's Third Symphony. It features a full orchestral ensemble with the following parts and staves:

- Flutes (Flt.):** Flt. 1 (Picc.), Flt. 2 (Picc.), and Flt. 3 (Picc.).
- Oboes (Ob.):** Ob. 1 and Ob. 2.
- Clarinets (Clts.):** Clts. 1, 2 (A).
- Bassoons (Bsns.):** Bsns. 1, 2 (C. bsn.).
- Horns (Hns.):** Hns. 1, 3 (F) and Hns. 2, 4.
- Trumpets (Tpts.):** Tpts. 1, 2 (B $\flat$ ).
- Trombones (Tbns.):** Tbns. 1, 2.
- Tuba (Tbn. 3):** Tuba.
- Timpani (Timp.):** Timp.
- Violins (Vln.):** Vln. 1 and Vln. 2.
- Viola (Vlas.):** Vlas.
- Cellos (Cellos):** Cellos.
- Basses (Basses):** Basses.

The score is written in 3/4 time and includes dynamic markings such as *fff* (fortissimo) and *ff* (fortissimo). The woodwinds and strings play a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, while the brass instruments provide harmonic support. The score is divided into three measures, with the first measure containing a trill in the Timp. part.

Reconstruction 16: Second reconstruction of the [A<sup>0</sup>] version of Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage A<sup>1</sup>, first movement, bars 27–40

Reconstruction of the music which immediately preceded A<sup>0</sup>/13

The score is written for a full orchestra. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Flt. 1 (Picc.)**: Flute 1 (Piccolo)
- Flt. 2 (Picc.)**: Flute 2 (Piccolo)
- Flt. 3 (Picc.)**: Flute 3 (Piccolo)
- Ob. 1**: Oboe 1
- Ob. 2**: Oboe 2
- Clts. 1,2 (A)**: Clarinets 1 and 2 (A)
- Bsns. 1,2 C. bsn.**: Bassoons 1 and 2 (Contrabassoon)
- Hns. 1,3 (F)**: Horns 1, 3 (F)
- Hns. 2,4**: Horns 2, 4
- Tpts. 1,2 (B $\flat$ )**: Trumpets 1 and 2 (B $\flat$ )
- Tbns. 1,2**: Trombones 1 and 2
- Tbn. 3 Tuba**: Trombone 3 (Tuba)
- Timp.**: Timpani
- Vln. 1**: Violin 1
- Vln. 2**: Violin 2
- Vlas.**: Viola
- Cellos**: Cello
- Basses**: Bass

The score includes dynamic markings: *ff* (fortissimo), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *pp* (pianissimo). The music is in common time (C) and features a variety of note values and rests.

Flt. 1  
(Picc.)

Flt. 2  
(Picc.)

Flt. 3  
(Picc.)

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Clts. 1,2  
(A)

Bsns. 1,2  
C. bsn.

Hns. 1,3  
(F)

Hns. 2,4

Tpts. 1,2  
(B $\flat$ )

Tbns. 1,2

Tbn. 3  
Tuba

Timp.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlas.

Cellos

Basses



[illegible]

motile lines had ended on the last beat of the first bar of the deleted page. At stage  $A^1$ , however, the imitative motile line (flute 1, clarinets, and violas) continues for two further bars (bars 39–40). This discrepancy adds further credence to Reconstruction 16 because the point at which the music on  $A^0/13$  begins is two bars later within its process than the formally corresponding music at the beginning of  $A^1/9$ . Reconstruction 16 may therefore explain why  $A^1/9$  contains only two bars of music. These two bars were necessary in order to connect the music of  $[A^0]/12$  (i.e., the music which corresponded formally with the music on  $A^1/8$ ) with the music of  $A^1/10$ . Reconstruction 16 may even represent a revision on the composer's part of Reconstruction 15.

### 3.2 Reconstruction of the $[A^0]$ version of $A^1$ , bars 25–27

The  $[A^0]$  version of the music found in bars 25–27 of  $A^1$  can be reconstructed, in part. Simpson's melody for the brass derives more obviously from  $y$ , whereas Beethoven's derives more clearly from  $z$ . However, the initial part of both melodies, and perhaps therefore the remainder of Simpson's, also derives partially from  $z$  (see Diagram 2).

Diagram 2: Comparison between the origins of the melodies in Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage  $A^1$ , first movement, bars 25–27, and in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, first movement, bars 30–35

Obs. 1,2

30

31 32 33 34 35

*f sf sf sf dimin. p*

derives from

$z$

Vln. I

21 22 23 24 25 26 27

*sf sf sf sf ff sf*

musical cell

2 3 4 5

*pp sotto voce*

Basses

*pp*

\*: One particular instrument, or set of instruments, has been chosen for the diagrams, but not the reconstructions.

The musical score for 'The Great Wall' by Tan Dun features several instruments with specific dynamic markings and articulations. The score is written in 3/4 time and includes the following parts:

- Vln. 1:** Measures 25-27. Measure 25 has a *sf* marking. Measure 26 has a *ff* marking. Measure 27 has a *dim.* marking.
- Tbns. 1, 2:** Measures 25-27. Measure 25 has a *ff* marking. Measure 26 has a *ff* marking. Measure 27 has a *dim.* marking.
- Bsns. 1, 2:** Measures 25-27. Measure 25 has a *ff* marking. Measure 26 has a *ff* marking. Measure 27 has a *dim.* marking.
- Vln. 1:** Measures 25-27. Measure 25 has a *ff* marking. Measure 26 has a *ff* marking. Measure 27 has a *dim.* marking.
- Tbn. 3:** Measures 25-27. Measure 25 has a *ff* marking. Measure 26 has a *ff* marking. Measure 27 has a *dim.* marking.
- Ob. 1:** Measures 25-27. Measure 25 has a *ff* marking. Measure 26 has a *ff* marking. Measure 27 has a *dim.* marking.
- Vln. 1:** Measures 25-27. Measure 25 has a *f* marking. Measure 26 has a *f* marking. Measure 27 has a *ff* marking.

The score also includes various articulations and dynamics such as *sf*, *ff*, *dim.*, *f*, and *ff*. The score is annotated with 'derives from' and 'musical cell' to indicate relationships between different parts of the music.

The composed out portamento (Beethoven: violin 1 and violas; Simpson: lower woodwind and lower strings) cannot be reconstructed with certainty: in both movements it derives most obviously from the musical cell (and in Simpson's movement in particular, from *x*). Simpson's syncopated accompaniment (upper woodwind, brass, and strings) cannot be reconstructed either, because it is derived in both movements from the musical cell. This reconstruction is shown as Reconstruction 17.

Reconstruction 17: The [A<sup>0</sup>] version of Simpson’s Symphony No. 3, stage A<sup>1</sup>, first movement, bars 25–27

Flt. 1  
(Picc.)

Flt. 2  
(Picc.)

Flt. 3  
(Picc.)

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Clts. 1,2  
(A)

Bsns. 1,2  
C. bsn.

Hns. 1,3  
(F)

Hns. 2,4

Tpts. 1,2  
(B $\flat$ )

Tbns. 1,2

Tuba tacet

Tbn. 3  
Tuba

Timp.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlas.

Cellos

Basses

[ ] : The presence of these notes depends upon the nature of the music in this bar.  
Instrumentation taken from stage A<sup>1</sup> onwards

### 3.3 Reconstruction of the $[A^0]$ version of $A^1$ , bars 22–25

Extensive derivations from the musical cell are responsible for problems in reconstructing the  $[A^0]$  version of bars 22–25 of  $A^1$ , although relationships between Beethoven's music at bars 27–30, Simpson's music in bars 22–25 of  $A^1$ , and either melody  $y$  or  $z$ , might serve as the basis for a reconstruction. Beethoven's melody played by the woodwind and lower brass, for example, like Simpson's corresponding melody, can be derived from  $z$ , because a large portion of  $z$  comprises each composer's musical cell (see Diagram 3).

Diagram 3: First comparison between the melodic origins of Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage  $A^1$ , first movement, bars 22–25 and of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, first movement, bars 27–30

The diagram illustrates the relationship between two musical passages. The top system shows Beethoven's Bsn. 1, 2 (bars 28-30) in 2/4 time, marked *p*. A bracket labeled *z* spans bars 28-30, with a vertical line labeled 'derives from' pointing to Simpson's Vln. 1 (bars 21-25) in 2/4 time. Simpson's Vln. 1 has a bracket labeled *z* spanning bars 21-25, with a vertical line labeled 'derives from' pointing to Beethoven's Bsn. 1, 2. The bottom system shows Beethoven's Bsns. 1, 2 (bars 27-30) in 3/4 time, marked *ff*. A bracket labeled *z* spans bars 27-30, with a vertical line labeled 'derives from' pointing to Simpson's Vln. 1 (bars 21-25) in 3/4 time. Simpson's Vln. 1 has a bracket labeled *z* spanning bars 21-25, with a vertical line labeled 'derives from' pointing to Beethoven's Bsns. 1, 2. Simpson's Vln. 1 has a bracket labeled 'musical cell' under bars 22-23.

One can therefore conclude that Simpson's melody in bars 22–23 and 24–25 of  $A^1$  was present in the  $[A^0]$  music.

Reconstructions of the  $[A^0]$  version of the melodies other than those played by the lower woodwind and brass cannot, however, be made. One could relate the rhythm of Simpson's descending crotchets (upper woodwind and brass) in bars 22–25 of  $A^1$  to the rhythm of his woodwind figurations at the beginning of the movement. Simp-

son's presentation of his musical cell's quaver in bars 23 and 25 in retrograde, however, reveals a relationship with the retrograde organization of the dotted-rhythm component of his musical cell. The prominence of the tone within both of Simpson's melodies reinforces this connection. A similar relationship is less obvious in Beethoven's corresponding figurations (strings, bars 27 and 29). (See Diagram 4.)

Diagram 4: Second comparison between the melodic origins of Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage A<sup>1</sup>, first movement, bars 22–25, and of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, first movement, bars 27–30



The two-quaver phrase in the brass and percussion (A<sup>1</sup>, bars 23 and 25) might be considered a curtailed version of the middle part of *z*, but is more readily interpreted as a derivative of the musical cell. Our inability to reconstruct either this melody, or those shown in Diagram 4, is further aggravated because Beethoven's corresponding music (strings, bars 27–30) has a different origin – the final note of *z* (see Diagram 5). Moreover, Simpson's shorter phrases (strings, lower woodwind, and percussion in A<sup>1</sup>, bars 22–23 and 24–25), might have been derived from a retrograde version of the middle part of *z*. These phrases' curtailed, retrograde rhythmic relationship with the musical cell, however, is all the more fundamental.

Diagram 5: Third comparison between the melodic origins of Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage A<sup>1</sup>, first movement, bars 22–25, and of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, first movement, bars 27–30

The diagram illustrates the melodic origins of Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage A<sup>1</sup>, first movement, bars 22–25, and Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, first movement, bars 27–30. It features three staves with musical notation and dynamic markings, connected by dashed lines indicating derivations.

**Top Staff (Vlns. 1, 2):** Shows bars 22–25. Bar 22 has a *ff* dynamic. Bar 23 has a *ff* dynamic. Bar 24 has a *ff* dynamic. Bar 25 has a *ff* dynamic. A bracket labeled *z* spans bars 22–25.

**Middle Staff (Vln. 1):** Shows bars 19–21. Bar 19 has a *ff* dynamic. Bar 20 has a *sf* dynamic. Bar 21 has a *ff* dynamic. A bracket labeled *z* spans bars 19–21.

**Bottom Staff (Vln. 1):** Shows bars 12–14. Bar 12 has a *f* dynamic. Bar 13 has a *ff* dynamic. Bar 14 has a *ff* dynamic. A bracket labeled *z* spans bars 12–14.

**Right Staff (Vln. 1):** Shows bars 12–14. Bar 12 has a *f* dynamic. Bar 13 has a *ff* dynamic. Bar 14 has a *ff* dynamic. A bracket labeled *z* spans bars 12–14.

**Bottom Staff (Vln. 1):** Shows bars 26–30. Bar 26 has a *sf* dynamic. Bar 27 has a *p* dynamic. Bar 28 has a *p* dynamic. Bar 29 has a *f* dynamic. Bar 30 has a *p* dynamic. A bracket labeled *z* spans bars 26–30.

**Derivations:** Dashed lines indicate derivations from the *z* bracket in the top staff to the *z* bracket in the middle staff (labeled "derives from") and to the *z* bracket in the bottom staff (labeled "derives from"). A dashed line also indicates a derivation from the *z* bracket in the middle staff to the *z* bracket in the right staff (labeled "derives from"). A dashed line also indicates a derivation from the *z* bracket in the bottom staff to the *z* bracket in the right staff (labeled "derives from").

**Musical Cell:** A bracket labeled "musical cell" spans bars 12–14 in the right staff.

**Continuation:** A dashed line labeled "continuation of *z*" spans bars 26–30 in the bottom staff.

This reconstruction is shown in Reconstruction 18.

Reconstruction 18: The [A<sup>0</sup>] version of Simpson’s Symphony No. 3, stage A<sup>1</sup>, first movement, bars 22–25

Flt. 1  
(Picc.)

Flt. 2  
(Picc.)

Flt. 3  
(Picc.)

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Clts. 1,2  
(A)

Bsns. 1,2  
C. bsn.

Hns. 1,3  
(F)

Hns. 2,4  
(F)

Tpts. 1,2  
(B)

Tbns. 1,2

Tbn. 3  
Tuba

Timp.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlas.

Cellos

Basses

Instrumentation taken from that stage A' onwards.

Flt. 1 (Picc.)

Flt. 2 (Picc.)

Flt. 3 (Picc.)

Ob. 1,2

Cls. 1,2 (A)

Bsns. 1,2 C. bsn.

Hns. 1,3 (F) 2,4

Tpts. 1,2 (B+)

Tbns. 1,2 3. Tuba

Timp.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlas.

Cellos

Basses

Instrumentation taken from that stage A' onwards.

### 3.4 Reconstruction of the $[A^0]$ version of $A^1$ , bars 18–21

Reconstruction of the  $[A^0]$  version of bars 18–21 of  $A^1$  (later sources, bars 18–22) comprises an exact repetition a major third higher of the music of  $A^0/13$ , bars 4–5. The final bar's rest ( $A^2$ ,  $P^1/P^2$ , bar 22) was added at stage  $A^1$ , and must not therefore be included in this reconstruction. (See Reconstruction 19, p. 107.)

### 3.5 Reconstruction of the $[A^0]$ version of $A^1$ , bars 1–17

The  $[A^0]$  version of the music in the first seventeen bars of  $A^1$  can be reconstructed, in part. Although the presence of the musical cell and music derived from it in bars 1–17 of  $A^1$  renders impossible the reconstruction of these figurations, the two rising semitonal lines can be reconstructed. The fact that these lines existed in the  $[A^0]$  music is confirmed by the presence of the crotchets in the first bar of  $A^0/13$ , when these figurations, if the analogy with Beethoven's movement is to be trusted, occurred for the second time. Simpson's motile figurations in bars 1–17 of  $A^1$  would therefore have been analogically consistent with the anticipation of the music of bars 35–50 during the first sixteen bars of Beethoven's work. In contrast to Reconstructions 1–16, however, the pitches of the semitone-orientated voices at the beginning of  $[A^0]$  cannot yet be determined. It is evident, nevertheless, that the opening figurations would have risen through six perfect fifths. This situation would be consistent not only with the stages of composition of this passage from  $A^1$  onwards, but also with Simpson's analogy to the number of woodwind entries in bars 1–16 of Beethoven's movement. (See Reconstruction 20, pp. 109–111.)

### 3.6 Re-evaluation of Reconstructions 1–20

The extrapolations presented above of all of the  $[A^0]$  music according to the model provided by Beethoven still suffer from a fundamental flaw. Of the lost sixty bars of music, only thirty-seven have been accounted for. The  $[A^0]$  music must therefore have occupied twenty-three more bars than the music which preceded bar number 38 of  $A^1$ . Because of the consistency between Simpson's and Beethoven's movements from stage  $A^1$  onwards, it is most likely that the discrepancy between the number of bars of  $[A^0]$  and  $A^1$  can be explained in terms of music unique to  $[A^0]$ . This situation necessitates reconsideration of the music of  $A^0/13$ , bars 2–3.

# Reconstruction 20: The [A<sup>0</sup>] version of Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage A<sup>1</sup>, first movement, bars 1–17

**Allegro ma non troppo**

Flt. 1 (Picc.)

Flt. 2 (Picc.)

Flt. 3 (Picc.)

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Clts. 1,2 (A)

Bsns. 1,2 C. bsn.

Hns. 1,3 (F)

Hns. 2,4

Tpts. 1,2 (B)

Tbns. 1,2

Tbn. 3 Tuba

Timp.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlas.

Cellos

Basses

Instrumentation taken from that stage A' onwards.

Flt. 1 (Picc.)

Flt. 2 (Picc.)

Flt. 3 (Picc.)

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Clts. 1,2 (A)

Bsns. 1,2 C. bsn.

Hns. 1,3 (F)

Hns. 2,4

Tpts. 1,2 (B $\flat$ )

Tbns. 1,2

Tbn. 3 Tuba

Timp.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlas.

Cellos

Basses

6 7 8 9 10 11

*pp*

*sempre pp*

*sempre pp*

*crescendo*

*crescendo*

※: ♯ omitted in A!

Flt. 1 (Picc.)  
 Flt. 2 (Picc.)  
 Flt. 3 (Picc.)  
 Ob. 1  
 Ob. 2  
 Clts. 1,2 (A)  
 Bsns. 1,2 C. bsn.  
 Hns. 1,3 (F)  
 Hns. 2,4  
 Tpts. 1,2 (B)  
 Tbns. 1,2  
 Tbn. 3 Tuba  
 Timp.  
 Vln. 1  
 Vln. 2  
 Vlas.  
 Cellos  
 Basses

Measure 12: (Picc.) *pp*  
 Measure 13: *pp*  
 Measure 14: *pp*  
 Measure 15: *cresc.*  
 Measure 16: *cresc.*  
 Measure 17: *f*

The score shows a woodwind section (Flutes 1-3, Oboes 1-2, Clarinets 1-2, Bassoons 1-2, Horns 1-3, Horns 2-4) and a string section (Violins 1-2, Viola, Cellos, Basses). The woodwinds are active in measures 12-17, while the strings are mostly silent. The woodwinds play a melodic line that starts in measure 12 and continues through measure 17. The woodwinds are marked with *pp* (pianissimo) in measures 12-14 and *cresc.* (crescendo) in measures 15-17. The woodwinds are marked with *f* (forte) in measure 17. The woodwinds are marked with *pp* (pianissimo) in measure 12 and *cresc.* (crescendo) in measures 15-17. The woodwinds are marked with *f* (forte) in measure 17.

The two melodies in bars 2–3 of  $A^0/13$  are the original version of bars 39–40 of  $A^1$ . It is unlikely, however, that the two melodies in the  $A^0$  bars are an  $[A^0]$  version of a prototype  $x$ , even though the semiquaver figuration in bars 39–40 of  $A^1$  is derived from  $x$ ; indeed, no other evidence proves conclusively the existence of  $x$  at stage  $A^0$ . Moreover, the two melodies in bars 2–3 of  $A^0/13$  probably had no connection with a prototype musical cell either, even though this cell comprises part of the slower figuration in bars 39–40 of  $A^1$ , because the  $A^0$  melodies are orientated exclusively around the semitone. Ironically, the faster-moving music of these two  $A^0$  bars bears greater similarity, because of its rhythm, to the  $A^1$  musical cell. The figurations in bars 2–3 of  $A^0/13$  are unrelated to the figurations in the corresponding bars of  $A^1$  therefore, and merely intensify the semitone-orientated lines of the immediately preceding bar.

Simpson's preference for semitones, both melodic and harmonic, in bars 2–3 of  $A^0/13$  is evident from a closer examination of the first bar of the page. This bar contains two voices – the last eight crotchets of a single semitonal line. However, one would expect four voices of two semitonal lines had the second line entered imitatively (cf.  $A^0/13$ , bar 1 and  $A^1$ , bar 38). There must have been only a single semitonal line immediately preceding  $A^0/13$ , and this explains not only why Simpson felt the need to incorporate more semitones in bars 2–3 of  $A^0/13$  than in bars 39–40 of  $A^1$ , but also the unlikely curtailment at the bar before  $A^0/13$  of the second motile line in the first set of reconstructions (see Reconstructions 15 and 16).

The similarities between the music of  $[A^0]$ ,  $A^0$ ,  $A^1$ , and Beethoven's movement suggest that Simpson's semitonal lines of  $[A^0]$  must have ascended in a manner analogous to Beethoven's formally corresponding entries in the woodwind and brass of bars 1–16 and 35–50, even though there is only one semitonal line in the first bar of  $A^0/13$ . In this situation lies the fundamental difference between  $[A^0]$  and  $A^1$ .  $A^1$  comprises imitative entries of the rising semitonal lines, and these lines eventually combine simultaneously.  $[A^0]$ , however, contained no imitative entries. Instead, the semitone-orientated lines entered successively. Simpson must have decided to present his semitonal lines in stretto, therefore, at stage  $A^1$ .

Difficulties remain in reconstructing the semitonal lines of  $[A^0]$  with reference to similar figurations at stage  $A^1$ . The final ascending, perfect fifth-orientated phrase (i.e., from  $\underline{c}\sharp''/\underline{c}\sharp'$  and  $\underline{b}\sharp''/\underline{b}\sharp'$  in  $A^1$ , bars 38–40) has a stationary part six crotchets shorter than its full theoretical complement, for example. In bars 15–17 of  $A^1$  also, the unit of stationary crotchets, which begins with  $\underline{e}\flat''/\underline{d}''$ , is not followed by a connecting section. It therefore contains only ten notes, and is eight crotchets short. One cannot know whether these decisions were made during, or before, composition of  $A^1$ .

Moreover, the music which sounds simultaneously with the  $\underline{e}b'''/\underline{d}'''$  line – it comprises the notes  $\underline{b}\sharp'''$  and  $\underline{c}\sharp'''$  – contains only six crotchets, and is therefore twelve crotchets short. This music should not be included in any reconstruction because it is an enharmonic repetition of bar 6 of  $A^1$  (i.e., the flute 2 and clarinet 2 parts), and is not part of the analogy with Beethoven's movement.

It is now possible to revise all of the reconstructions listed above: to allow the semitonal lines to enter not imitatively, but successively, and to insert the bar numbers. (See Reconstruction 21, pp. 114–124.) It is apparent from this reconstruction that as few as two extra bars of music may have existed at  $[A^0]$ . However, the discrepancy may have been larger than this. In addition to the two extra bars already identified, there could have been as many as six crotchets (1.5 bars) from the possible curtailment of the original stationary part of the semitonal line of bars 38–40 of  $A^1$  (i.e.,  $[A^0]$ , bars 57–58). There could have also been eight crotchets (2 bars) from the possible curtailment of the original connecting part of bars 15–17 of  $A^1$  (i.e.,  $[A^0]$ , bars 30–31). There were therefore between two and five-and-a-half ( $2 + 2 + 1.5$ ) extra  $[A^0]$  bars which cannot yet be accounted for. An extra half bar is most unlikely to have existed, owing to Simpson's tendency not to delete, and then rewrite, corrections of a bar's length or less. Thus Simpson's decision to curtail his stationary group of bars 38–40 of  $A^1$  to six crotchets was probably taken whilst writing  $[A^0]$ , after he had written out this group as ten crotchets, and the total discrepancy is unlikely to have been more than four bars. Indeed, it was likely to have been only one, or more probably two, bars, deleted and subsequently rewritten in the following bars. Owing to the rhythmic and intervallic consistency with which the semitonal lines and voices were conceived, it is most likely that these surplus bars concerned the duration of the initial  $\underline{c}'''/\underline{c}''$ , played by the violins, at the very beginning of the work.

### 3.7 Physical evidence in favour of Reconstruction 21

Confirmation that Simpson curtailed the stationary group of bars 38–40 of  $A^1$  at  $[A^0]$ , and deleted the first two bars of  $[A^0]$ , is revealed by the physical relationship between  $[A^0]$  and  $A^1$ . Because the semitonal lines entered not contrapuntally, but successively at  $[A^0]$ , the beginning of the fourth stationary section of the first semitone-orientated line can be located. This section begins with  $\underline{c}'/\underline{c}\sharp'$ . At this point, Simpson must have decided against allowing the semitonal lines to enter successively, for the  $\underline{c}/\underline{c}\sharp'$ -orientated figuration represents the first notes of the second line,

# Reconstruction 21: The [A<sup>0</sup>] version of Simpson's Symphony No. 3, stage A<sup>1</sup>, first movement, bars 1–40

**Allegro ma non troppo**

2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

Flt. 1 (Picc.)

Flt. 2 (Picc.)

Flt. 3 (Picc.)

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Clts. 1,2 (A)

Bsns. 1,2 C. bsn.

Hns. 1,3 (F)

Hns. 2,4

Tpts. 1,2 (B $\flat$ )

Tbns. 1,2 3, Tuba

Timp.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlas.

Cellos

Basses

Instrumentation taken from that of stage A' onwards. For this reason the bar rests in the remaining parts have been omitted.

8 9 10 11 12 13

Flt. 1  
(Picc.)

Flt. 2  
(Picc.)

Flt. 3  
(Picc.)

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Clts. 1,2  
(A)

Bsns. 1,2  
C. bsn.

Hns. 1,3  
(F)

Hns. 2,4

Tpts. 1,2  
(B $\flat$ )

Tbns. 1,2  
3, Tuba

Timp.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlas.

Cellos

Basses

Detailed description: This is a page from a musical score, specifically measures 8 through 13. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. The instruments listed on the left are: Flute 1 (Piccolo), Flute 2 (Piccolo), Flute 3 (Piccolo), Oboe 1, Oboe 2, Clarinets 1 and 2 (A), Bassoons 1 and 2 (Contrabassoon), Horns 1, 3 (F), Horns 2, 4, Trumpets 1 and 2 (B-flat), Tubas 1 and 2 (3, Tuba), Timpani, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Cellos, and Basses. Measures 8 and 9 show various woodwind entries and melodic lines. Measure 10 features a prominent melodic line in the Flute 3 part, which is also echoed in the Clarinets and Bassoons. Measures 11 and 12 show a continuation of these melodic themes, with the Violins and Violas providing harmonic support. Measure 13 concludes the sequence with a final melodic flourish in the Flute 3 part. The score is written in a clear, professional notation style, with notes, rests, and dynamic markings clearly visible.

14 (Picc.) 15 16 17 18 23 19 24

Flt. 1 (Picc.) *pp*

Flt. 2 (Picc.)

Flt. 3 (Picc.) *pp* 8va

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Clts. 1,2 (A) 2° *pp*

Bsns. 1,2 C. bsn. 2°

Hns. 1,3 (F)

Hns. 2,4 *pp*

Tpts. 1,2 (B♭)

Tbns. 1,2 3, Tuba

Timp.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlas.

Cellos

Basses

20 25 21 26 22 27 23 28 24 29 25 30

Flt. 1  
(Picc.)

Flt. 2  
(Picc.)

Flt. 3  
(Picc.)

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Clts. 1,2  
(A)

Bsns. 1,2  
C. bsn.

Hns. 1,3  
(F)

Hns. 2,4

Tpts. 1,2  
(B $\flat$ )

Tbns. 1,2  
3, Tuba

Timp.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlas.

Cellos

Basses

\*: These notes 'should' be  $\sharp a$ ,  $b$  and  $d$  (written),  $\sharp a$  (written) respectively,  
if the intervallic consistency of the semitone-orientated lines is to be trusted.

26 31 32 33 34 35 36

27 28 29 30 31

Flt. 1 (Picc.)

Flt. 2 (Picc.)

Flt. 3 (Picc.)

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Clts. 1,2 (A)

Bsns. 1,2 C. bsn.

Hns. 1,3 (F)

Hns. 2,4

Tpts. 1,2 (B $\flat$ )

Tbns. 1,2 3, Tuba

Timp.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlas.

Cellos

Basses

32 33 34 35

Flt. 1 (Picc.)

Flt. 2 (Picc.)

Flt. 3 (Picc.)

Oboe 1,2

Clts. 1,2 (A)

Bsns. 1,2 C. bsn.

Hns. 1,3 (F) 2,4

Tpts. 1,2 (B $\flat$ )

Tbns. 1,2 3, Tuba

Timp.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlas.

Cellos

Basses

*ff* *sf* *ff* *sf* *ff* *sf* *ff* *sf*

*8va*

*ff* *sf* *ff* *sf* *ff* *sf* *ff* *sf*

	36	37	38	39
Flt. 1 (Picc.)				
Flt. 2 (Picc.)				
Flt. 3 (Picc.)				
Ob. 1				
Ob. 2				
Clts. 1,2 (A)	<i>ff</i>			
Bsns. 1,2 C. bsn.	<i>ff</i>			
Hns. 1,3 (F)	<i>ff</i>			
Hns. 2,4				
Tpts. 1,2 (B $\flat$ )				<i>ff</i>
Tbns. 1,2 3, Tuba				<i>ff</i> Tuba tacet
Timp.				
Vln. 1				
Vln. 2				
Vlas.				
Cellos				
Basses				

[illegible]

45 46 47 48 49 50

Flt. 1  
(Picc.)

Flt. 2  
(Picc.)

Flt. 3  
(Picc.)

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Clts. 1,2  
(A)

Bsns. 1,2  
C. bsn.  
*pp*

Hns. 1,3  
(F)

Hns. 2,4

Tpts. 1,2  
(B $\flat$ )

Tbns. 1,2  
3, Tuba  
*pp*

cf. violins, A', bars 36 - 7

Timp.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlas.

Cellos  
*pp*

Basses

Flt. 1  
(Picc.)

Flt. 2  
(Picc.)

Flt. 3  
(Picc.)

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Clts. 1,2  
(A)

Bsns. 1,2  
C. bsn.

Hns. 1,3  
(F)

Hns. 2,4

Tpts. 1,2  
(B $\flat$ )

Tbns. 1,2  
3, Tuba

Timp.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vlas.

Cellos

Basses

cf, violins, A', bars 36 - 7

cf, violins, A', bars 36 - 7

cf, violins, A', bars 36 - 7

cf, violins, A', bars 36 - 7

cf, violins, A', bars 36 - 7

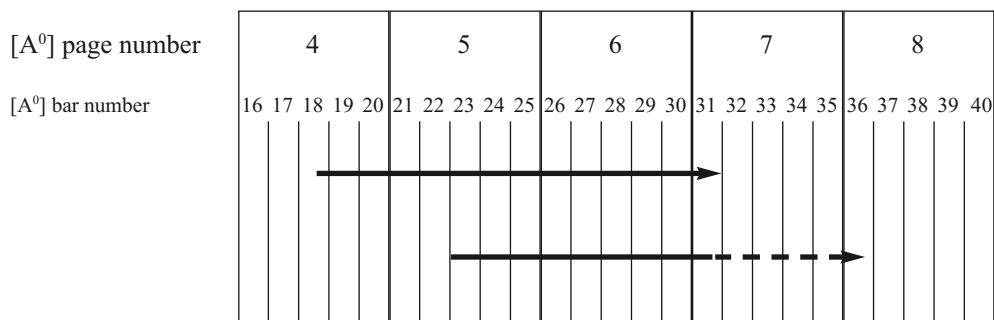
cf, violins, A', bars 36 - 7

[ ] : Equivalent notes absent from stage A' onwards.  
- \_ : This part may be sounded one or two tones higher.



that is, the line which enters imitatively. These notes could have begun as early as seventeen-and-a-half bars, or as late as twenty-two bars, after the beginning of the movement, or at some intermediate point. The earliest point is calculated as 2 bars (i.e., the number of extra bars at the beginning of the movement –  $[A^0]$ , bars 1–2), plus 2 bars (i.e., the number of bars of pedal  $\underline{c}''/\underline{c}'''$  before the first semitonal line begins –  $[A^0]$ , bars 3–4), plus  $13 \cdot 5$  bars (i.e., 10 beats for each stationary section of a semitonal line, plus 8 beats for each connecting part, times 3 beats, as there are 3 stationary units and 3 connecting units prior to the arrival at  $\underline{c}'''/\underline{b}''$ ) –  $[A^0]$ , bars 5–18, second crotchet). In order to determine the latest point, one could add 4.5 bars (i.e., the maximum number of additional bars arising from the curtailment and enharmonic doubling of the  $\underline{c}'''/\underline{b}''$  section of the semitonal line –  $[A^0]$ , bar 18, third crotchet, until the end of bar 22). The former total signifies that the  $\underline{c}''/\underline{c}'''$  section of the semitone-orientated line would have entered at the middle of the third bar of  $[A^0]/4$ . The remainder of the line would then have finished at the end of the first bar of  $[A^0]/7$ . The latter total suggests that the entry of the  $\underline{c}''/\underline{c}'''$  semitone-orientated music could also have commenced at the third bar of  $[A^0]/5$ , before ending halfway through the first bar of  $[A^0]/8$  (see Diagram 6).

Diagram 6: Physical location of the fourth stationary and connecting sections of the first  $[A^0]$  semitone-orientated line in Simpson's Symphony No. 3, first movement



Reconstruction 21 reveals that the arrival at, and continuation of, the  $\underline{c}''/\underline{c}'''$  section of the semitone-orientated line would have occupied pages (4), 5, 6, 7 (and 8) of  $[A^0]$ . Simpson must have written a substantial part of the  $\underline{c}''/\underline{c}'''$  figuration before deciding to introduce it imitatively, otherwise he would not have found it necessary to discard  $[A^0]/7$ , and therefore also page 8 on its verso, by bisecting the bifolio upon which these pages were written. Simpson's curtailment of the semitonal music of bars 15–

17 of A<sup>1</sup>, moreover, like that of bars 38–40 of A<sup>1</sup>, probably also occurred whilst he was writing [A<sup>0</sup>]. Had this not been so, there would have been too much music at [A<sup>0</sup>] to fit into the number of pre-written bars.

### 3.8 Summary

The deleted music of A<sup>0</sup>/13 is important for two reasons. First, it reveals that similarities and analogies between the first movement of Simpson's symphony and the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony existed at the earliest stage of composition, whether or not Simpson had decided consciously to use Beethoven's movement as a model at this time. Secondly, it enables a partial extrapolation of the [A<sup>0</sup>] music, shown in Reconstruction 21, to be made. This reconstruction, which comprises twenty-three more bars than the number of bars required to reach the identical point within the same formal process at stage A<sup>1</sup>, suggests that Simpson made several alterations during, or shortly after, stage A<sup>0</sup>. The unaccompanied  $\underline{c}^{\underline{u}}/\underline{c}^{\underline{u}}$ , which began the movement, for example, initially lasted for four bars ([A<sup>0</sup>], bars 1–4) rather than two (A<sup>1</sup>, bars 1–2). Most of the revisions were analogies to Beethoven's movement. The motile lines, for instance, were written in succession, rather than both successively and imitatively (cf. [A<sup>0</sup>], bars 5–32 and 41–61 with A<sup>1</sup>, bars 3–17 and 27–40 respectively). The musical cell had not yet been conceived at stage A<sup>0</sup> (cf. [A<sup>0</sup>], bars 12–31 and 41–61 with A<sup>1</sup>, bars 12–17 and 35–40 respectively). The melodies derived from the musical cell were also conceived after stage A<sup>0</sup> (cf. [A<sup>0</sup>], bars 32, 34, and 64 with A<sup>1</sup>, bars 18, 20, and 41 respectively; [A<sup>0</sup>], bars 36–40 with A<sup>1</sup>, bars 22–26; also, [A<sup>0</sup>], bars 62–63 with A<sup>1</sup>, bars 39–40). The bar's rest indicated at stage A<sup>1</sup> was also a later addition (cf. [A<sup>0</sup>], bars 35–36 with A<sup>1</sup>, bars 21–22).

The earliest and latest points at which the  $\underline{c}'/\underline{c}^{\#}$  section of the first motile line could have begun at [A<sup>0</sup>] – between the third crotchet of bar 18 and the beginning of bar 23 – reinforce the possibility that the manuscript sheets on which the earliest pages of [A<sup>0</sup>] were written originally comprised part of a single gathering. This assumption can be made because the pages on which the fourth statement of the motile line would have occurred during [A<sup>0</sup>] – in particular pages 5, 6, and 7 – would have been folios 3 and 4 from the beginning of the gathering. The sheets on which the lost A<sup>1</sup>/99–102 were written were probably originally attached to [A<sup>0</sup>]/5–8. It is possible to draw this conclusion because the first movement of source A<sup>1</sup> comprises 106 pages, and the folios upon which A<sup>1</sup>/99–102 were written would therefore have originally occupied the

third and fourth folios from the end of the gathering. They were probably lost after becoming detached from their bifolios.

The revisions of the semitone-orientated lines reveal, in particular, that Simpson disguised his analogies to Beethoven's music by using counterpoint. An impulse towards musical and physical compression, that is, recasting the basic musical process so that it occupies fewer bars than before, has thus been found in an atypical aspect of Simpson's style (i.e., the use of a Beethoven model). Moreover, because Simpson's and Beethoven's movements are most similar at their beginnings, the revision of [A<sup>0</sup>] suggests that the places where Simpson made errors were the occasions when Simpson felt the influence of Beethoven most keenly.

The remaining revisions which Simpson made as he was composing the Third Symphony reveal further connections between Beethoven's music and the principal typical features of Simpson's style which are fundamental to the symphonic structure of the Third Symphony – tonality and harmony, rhythm and pace. In each case a specific Beethoven influence can be established. The implications of these revisions can be explored, by referring to further evidence in the manuscripts, and to other Simpson works. They bring further insight into the subtlety, originality, and development of the music of a fine composer.

## Simpson's Third Symphony – an analysis<sup>1</sup>

John Pickard

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in *Tonic* 6, 1994, pp. 3–27. Republished by kind permission of the author.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Ottaway, Notes on Simpson No. 3 issued with record Unicorn-Kanchana UNS 225 (1970), now on CD NMC D109.

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

## First Movement

### Exposition

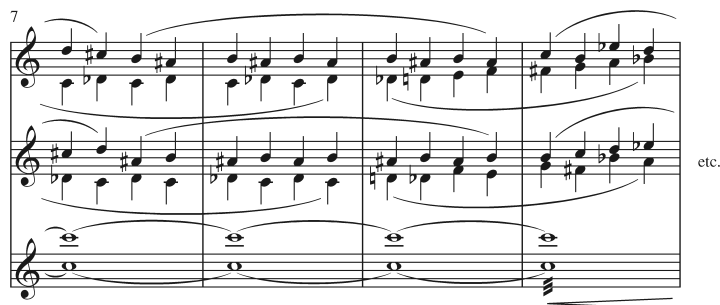
The cover photograph for the first LP issue of this work shows Earth from Apollo 11, taken just a year earlier. Continents are hard to make out, but the wispy outlines of the weather systems so essential to life on our planet are clearly evident – a reminder that the boiling activity of our world if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

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

#### Example 1

**Allegro ma non troppo** ( $\text{♩} = \text{c.}70$ )

The musical score for Example 1 consists of three staves. The top staff is for Flute 3 (Fl. 3), the middle staff is for Clarinet 1 (Cl. 1), and the bottom staff is for Violins (Vlns.). The tempo is marked 'Allegro ma non troppo' with a quarter note equal to approximately 70 beats per minute. The time signature is common time (C). The Violins play a soft, pulseless octave C. The Flute 3 and Clarinet 1 play ascending semitonal clashes, alternating between C major and C minor. The Flute 2 (Fl. 2) and Clarinet 2 (Cl. 2) enter in the sixth measure, playing a descending semitonal clash. The dynamic is marked *pp* (pianissimo).



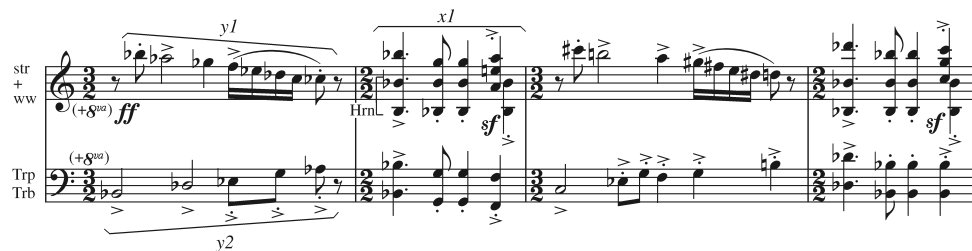
The entry of the second flute and second clarinet is in canon with the first and the canon is continued with the entry of a third pair of instruments (piccolo and horn). As these weird oscillations rise in pitch and increase in harmonic complexity, the sustained violin C becomes tonally unstable and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

### Example 2



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

### Example 3



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

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

#### Example 4

Example 4 is a musical score for five staves: Picc (+8va), Fl 2, Ob 2, Cl, Bn +Hrn, and Trb. The score is in 3/2 time and features a key signature of one flat. The Picc, Fl 2, and Ob 2 staves have a melodic line marked 'x2' and 'ff'. The Cl, Bn +Hrn and Trb staves have a similar melodic line marked 'ff'. The str (string) staff has a rhythmic pattern marked 'ff' and 'Timp'. The score includes a '5 before' marking and a '3' in a box.

The unusual doubling in this passage between flute/piccolo, oboes and trombones in widely spaced registers is to become a characteristic feature of Simpson's orchestral

style from this work onwards. His instrumental imagination is highly individual and frequently favours unexpected textures and spacings which, while never distracting attention from the symphonic argument, enhance the tough, steely power so typical of his musical invention. This fact is equally applicable to the chamber music as it is to the orchestral works.

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

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

### Example 5

The musical notation for Example 5 consists of two staves, Violin I (Vln I) and Violin II (Vln II). Both staves show a series of semiquaver notes with accents. Above the first measure of Vln I, there is a measure indicator '1 before [4]'. A 'cresc.' (crescendo) marking is placed between the two staves, indicating a dynamic increase. The notation ends with 'etc.' on the right side of the Vln II staff.

To summarize what has happened so far: two long, mysterious crescendi have each culminated in a huge fortissimo tutti, the first beginning in B $\flat$  minor and the second, a major third lower. There is a clear structural precedent in the first movement of

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony which also begins with a mysterious crescendo, moves towards a fortissimo statement of the main theme in the tonic (at bar 15) and then repeats the process with the second statement of the main theme a major third lower (bar 51). Such a correspondence could be coincidental or subconscious, especially for a composer so greatly influenced by Beethoven, but further comparison of the two movements shows their relationship to be both profound and intentional. As already shown, the analogy is not merely gestural but tonal and this deeper relationship invites further comparison of the two movements.

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

#### Example 6

Example 6 shows a comparison of musical notation between Simpson and Beethoven. The top staff, labeled 'Simpson', shows a sequence of chords and eighth notes, with a bracket indicating a pattern 5 measures before a boxed 3. The bottom staff, labeled 'Beethoven', shows a similar sequence of eighth notes and chords, with a bracket indicating a pattern 3 measures before a boxed 5. The Simpson music is labeled 'etc.' and the Beethoven music is labeled 'etc.'.

In the Beethoven, this culminates in an extended tutti passage where, previously, the climax had disintegrated. Exactly the same thing happens in the Simpson: a vehement three-part antiphonal exchange of  $x3$  (Example 4) comes to rest on a pedal C sustained in the brass (fourth bar of Fig. 5). Beethoven also sustains a pedal note to powerful effect in bars 63–65 and 67–69, though in this case it is a dominant of D minor whereas Simpson sustains the supertonic (C). However, it is worth remembering that the Beethoven movement begins 'in A': in fact, until the D minor *ff* tutti at bar 17, the movement could well be in A major/minor.

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

## Example 7

Example 7 consists of two parts, a) and b), showing musical notation for different instruments.

Part a) is titled "Beethoven bar 4f." and shows a piano (p) texture with a treble and bass staff. The treble staff has a melody of eighth notes, and the bass staff has a supporting figure. Arrows indicate a cross-rhythm or phrasing. The notation ends with "etc.".

Part b) is titled "Simpson 4th of [5] (+8va)" and shows a woodwind (ww) and string (str) texture. The woodwind staff has a melody with a descending sequence, marked with a forte (*sf*) dynamic. The string staff has a supporting figure, also marked with a forte (*sf*) dynamic. The notation includes a marking "(+ multiple 8<sup>ves</sup>)".

Below part b) is a continuation of the string part, showing a descending sequence of notes, marked with a forte (*sf*) dynamic. The notation ends with "etc.".

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

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

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

### Example 8a

Beethoven

Beethoven

bars 80–83

ww

*p* (+8<sup>acc</sup>)

str

+8<sup>ves</sup>

etc

This passage marks a crucial point in the tonal argument of Beethoven's Ninth due to its tonal ambivalence. The whole symphony is concerned with the relationship between D and B $\flat$  and here, at the beginning of the B $\flat$  major second subject, the music is momentarily caught between the two keys. In his book *Beethoven, Sibelius and the Profound Logic*, Lionel Pike perceptively comments that the first two bars of the strings' accompaniment could equally be in D minor or B $\flat$  major.<sup>3</sup> This is also true of the beginning of the woodwind melody, the key only being defined by the E $\flat$  in the third bar.

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

### Example 8b

Simpson

3 Picc  
2 Ob

Cl 1  
Bsn 1+2

str

7

*p*

*mf*

*p*

*mf*

etc

The string figure, which rises through a minor 7th, is clearly derived from fig. y2, whilst the woodwind line can be traced to the sixth bar of Fig. 5 (Example 7b, third bar) which is itself derived from the sixth bar of Fig. 2 (Example 4). Another

<sup>3</sup> Lionel Pike, *Beethoven, Sibelius and the Profound Logic*, London: Athlone, 1978, p. 61.

analogy lies in the fact that, like the Beethoven, the passage is tonally ambiguous: the strings, piccolos and oboes imply F major/minor, whilst the 1st clarinet and bassoons hold a chord of the flattened 7th on B major (without the fifth), moving every third bar to an anacrusis on a C major chord. This diatonic chord shines through the texture quite noticeably, but the tonal ‘region of promise’ with which it is associated is not established here and, in this context, C major acts merely as a dominant in F.

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

### Example 9a

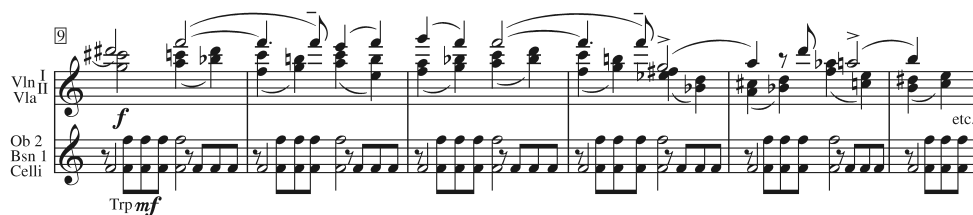


### Example 9b



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

### Example 10



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

Although, at this early stage in the work, Beethoven's introduction of B major appears tangential, it is to have long-term tonal consequences, as can be seen from bars 837–842 of the finale and bars 171–176 of the scherzo. Simpson's analogy is to introduce a similarly unrelated, though ultimately relevant, key – E major, whose implied appearance was noted at Fig. 7 and whose importance will shortly become apparent. This passage (three bars before Fig. 10 in the score) also relates to the Beethoven in its rapid change of texture after the tutti of the previous bar.

Beethoven returns to B $\flat$  major/minor by means of a wonderfully hushed and mysterious run of semiquavers in the strings (bars 114–119) and this is reflected in Simpson's work in a similarly striking and evocative way. Indeed, it was while listening to this passage that a correspondence between the two symphonies first occurred to me.

### Example 11a

Beethoven

str. (- Basses)

114 *pp* (+  $8^{ma}$ ) (+  $15^{ma}$ )

117 etc.


### Example 11b

Simpson

6<sup>th</sup> of [10] str. (- Basses)

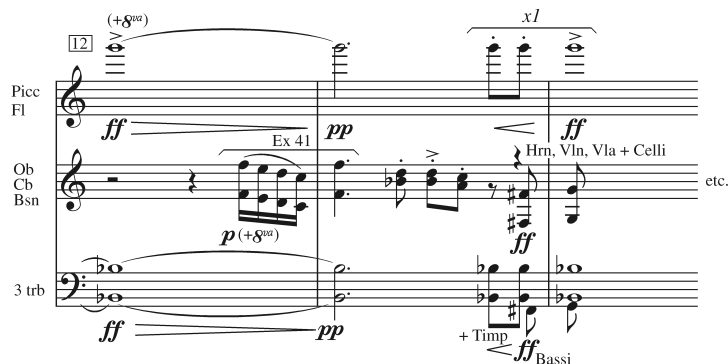
*pp* (+  $8^{ma}$ ) (+  $15^{ma}$ )

x etc.

Beethoven now starts to build up tension to the exposition's powerful conclusion, first of all, by the reintroduction of the timpani rhythm  from the first subject. Simpson does the same – in this case, by introducing a new derivation of *x* (anticipated in the final bar of Example 11 but played in the three bars of Fig. 11 by cellos and 1st bassoon). The second stage of Beethoven's build-up is marked by the introduction of rushing demisemiquavers on violins and violas (bars 132–137) – Simpson introduces semiquavers (the movement is in *alla breve* time) derived from Example 7 in the basses and cellos six bars after Fig. 11. In the next six bars the figuration spreads through the whole string section to reach a fortissimo climax.

At bars 138–144, Beethoven alternates fortissimo tuttis with soft legato phrases on upper woodwind. Simpson's musical parallel is a development of Example 3 for woodwind combined with another version of *x* against the striking sonority of flute and piccolo in their high register together with three trombones:

### Example 12



The Beethovenian alternation of contrasting dynamics is here as well, but Simpson's passage feels significantly different from Beethoven's. It has greater thematic identity; more sense of the emergence of a new theme. Indeed, at this point the centre of gravity of Simpson's exposition starts to shift away from the Beethoven model.

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

## Example 13

The musical score for Example 13 is presented in two systems. The first system includes staves for Fl+Picc, Vln, Vla, Celli, Trb, Ob, Cl, Bsn, Hrn, Trp, and 2 Picc Vln, Vla. The second system includes staves for Trp, Vlns, and other instruments. The score features various musical notations including notes, rests, trills, and dynamic markings such as *p*, *cresc.*, *f*, and *ff*. A bracket labeled '13' and 'x4' indicates a repeated section.

E is at the furthest tonal remove from B $\flat$ , the main key of this movement, but it is closer to the other main tonal area of the symphony, C. This is particularly so when an E minor chord appears in first inversion, since it can be interpreted as a V $_6$ –I progression in C. This is what happens in the bar before Fig. 13 (see Example 13), though this C major chord (with an added flat 7th) is not consolidated as a tonality here. Nevertheless, the chord does assist in preparing for the end of the exposition in F major.

Before that, however, a codetta (relating to bars 150–157 in the Beethoven) has the effect of an ‘interrupted’ cadence as the implied V $_6$ –I progression of one bar before Fig. 13 moves (by chromatic movement in the bass) to a first inversion chord of A major at Fig. 13 itself. This chord, with its bare fifths in the treble and major third deep in the bass is one of the ‘Beethovenian’ sounds which constantly recurs in Simpson’s music. It is a spacing of which both composers are fond. Compare Fig. 13 in the Simpson with Beethoven’s treatment of the same chord at bar 30 of the finale of No. 9. In both cases the composers make this straightforward major triad sound like a new discovery.

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

### Example 14

7<sup>th</sup> of 13

3 Picc (at 8<sup>va</sup>)

Hrn + Trp

Ob

Cl

(harmonic outline only)

Trb

Tuba

Bsn

Contra

Celli

+ Tim

Trb Vla

VI II

Celli Bassi

(tutti)

*sf sf dim.*

Piccs (at 8<sup>va</sup>)

*pp*

*pp*

etc.

### Development

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

Nonetheless, certain broad analogies exist and will be pointed out as they occur. For example, Beethoven begins his development by expanding upon the symphony's mysterious opening (quite common for the start of a development section, though Beethoven sometimes prefers to begin developments with a reference to the end of the exposition, for example in the first movement of Symphony No. 8). Simpson does likewise. Once again, violins sustain an octave C, though it no longer feels like a tonic (the previous F major chord saw to that, turning it into a dominant). The quiet semitonal clashes of Example 1 begin again – this time on horn and bassoon, piccolo and oboe. But instead of the expected crescendo, the progress of the music is halted by a dense nine-note chord spread, *ppp*, across the entire orchestra: Example 15(a).

## Example 15a and b

The image displays two musical staves, labeled [15] and 3<sup>rd</sup> of [16], representing orchestral parts. Staff [15] includes parts for Vln, Vla, Picc, Ob, Cl, Trp, Hrn, Bsn, Trb, Timp, Celli, Bassi, and CBsn. Staff 3<sup>rd</sup> of [16] includes parts for 3 Picc, 8<sup>va</sup>, Vln, Vla, Ob, Cl, Hrn, Trp, Trb, Celli, Tuba, Bassi, and CBsn. Both staves feature complex chordal structures with dynamic markings such as *ppp* and *8va*.

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

This second chord contains all twelve notes of the chromatic scale and, again, fifths tend to be prominent in the spacing. From this symphony onwards, twelve-note chords are an occasional feature in Simpson's works. They are not 'clusters' and have no connection with the principles of Schoenbergian twelve-note composition. The chords are generally soft, always spread across an extremely wide compass and are constructed with great attention to the intervals set up between the pitches. Their effect is often deeply poetic: remote and mysterious, to me they seem like the musical equivalent of faint nebulae in the night sky.

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

## Example 16



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

The fugue subject in Simpson’s movement is yet another version of *x*!:

## Example 17a



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

## Example 17b



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

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

## Example 18

[22] (+8<sup>va</sup>)

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

### Example 19

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

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

### Example 20

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

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

As with the Beethoven, the development section of this movement has been proportionately concise – 139 bars against 155 bars of exposition and 214 bars of recapitulation and coda (the Beethoven movement works out at 159 bars of exposition, 141 bars of development and 247 bars of recapitulation and coda). In both cases one could say that the recapitulation and large-scale coda form a natural extension of the development. But one important respect in which Simpson diverges from the Beethoven model is that, although both movements have an enormously powerful moment of recapitulation, Beethoven prepares the unequivocal return of the tonic and the first subject with great care over many bars whereas, in the Simpson, the moment is a continuation of the B $\flat$ /C conflict of the whole movement. The result is that the return of the first subject is less clearly signalled in the Simpson than it is in the Beethoven.

## Recapitulation

Beethoven's first subject recapitulation marks a high-point of stress in this movement; Simpson's is similarly unyielding in its ferocity. But whilst the Beethoven, with its extraordinary timpani pedal-point, is monolithic, Simpson's is tonally exploratory. It is also quite irregular, involving both the extension of Example 3 and the incorporation of an idea from the development – dense 'nebula' chords similar to those shown in Example 15. Here there are four such chords: the first and last each containing all twelve-notes, the second and third comprising eleven and seven notes respectively. Each time a chord is sounded, certain sustained notes are picked out and

make a crescendo, with the result that a series of wide-spaced major chords emerges from the texture (A $\flat$ , G $\flat$ , C and D $\flat$ ). In each case, first subject material is superimposed and, throughout the entire passage, trumpets and timpani continue their ostinato based on Example 4  $\times 3$ , changing pitch every few bars, forced by the conflict raging around them to search for tonally compatible pitches. Thus, they move C, C $\sharp$ , D, E, F, E, E $\flat$ , D, D $\flat$ , back to C, before finally arriving at B $\flat$ , and, with a roar of timpani and trombones, the violent storm of the first subject recapitulation ends with the firmest assertion yet of B $\flat$  minor. It is a searingly intense passage – one of the most impressive in the symphony.

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

## Coda

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

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

## Example 21

The musical score for Example 21 consists of three measures. The first measure is labeled '6<sup>th</sup> of [39]'. The Oboe 1 part has a *p* dynamic and a *y2* marking. The Violin part has a *pp* dynamic and a *2 Picc* marking. The Timpani/Cello part has a *Trp* marking and an *x* marking. The second measure shows a complex chord structure with various dynamics and markings. The third measure shows a complex chord structure with various dynamics and markings. The score ends with 'etc.'.

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

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

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

As far as the composer is concerned the answer is perfectly simple: 'No comparison welcomed or intended! I just gave myself a lesson and then let fly in the second movement.'<sup>5</sup> This is fair enough. Composers have, throughout history, learned either by imitating works they admire or by finding their own musical analogies to an existing blueprint. For example, Elgar said that the greatest composition lesson of his life was to write his own 'version', precisely similar in terms of bar length and formal division, of the first movement of Mozart's Fortieth Symphony. What makes Simpson's first movement unusual is that it is not only the work of a mature artist, as opposed to a beginner, but it is also the creative response of a composer who feels an uncommonly close affinity with another in such a way that this kind of approach stimulates, rather than stifles, his individual artistic expression. As Hugh Ottaway said in his note accompanying the LSO/Horenstein recording of No. 3: 'It is music that could only have been written in the twentieth century, yet its deepest roots are in that most unfashionable of periods, the age of Beethoven ... There is no suggestion of going back and refurbishing an old stylisation; rather it is a matter of carrying forward creative principles felt to be perennially alive and relevant'.

In recent years, many contemporary composers have expressed a direct creative involvement with specific works from the past – Peter Maxwell Davies and Michael Tippett for example. Tippett's Fourth String Quartet contains references to Beethoven's Grosse Fuge Op. 133 in a manner which I would term 'gestural'<sup>6</sup> – that is to say, the material is used in a dramatic way which remains self-contained and does not imply development. To say that Simpson's reworking of a Beethovenian model is more profound is in no way intended to cast aspersions on Tippett's response but is intended to show how fundamentally different Simpson's attitude to Beethoven happens to be. In the first movement of this symphony, Simpson is not borrowing ideas from Beethoven and building on them in the manner of 'Variations on a Theme' (though he has subsequently done this in the Beethoven Variations for piano) – and

<sup>4</sup> John Pickard, *Robert Simpson's 2nd Symphony – an analysis*, Tonic 4/1, 1991, pp. 15–25.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Simpson's letter to the author, date unknown; author's collection.

<sup>6</sup> Another striking example of such an approach is Tippett's use in the second movement of his Third Symphony of the famous dissonant passage beginning the finale of Beethoven's Ninth.

he is certainly not parodying his source, in the manner of, say, Zimmermann's 'Musique pour les soupers du Roi Ubu' from 1966 (to cite just one roughly contemporary work that refers to pre-existing music).

For Simpson, the purpose of this astonishing creative exercise is to learn more about the internal workings of a piece he loves in the way he enjoys best – i.e. creating his own music. Three particular ways of listening to this music spring to mind: 1) it can be heard as pure music, unrelated to external models; 2) the listener can find musical satisfaction in identifying the various analogies; 3) as a result of (2), the composer would hope that this would lead the listener to find new things in the Beethoven model. Each approach is valid, though the composer would be the first to agree that if the music is unconvincing in the first approach, then there is not much point in bothering with the other two.

The same could be said of the three String Quartets (Nos. 4, 5 and 6) which Simpson produced in the 1970s, each of which constitutes a close study of one of Beethoven's 'Rasumowsky' Quartets Op. 59. In a BBC interview concerning these quartets, Simpson was asked 'can you imagine ever doing the same kind of thing again with a masterwork by another great composer of the Classical period?' He replied that he might: 'It's possible, but I think if I did it again, I wouldn't declare my guilt, I wouldn't confess. I'd just do it and see whether anybody noticed it.'

## Second Movement

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

Ottaway paraphrases the composer's remarks on the movement:

'[The movement is] Nature music in a sense – the only piece of mine which has an origin in some external situation ... Put programmatically, the situation is this: a sleeper wakes in the early morning, his mind passively receptive; the first bird-songs begin, gradually becoming the dawn chorus; the mind quietly absorbs and reflects until at last a tremendous sense of excitement is experienced; an energy that cannot be repressed'.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Tonic 3/1, 1987, p. 25; in this volume p. 304. Given that the Third Symphony was written a decade prior to the quartets, the irony of this mischievous comment will not be lost on the reader.

<sup>8</sup> Hugh Ottaway, Notes on Simpson No. 3, op. cit.

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

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

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

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

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

The concept of a constantly evolving structure applies to the treatment of melodic material as well as to the overall form. In the composer's words, '[The movement] all comes out of the first theme, changed as the pace changes'.<sup>9</sup> This theme, given to the first violins at the opening, is an intense, arching line rising through a crescendo then falling through a diminuendo: Example 22.

#### Example 22

(♩ = c.50)

VI I  
pp  
f  
p  
pp  
Vla  
pp  
Celli Bassi (+8<sup>va</sup>)  
etc.

This melody carries a variety of harmonic implications and the main source of its ambiguity is the way it approaches its highest note (the C in bar 3) through a flat note (B $\flat$ ) and quits it through a sharp one – the reverse of the way a tonal melody usually behaves.<sup>10</sup> The entry of the B $\flat$  in the second bar seems to confirm a modal B $\flat$  tonality at the opening (B $\flat$  approached via a flattened 7th) but, by the third bar, C emerges the strongest tonal contender (due to its placing at the top of the phrase and its dynamic emphasis) – again approached through a flattened 7th. The descent in the third and fourth bars, implies E before B $\flat$  major is strongly suggested in the first two minim beats of the fifth bar – only to be undermined by a flattened 7th in the bass on the third beat. Now E $\flat$  is implied and this is confirmed by the entry of the second violins in the sixth bar.

So, to sum up, a possible F minor opening (the minor third at the very start) approaches a modal B $\flat$  (second bar, last beat) which, in turn, proves to be an approach to C. Descent through a sharpened 7th implies E before the music settles back to

<sup>9</sup> Robert Simpson's letter to the author, date unknown; author's collection.

<sup>10</sup> Although such considerations may be irrelevant to many contemporary composers, they are, for Simpson, very real. Indeed he has pointed out an exactly similar situation in the opening phrase of the third movement of his Quartet No. 10.

B $\flat$ . The two important points to note are: 1) the continuation of the B $\flat$ /C conflict from the first movement; and 2) the importance of the flattened 7th – also apparent in the first movement. This variety of possibilities is, of course, essential to any musical structure if the opening is to be used as the basis of a gradually evolving argument.

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

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

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

### Example 23

4 before [47]

Vln  
Vla

Celli  
Bassi  
(+8va)

*pp cresc.*

*f p pp*

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

A new development of the first theme now begins (the bar after Fig. 47) with six bars of double canon – first and second violins / violas and cellos, the texture constantly punctuated by an accented semitonal figure which first appeared in bar three (marked *z'*). This idea fulfils a similar function to *x* in the first movement, dominating the music and subtly changing identity as the music proceeds. The counterpoint thins out to three parts (second bar of Fig. 48) then essentially to two parts (three be-

fore Fig. 49) and, throughout, the music is suffused with a drowsy sense of unreality – surely a reflection of that moment between sleeping and waking when time and space can seem to contract or expand at will.

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

### Example 24



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

### Example 25

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

A rocking semitonal idea in minor thirds given to the horns in Example 25 is taken up by second violins (flutes 2 and 3 doubling an octave lower) in the fourth

bar of Fig. 51, but they have now been speeded up to become crotchet triplets and these in turn become the basis of a new, faster tempo in the next bar, (the relationship is marked in the score as  $\text{♩} = \text{♩ del prec.}$ ).

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

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

#### Example 26



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

#### Example 27

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

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

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

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

### Example 28

55 *quasi a tempo*

Vln I (sord) *pp*

Trp *pp* etc.

Trb pizz Celli + Bassi (at 8<sup>va</sup>)

The tonal contention here is very clear – a C minor cadence is contradicted by the entry of the first violins in B♭ minor with a line which tends towards C (the imitative

entry of the second violins). The speeding up of Example 22 and the removal of any rhythmic stress has resulted in harmonic implications entirely different from those experienced at the start of the movement – the *accelerando* is indeed being ‘composed’.

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

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

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

#### Example 29

7<sup>th</sup> of [56] ♩ = ♩ Allegretto

2 Picc  
2 Ob

Vln

Vla  
Celli

*sempre pp*

*x 3*

The ostinato itself is derived from Example 28 (and, by extension, from the opening idea), the rising three-note pattern on second violins and violas coming from the fourth, fifth and sixth notes of Example 28 and the accompanying figure from the last five-notes of the first violin phrase in the same example. Tonally, the music appears to be in F but the sustained D $\flat$  and B $\flat$  on piccolos and oboes confirms the F as a dominant of B $\flat$  minor. However, when the sustained notes cease, after three bars of

the Allegretto, the music moves more definitely into F major/minor as the opening theme takes on a new guise, this time scored for solo bassoon and luminously accompanied by two piccolos: Example 30.

### Example 30

13 before [57]  
(at 8<sup>me</sup>)  
2 Picc  
1 Bsn  
*pp*  
*pp*  
etc.

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

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

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

### Example 31

Picc (at 8<sup>me</sup>)  
Ob  
[59]  
*pp* *distinto*  
*pp* *distinto*

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

#### **Tempo 4 (Fig. 62 to Fig 67)**

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

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

## Example 32

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

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

## Example 33

The passage culminates, at Fig. 65, in a 4/2–3/1 suspension in C major – in contrast with the Db major/Bb minor implications of the melody at Fig. 64 and their now follows another gradually built up twelve-note chord similar to the ones encountered in the first movement. The chord is constructed as follows: each instrument sustains a note, preceded by the semiquaver 'tag' mentioned at Fig. 59, and starting from the G (picc. & trp. at Fig. 65) the chord is built up chromatically with octave displacements until the complete chord is formed. The rate at which this happens is extremely rapid: one note/voice per crotchet beat. When all twelve notes are sustained (seventh of Fig. 65) the chord is then gradually dismantled by the reverse process. When, during the building up of this chord, the point of greatest density is approached (sixth and

seventh bars of Fig. 65) a dramatic new element is added – cellos and basses with a further transformation of Example 22 in crotchet triplets which cut across the 2/4 pulse. The phrase is based on the rising three-note figure of Example 22 and even though it is not very loud it creates a further disturbance in a passage whose sudden harmonic density has already been something of a surprise.

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

### Tempo 5 (Fig. 67 to Fig. 73)

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

### Example 34

The musical notation for Example 34 is written for Cello and Bass. It begins with a 2/4 time signature and a key signature of one flat. The first measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (F, A, C) marked with a forte *f* dynamic and a tempo marking of *♩* = *♩*. Above the first measure, text indicates '3 before [67]'. The second measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (G, B, D) marked with a piano *pp* dynamic. The third measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (A, C, E) marked with a piano *pp* dynamic. Above the third measure, text indicates '+ Vln, Vla (+8va)'. The fourth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (B, D, F) marked with a piano *pp* dynamic. Above the fourth measure, text indicates 'Allegro'. The fifth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (C, E, G) marked with a piano *pp* dynamic. The sixth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (D, F, A) marked with a piano *pp* dynamic. The seventh measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (E, G, B) marked with a piano *pp* dynamic. The eighth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (F, A, C) marked with a piano *pp* dynamic. The ninth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (G, B, D) marked with a piano *pp* dynamic. The tenth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (A, C, E) marked with a piano *pp* dynamic. The eleventh measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (B, D, F) marked with a piano *pp* dynamic. The twelfth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (C, E, G) marked with a piano *pp* dynamic. The thirteenth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (D, F, A) marked with a piano *pp* dynamic. The fourteenth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes (E, G, B) marked with a piano *pp* dynamic. The notation ends with 'etc.'.

When the music is moving with such rapidity one tends to feel the pulse in phrases of several bars. This is true of the passage from Fig. 68 onwards where the ascending figure on the violas and oboes (derived from the woodwind ‘cadential’ idea in the fifth bar of Fig. 66) is felt as a five-bar phrase. The continued ascent (on violins,

violas and cellos) from the sixth of Fig. 68 is phrased according to the *ffpp* accents working out (in numbers of bars) as 4+3+2+1, adding to the sense of gradual acceleration and of suppressed excitement.

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

### Example 35

The musical notation for Example 35 is presented on three staves. The top staff is for Violins (+ Vln), the middle for Violas and Cellos (+ Vla + Celli), and the bottom for Basses (Bassi). The notation shows a chromatically rising sequence of notes, starting from a low register and moving upwards. The dynamic marking *pp* (pianissimo) is indicated at the beginning, and *sfpp* (sforzando pianissimo) is indicated later. A tempo marking '2<sup>nd</sup> of [69]' is present at the start. The sequence of notes is chromatic, moving from a low note to a higher one, and then continuing with a chromatic descent. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

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

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

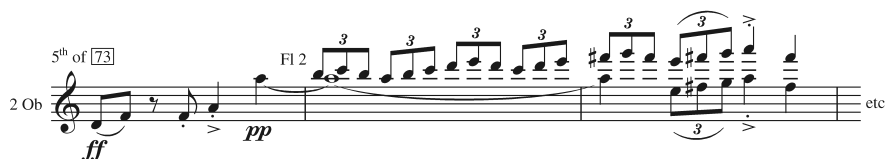
The low B $\flat$  is answered by the dominant (in the extreme bass of the tuba at five before Fig. 71) and the passage appears to disintegrate in a series of exchanges between the pairs of woodwinds concluding with two chirping piccolos (the programmatic reference to birdsong is, again, inescapable). Two important ideas are generated by this passage: first, the repeated quavers on the strings at Fig. 72 are punctuated at the start of every other bar by a triplet figure – marked *ffpp* and rising through a perfect fourth – which is shortly to prove significant. The second feature is the tendency, from Fig. 72 onwards, for the piccolos to stress a hemiola pattern within a two bar phrase – for example, the grace notes in the third bar of Fig. 72 on the first and third beats of the bar and the second beat of the next bar. This emphasis proves to be transitional to Fig. 73 and the next tempo. Here the crotchet relationship remains the same but the tempo changes from 3/4 to 2/2 – the piccolo accents were a preparation for this.

### Tempo 6 (Fig. 73 to Fig 82)

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

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

#### Example 36



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

### Example 37

Figure 77 shows the musical score for Example 37. The top staff is for Flute (Fl) and Clarinet in B-flat (Cl), with a dynamic marking of *pp* followed by *f*. The bottom staff is for Viola (Vla) and Cello (Celli), with a dynamic marking of *pp* followed by *f*. The score includes a reference to 'cf Ex 33' and ends with 'etc.'.

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

### Example 38

Figure 79 shows the musical score for Example 38. The top staff is for 3 Flutes (3 Fl), Clarinet (Cl), and Horn (Hm), with a dynamic marking of *pp*. The bottom staff is for Trumpet (Trp), Oboe (Ob), Trombone (Trb), Tuba, and Pizzicato Basses (+ Pizz Bassi), with a dynamic marking of *pp* followed by *f*. The score includes a reference to 'cf Ex 33' and ends with 'etc.'.

The version of Example 37 which follows (violas and cellos) is an extension of the original and, by Fig. 80, it moves into triplet crotchets against the persistent exchange of ‘gruppetto’ on each crotchet beat. The cadential figure from Example 38 is now developed into a series of V–I cadences which gradually move down by a semitone –

C#, C $\flat$ , B (C $\flat$ ), B $\flat$ . (The quiet but teeming activity of this passage, combined with the unusual pianissimo writing for full orchestra always reminds me of the ‘Cortège’ from Busoni’s *Doktor Faust* – a work Simpson greatly admires.)

### Tempo 7 (Fig 82 to end)

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

#### Example 39



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

The three-note pattern from the second and third bars of Example 39 becomes increasingly prominent during the ensuing passage. Fragments of Example 39 are developed at great speed until, at the sixth bar of Fig. 85 a wind chord of the dominant 7th in C provokes a subterranean *ffpp* F minor chord two bars later. Its reinforcement with a low accented timpani roll seems strangely ominous and a ‘resolution’ onto a low B $\flat$  minor chord at Fig. 87 leads one to suspect that the music may yet turn back to the B $\flat$  minor which ended the first movement so fiercely. We may well feel that here the music is flexing its muscles in preparation for the sudden *fff* outburst at the

second bar of Fig. 93. Indeed, despite the general *pp* dynamic, the music from the 'Presto' onwards, with its strong offbeat accents and rhythmic drive, seems more formidable than anything heard so far in this movement.

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

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

With the first of four cymbal clashes – the only percussion contribution to the entire work – the entire orchestra suddenly erupts '*fff*'. After almost fifteen minutes of quiet music, the impact is shattering. The very opening of the outburst takes C as its tonal centre (with a I–V progression in the bass). The prominent trumpet line is based upon the three-note motif in Example 39 and, like much of the writing in this section and elsewhere, it is in thirds. Simpson is fond of presenting a diatonic chord in such a way that the fifth is not particularly prominent (and sometimes entirely absent) thereby destabilising it. In this case, the fifth, though present, appears only on the first trombone:

#### Example 40

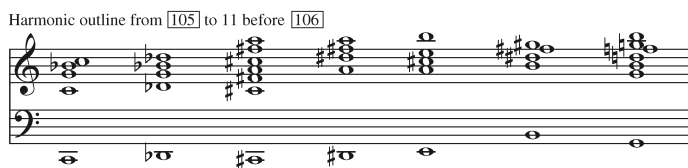
Example 40 is a musical score snippet showing a harmonic outline for four instruments: Trumpet (Trp), Horn (Hrn), Trombone (Trb), and Tuba. The score is in 3/4 time and features a three-note motif in thirds. The dynamic is marked *fff*. The score is labeled '2nd of [93]' and 'cf Ex 39'. The Horn part is marked '(harmonic outline)'. The Trombone part is marked 'etc.'. The Tuba part is marked 'fff'.

A similar outburst occurs at Fig. 94, this time with the tonal centre a semitone higher (D $\flat$ ). Two bars before that, the furious triplets on the strings provide the basis of much



harmony but by the stepwise movement of the part-writing and in particular by the movement of the bass-line:

### Example 42



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

As the sustained dominant 7th dies away, staccato B♭'s are softly repeated by trombones and the bass-line moves to a sustained B♭ over which a solo clarinet, in long notes, recalls the opening theme in its original version. The composer says '... the C tonality ... eventually wins, turning B♭ into a mere Mixolydian 7th at the climax – as classical composers often turned to the subdominant near the end, so I have used the flat 7th ambiguously – is it tipping the music in the direction of F harmony that could be either the dominant of B♭ or the subdominant of C, or is it in this case only a flat 7th? The latter, of course, but its old associations are not forgotten.'<sup>11</sup>

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

<sup>11</sup> Robert Simpson's letter to the author, date unknown; author's collection.

## The Sixth Symphony

Lionel Pike<sup>1</sup>

Robert Simpson finished his Sixth Symphony in March 1977: it had been commissioned by the London Philharmonic Orchestra with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain, and it was the London Philharmonic who gave the first performance, just afterwards, under Sir Charles Groves, in a concert broadcast live on Radio 3, on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1980. The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra recorded the work in 1987, and warmed up for the recording sessions at a BBC Invitation Concert, conducted by Vernon Handley, on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1987. The recording was issued in 1988, and it made a great hit with the very prestigious journal, *The Gramophone*: in its edition of December 1988 no less than three critics included this record (which also contains Robert Simpson's Seventh Symphony) in the *Critics' Choice* section, in which each of the regular panel of contributors nominated the six best records of the year. David Fanning called it 'boundlessly energetic'; Stephen Johnson said "'The momentum of a planet in its orbit' [is] a quality shared by Robert Simpson's Sixth Symphony'; and Robert Layton described Robert Simpson as 'a true symphonist with the breadth of vision and command of architecture so rare in our age'. That was extremely encouraging for those of us who have been trying to push Bob's music, so I thought I would make it an excuse for talking to you about one of the Symphonies on this record. I might even persuade you to go out and buy it.<sup>2</sup>

This symphony, which is in one large movement, is dedicated to the distinguished gynaecologist Professor Ian Craft; he it was who suggested to the composer the idea of a symphony whose growth from initial melodic germs might parallel the living development of a fertilized cell. (Ian Craft, of course, now owns the manuscript score of the work, although there is photocopy of it in the Robert Simpson Archive; it has

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on an open lecture given at Royal Holloway and Bedford New College (University of London) and was originally published in *Tonic* 3/4, 1990, pp. 2–12. Reprinted by kind permission.

<sup>2</sup> The symphony was recorded by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Vernon Handley in September 1987 and published by Hyperion Records on CDA66280.

not yet been published.) The idea appealed to the composer, for the kind of symphony that grows by logical stages has always been his ideal; moreover, he has always agreed strongly with Nielsen's view that music is the 'sound of life'. The concepts of energy and rhythmic movement have played a large part in Robert Simpson's music and thinking throughout his life; and the composers who have interested him deeply, and about whose music he has written – Beethoven, Bruckner, Nielsen, Sibelius, Havergal Brian – are all symphonists of this 'logical growth' type.

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

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

## Introduction

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

### Example 1: element *M*

**Adagio**

D minor/major    F# minor/major    Bb minor

The first four notes belong to a triad of D minor/major; the A and F# of this implied triad overlap with notes 3–6 of the melodic line, which state F# minor/major; notes 5–7 belong to the triad of Bb minor; the whole line then returns to D minor/major. The line, then, is made up of minor thirds which suggest triads (each of which, of course, fill out the interval of a fifth); and there are direct leaps of a fifth as well. So there is melodic motion in this line; but there is also tonal motion, for the implied shift of triads takes us round a complete circle of major thirds, from D at the start, to F#, then to Bb, and back to D, as shown in Example 1 above.

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

#### Example 1a: Original version



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

#### Example 2: element *F*

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

## Example 2a



These could equally be a series of descending fourths, of course. As the composer has vividly put it, ‘This group is really a succession of fifths coiled in upon itself (like a DNA molecule perhaps? – it certainly results in many special differentiations as the cell proliferates)’. Dissimilar as elements *M* and *F* are, they are not unrelated: both of them contain certain features which are echoed in the other. The fourths in element *F* are a complement to the fifths of element *M*, of which they are inversions; in a similar way, the cluster chord built within a major third is a complement both to the minor thirds of element *M* (i.e. they are both thirds of one sort or the other) and to the element of ‘major-sounding’ triads and implied tonal shifts of a major third that occur in Example 1. Element *F*, additionally, contains minor thirds (characteristic of element *M*) between G# and B, F# and D#: and it only requires the bass clarinet and oboe to play their second notes an octave higher for the fifth (a feature of element *M*) to be very plain.

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

## Example 3

A musical score for four instruments: Oboe, Strings, Horns, and Bass Clarinet. The Oboe part is in the top staff, starting with a whole note G#4, followed by a half note A#4, and then a series of eighth notes descending. The Strings part is in the bottom staff, starting with a whole note G#2, followed by a half note A#2, and then a series of eighth notes descending. The Horns part is in the middle staff, starting with a whole note G#3, followed by a half note A#3, and then a series of eighth notes descending. The Bass Clarinet part is in the bottom staff, starting with a whole note G#2, followed by a half note A#2, and then a series of eighth notes descending. The notation is complex, with many accidentals and ties.

## Example 3a



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

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

### First movement proper

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

## Example 4



A background chord spreads out the clusters of element *F* in three different interlocking versions – this chord simply sustains the separate notes of the descending figure, which then make a chord. The leaping element very frequently becomes a series of descending fifths – this is none other than the element *F* chord spread out and its constituent notes sounded in descending order. This leaping theme is almost immediately countered by a much more stepwise passage in which the melodic material, which is clearly derived from bars 1–2 (the tune begins as a retrograde of the horn part in bar 5 as shown in Example 5), is announced in a splendidly Bach-like canonic passage; again there is an element of the complementary here, for the contrapuntal lines are identical, like the multiplication of identical cells, yet at any given point their activities differ (see Example 5).

### Example 5



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

For a time, the static and motile elements combine, and they produce new offshoots. Brass, playing sustained chords in the lower to middle ranges of the orchestra rather in the manner of a continuo, start each set of chords with the central cluster of element *F*; simultaneously, the lower instruments, beginning with the bass clarinet, state a long tune while the upper woodwind and strings play an ‘oom-pah’ rhythm, soon replaced by rising tetrachords in semiquavers. These tetrachords are at first sounded alongside exact inversions of themselves – another instance of the use of different but complementary material in this first half of the work. The tetrachords continue when the chords stop, and the chords are replaced by more counterpoint

which is again based on the same material, not in canon, though the style is similar (see Example 6).

#### Example 6



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

To all this, increasing tension and power is applied. As the composer has written, ‘One of the remarkable qualities of life is the enormous force in its imperceptible growth – we are all familiar with the way a growing tree can split a rock. So this “antennatal” part of the symphony has something formidable in it ...’ The chords of element *F* are more frequently doubled at the fifth; the oom-pahs turn into fast semitone trills (the semitone had in any case been a feature of the introduction to element *F* at the beginning); and while the underlying pulse remains the same, by altering the time-signature the apparent speed increases. The rising scales from the opening now descend – yet another instance of melodic inversion – and tumble over one another in the strings as they do so.

The bass parts, which are extremely fine throughout the work, are particularly noticeable just before the central climax. At bar 297 a pedal A starts (trilled with G# in bassoons, cellos and basses); and at regular intervals sounding against it there is a thunderous A and accompanying drum tattoo (forming ‘contractions’, as the composer suggests). These spasms occur more frequently, while an *accelerando* leads to a tumultuous passage in which the strings cover virtually their whole range in alternately soaring and plunging scales (inversions are used here in an obvious fashion for the last time), and a superb bass part descends purposefully into the depths, transforming the fast tetrachords of the earlier part of the symphony into slow tetrachords that seem to be striding downwards in seven-league boots. The chords (ultimately derived from *F*) grind on and on getting ever higher, until at the moment when it would seem that searing dissonance could not possibly be taken any further, there is a General Pause and a violent fortissimo chord – the moment of birth has arrived. The composer has written of this passage,

'About halfway through the symphony there is a great upheaval we might liken to a kind of birth, contractions and all, repeated spasms at shortening frequency culminating in a sense of release. So perhaps we might say the creature is born alive and active after a period of gestation viviparous rather than oviparous! The laying (or the hatching) of an egg cannot be ruled out entirely, though an egg of such apparent proportions would probably have inconvenienced a brontosaurus'.

## Slow movement

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

### Example 7



The chords that occur during this passage do nothing to interrupt the gentle flow – a flow that is partially due to the frequent presence of hemiola rhythms in one part or another, contrasting with the prevailing 3/4. At bar 489 a fugue begins; its subject opens with syncopated repeated notes, and is otherwise made up of a rising minor third and rising fourth (see Example 8) – all elements that had been prominent in the ‘first movement proper’.

### Example 8



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

### Example 9



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

### Scherzo/Finale

The repeated notes that form the link now give the impetus for the Finale, a *moto perpetuo* not unlike the last movement of Schubert's ‘Great C major’ Symphony in some ways. It is surely this that causes Stephen Johnson to compare the piece with Schubert's ‘Great C major’ in his quotation of Tovey's ‘The momentum of a planet in its orbit’ that I mentioned at the start. Robert Simpson says that this passage (the link from the ‘slow movement’ into the Scherzo/Finale and the beginning of the latter – bars 575–878) is one that he thinks of as being ‘tetchy, unpredictable, characteristic of sometimes unbearable adolescence!’ Introductory triplet twitterings in the woodwind give way to a long tune in the second violins (doubled by the piccolo), a line that makes considerable use of minor thirds, but tails off into a slow ‘trill’ of a semitone. The tempo is the fast triple time that is so characteristic of Beethoven's Scherzos, though Robert Simpson's is not really quite fast enough for a Beethoven

Scherzo. But against this rising scales (taken from the Introduction) are used as a counterpoint, but in a contrasting duple rhythm. This duple versus triple conflict is a more vital development of the steady triple rhythm with underlying hemiola pulses which were used in the previous section. Various punctuations by the woodwind chords continue, helping to link the ‘slow movement’ neatly with the Scherzo/Finale.

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

#### Example 10



Eventually duple time takes over centre stage with a change to 2/4 at bar 355, and the triplets are then applied instead on the smaller scale; being very rapid indeed, they result in an immense increase in rhythmic vitality. The violins next begin a much faster, more vital, line (see Example 11) with many leaps (bar 396).

#### Example 11



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

The horns and trombones interrupt it from time to time with a series of sustained ‘continuo-style’ chords – an idea we have already encountered – in three parts, starting with element *F* (the woodwind play staccato chords off-beat, shadowing the horns and trombones). Most of the chordal progressions strive upwards: but there is a development of the element *F* chord in which a cluster with a second and minor (rather than major) third is used as the starting-point, and the subsequent chords descend.

This is the only use of inversion that really makes itself plainly evident after the ‘birth’: the element of two opposites being complementary is no longer relevant in the independent creature that results from the joining of two different cells. The dotted rhythms (some with ‘Scotch snap’) used in the downward-leaping tune (doubled in octaves, with many fifths in the melodic line) are a vivid reminder of the start of the ‘first movement proper’, though much faster.

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

## The genesis of the Eighth Symphony. A discussion<sup>1</sup>

Robert Simpson & Michael Oliver

MO: What is a symphony, or rather what must a composer be capable of in order to write what we call a symphony? Sixteen years ago Robert Simpson put forward this list of essential components: the fusion of diverse elements into an organic whole; the continuous control of pace; the reserves of strength necessary to achieve both of these and to express size, ‘bigness’, even if the symphony is quite short. And the music should be active in all possible ways: rhythm, melody, harmony, tonality – all in a state of onward movement. Robert Simpson is undeniably a symphonist. His Eighth Symphony was first performed on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1982, by the Royal Danish Orchestra under Jerzy Semkow. It was a commission from the Royal Philharmonic Society who did not, of course, say: ‘We want it to be in four movements; the first in sonata form, *Allegro con brio*, D major; the second a ternary *Andante* in A minor,’ and so on. Dr Simpson did, though, write the Symphony to a formula provided by someone else, which at first glance seems like a novelist agreeing that his heroine should come from Gloucester, be blackmailed in Chapter Seven and end up happily married on page 280. Why would he do such a thing?

RS: Let me put it this way. I thought for a long time with envy about the way Haydn and Bach and the old composers knew everybody in the audience that was going to hear next week’s symphony or next week’s cantata. It must be marvellous to be able to sit down and write and say: ‘Well, this will shake old so-and-so’ or ‘What’s-his-name will like this’, or maybe: ‘So-and-so will hate this’, or perhaps make somebody laugh. They could actually see their faces. Haydn knew them all individually, and Bach knew a great many of the people who went to the church every Sunday and heard his cantata. This is something that we lack nowadays. A composer can’t see many people listening to his music (except his friends, perhaps, and a few colleagues) but, generally speaking, all he can imagine – if he’s lucky enough – is a sea of faces

<sup>1</sup> This is an edited version of a discussion first broadcast on BBC Radio 3’s *Music Weekly* on 6 November 1982; it was originally published in *Tonic* 2/1, 1984, pp. 10–14. Reprinted by kind permission of The Michael Oliver Trust.

in the Festival Hall, or nothing at all on the radio, where it just seems to disappear into thin air.

So, thinking about this, it seemed to me rather a good idea to talk to an old friend of mine, Tony Dorrell. He's a painter, but he has in fact broadcast on music quite a bit and he's an intensely musical person. He and I have known each other for many, many years and we have very similar outlooks in all sorts of ways. He knew my music very well, and he knew the sort of thing which could come out, so I said to him: 'Tell me what kind of a symphony would you like to hear, and I'll see if I can oblige'. He was a bit shaken by this and he went away full of thought. When he came back (with a letter, because he lives in Cambridge quite some way from where I am), he came out with a description of the sort of symphony he might imagine. Then we talked it over, and it changed a bit – as it always would and I warned him that he shouldn't be too exact in his expectations because once you start on a big piece like this, it just takes over, and it might turn out quite different. But in fact that's the way it started.

MO: But presumably he didn't give you detailed instructions like: 'It should begin with a sombre melody in D minor, which is answered by the clarinets in whatever'.

RS: No, nothing like that. It was a general outline. For instance, his first idea was for a large symphony in two halves, with two movements in each, so there's only one break in the middle: the two movements in each half are joined together. The first movement was gradually to be invaded by things that seemed rather threatening and which took over in the second movement, which was a sort of scherzo. After the break came the slow movement, very intense in its reaction to all this, a sort of severe passion. In fact, it's a fugue, and this gradually gives way to calmer elements, and when the thing has become calm enough, then there's room for energy, in a finale with some positive action in it, which is not so full of conflict as the rest – just energy, a feeling that now that we have thought things out, we've got some strength back.

MO: You began at the beginning, did you?

RS: Yes, I always do that.

MO: It sounds a daft sort of question, but it is possible to begin in the middle.

RS: Oh yes. Beethoven used to begin in all sorts of odd places, and leave enormous gaps in the work sometimes, to be filled in afterwards.

MO: It's called 'Symphony No. 8', but not 'Symphony No. 8 in anything'.

RS: No. It eventually arrives at the key of G, but by a complex process which I wouldn't like to try and illustrate.

MO: Is Tony Dorrell going to understand the process, do you think?

RS: I don't think he'll have any difficulty in following it instinctively. Not being a

trained musician, he won't be able to say: 'Ah, now the centre of the tonality is C, or F#,' or whatever it happens to be at a particular time. He won't be able to follow all those things and he won't be able to say: 'Well, that theme occurred five minutes ago, and it's now changed into something else, and it's combined with something else.' But I do hope – and I hope it's the same with any other musical person – that the processes in the piece will reveal themselves just as naturally as any other natural organic processes will. As I see you sitting there, I know that all kinds of organic processes are producing the phenomenon which I am looking at, but, God knows, I can't understand them.

MO: He described the symphony he wanted in quasi-emotional terms, and you seem to have accepted that that is the way that you do write symphonies, that you can attach words like 'optimism', 'conflict', 'attack', and so on, to particular passages.

RS: It's a very good question, I think. Tony's description was in emotive terms which he couldn't put in any other way, obviously. To me they mean musical things, not emotive things in an extra-musical sense. For instance, the first movement begins calmly enough and it flows along in a fairly gentle way. One of the reasons for that was Tony's wife, Daphne, had a say in it, too, and she said that she hoped gentler elements would come in as well as all this conflict and violence. So I thought that in any case the best way to start any kind of symphony with conflict – begin it quietly, and let the thing develop its conflict, not start it with everything going flat out at everything else, because you wouldn't know which was which at all. So it starts quietly and gently, and moves along and is gradually invaded by contrasting – rather than conflicting – elements. They are conflicting because they are so contrasted, sometimes violently contrasted, in terms of dynamics and sound and everything. If that is emotive to some people, to me it's a stimulus in musical terms. Of course, naturally I experience some kind of emotion while I am writing it. I must feel it, because if I don't feel that, then I know that nobody else will.

MO: The difficulty comes, though, when you've written a piece of music that can be described in shorthand as 'triumphant', but then somebody interprets this as a triumphant view of human life, or even as a description of a particular triumph.

RS: I would say that that would be true of my Symphony if it were ending triumphantly, which of course it is not. It ends energetically, but that's another thing altogether. Energy can be used for whatever purpose you like – destructive, constructive or whatever. It simply means that after a certain amount of clashing of elements in this Symphony, there comes a point when these clashes are resolved into what you might call an undirectional energy which is canalised, which is positive in that sense.

It's very energetic, very lively and, I hope, very exciting. The last movement is very fast indeed, and it gives the orchestra a heck of a lot to do, but it doesn't end with a sort of blazing chorale or anything like that, or a feeling of romantic triumph. It ends with energy which finally comes to a point when it has got to stop sometime or other. I don't go along with Stravinsky who said that music can express only itself; I think it is much too complex for that. Music expresses all sorts of things that we are not really aware of. I don't know what I am expressing when I compose. I know that there is something coming out of me, and I know it must be human because I presume I am human, and I know that sometimes it appeals to other people and sometimes it doesn't. But one thing I know for sure, and that is that if as I write I don't experience that intense thrill (call it an emotion, whatever you like) at the time, when I know it feels right, then I know nobody else will.

MO: Does it break any new ground for you? I presume every new work breaks new ground in a way, but is there any particular new process in it, or anything like that?

RS: Yes, in some ways, although not exactly new, because the Seventh Symphony (which hasn't been played<sup>2</sup>) also starts to do this, and so do some of my other works: as I have got older, I've become more interested in the effects of intervals than tonality. In earlier times I was interested in large-scale tonality, large areas of tonality, but now I'm trying to find what intervals themselves can generate, using the resonances inherent in simple intervals like the fifth, the fourth or the third, and I try to generate something from that by feeling it in a novel way, by approaching the interval of a fifth as if I had never heard it before, and trying to find what can happen, or using intervals against each other. Take two intervals, the second and the fifth; then you have a combination of intervals and you can use them in different ways against each other. But I should emphasise this: that it's no good thinking of intervals or chords. None of this can mean anything at all unless it generates musical invention. It's terribly important for composers to write music, and you don't write music just by knocking a lot of chords or intervals together.

MO: So the business of setting intervals against one another is something you start thinking about once the basic ideas have arrived.

RS: In a way, yes. Of course, when I think of the basic ideas – some theme or some subject or some germ figure, a rhythm or something of the kind – then you look at it

<sup>2</sup> The Seventh Symphony was premiered by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Vernon Handley at the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1984 and released on CD on Hyperion CDA66280.

to see what it contains. It might contain this interval, or these intervals, and you think of how it can develop, how it can grow. And you let it grow like a seed, like a germ, at the beginning – that’s one reason I have for starting at the beginning – and it just grows, develops, multiplies and takes new forms. For instance, the last Quartet I did, No. 9,<sup>3</sup> ends with a fugue. As the fugue goes on, the subject continually changes, so that by the end it’s a completely different subject. If you heard the first version and the last version together, you would hardly associate them with each other at all, but all the intermediate processes, of course, make quite clear what is happening, and that is done all through thinking in terms of intervals, the combinations of intervals and rhythms.

MO: And, of course, thinking in those terms almost implies symphonic structure, doesn’t it?

RS: Well, what I call organic structure, the feeling of creating a current, creating movement. That’s something where I learned a great deal from the Classics, from Beethoven, and Haydn particularly, and then later from Nielsen and Sibelius. And Nielsen said: ‘Unless my music has a current, it’s nothing’, and that is a feeling I share very strongly.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. also Lionel Pike’s and Edward Green’s contributions in this volume, pp. 368–413 and 247–255.

## A note on Robert Simpson's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony

### John McCabe

The basic facts about Simpson's Ninth Symphony are well-known, above all that it is possibly the longest single span of music for orchestra at one sustained pulse (50 minutes on the Hyperion CD recording)<sup>1</sup> – not tempo, because this changes from time to time (mostly imperceptibly), but simply basic pulse. Pulse and tempo were always important considerations for this composer, and equally fundamental concerns to him were questions of movement, tension and relaxation, and overall form combined with detailed structure. His own writings about music contain many relevant passages – take this, from his book on the *Beethoven Symphonies*:

... bigness does not necessarily mean slowness. The romantic period created in many minds the assumption that expansion inescapably entailed the slowing-down of music; with Beethoven expansion often means filling a larger time-scale with more, not less, activity ... [In the first movement of the *Eroica*] This composition is 'slower' than its precursors only because its great moments of tension and relaxation are more widely spaced.<sup>2</sup>

In order to achieve the epic form of this massive work, Simpson adopted three main techniques: a detailed and apparently complex web of motifs and forms, a rigorous tonal scheme, and a systematic approach to tempo change using the underlying pulse to sustain the flow of the music and, in some instances, to hide or disguise the fluctuations in speed.

### **The First and Third Symphonies**

This was not by any means the first time Simpson had written a symphony on one pulse, or in one movement. Malcolm MacDonald, in a lecture during a Wigmore Hall series of Simpson chamber music performances, commented that

<sup>1</sup> CDA66299.

<sup>2</sup> *Beethoven Symphonies*, BBC Music Guide, London 1970, pp. 18–19.

'Simpson was especially prolific in writing pieces in one movement, and that movement subsuming into itself two or three or more parts ... And the Seventh and Ninth Symphonies are also big single movements that prove to have a natural three-part shape to them – though the Ninth ... can be read in more than one way, and some may prefer to see it as a work of two vast halves, hinged upon a shorter scherzo.'<sup>3</sup>

Deryck Cooke in his note on Simpson's First Symphony in Robert Matthew-Walker's compendium *The Symphonies of Robert Simpson*, commented:

The symphony, cast in a single movement, forms a unified whole by continuous development of its initial material within a basic, unchanging pulse; yet, by twice changing the unit of time within this basic pulse, it comprises three parts, corresponding to the opening movement, adagio and finale of a three-movement symphony. In this respect, it is the first symphony of its kind.<sup>4</sup>

Matthew Taylor, in his booklet notes for the Hyperion recording of the First Symphony, says it

embraces a highly original formal design: a continuous structure which, by twice modifying the unit of time within the unchanging pulse, corresponds to the three parts in a symphony: moderato (first movement), slow movement and fast finale. Like Simpson's First String Quartet this symphony is unified further by pursuing an argument that revolves around two pivotal tonalities placed a tritone apart, A and E flat...The last part of the [First] symphony ... assumes a fast, swinging, triple-time pulse, the old triplet quavers now becoming a bar of 3/4.<sup>5</sup>

Simon Philipppo, in *Symphonic Momentum and Post-tonal Dramas: Simpson's First Symphony*, points to

... the work's virtuosic demonstration of 'composed flexible pace'. The initial crotchet pulse is maintained throughout, though it undergoes two transformations: becoming a subdivision of the minim of the *alla breve* slow movement, and of the dotted minim in the one-in-a-bar finale ... Simpson not only maintains a common pulse for his material, with all its apparent variety of tempo, but uses this to generate a kind of sophisticated metric counterpart at both ends of the finale.<sup>6</sup>

There are plenty of examples of composers using a constant pulse on which to superimpose contrasting metres – for instance, Franz Schmidt, who in the first movement of his First Symphony delightfully explores in the space of less than a dozen bars both 3/4 and 3/2 shapes in the context of a written-out duple metre, and does so with great insouciance, while Brahms's music is full of metric sleights-of-hand.

<sup>3</sup> Tonic 15, 2005, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Lengnick, London 1991, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Hyperion CDA66890 (Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Vernon Handley).

<sup>6</sup> Tonic 15, 2005, p. 17.

Responding to the twin demands of changing tempo and unchanging pulse for the interpreter, Simpson wrote about Classical composers that they

mainly confined their various tempi to separate movements, in each of which a uniform pulse is felt. Beethoven will, even in such a piece, alter his rate of thought while maintaining the original pulse. Consequently it is never necessary to fluctuate the tempo in performance to 'make expression'. This point is almost certainly not understood by those conductors who give temperamental 'readings' of classical symphonies.<sup>7</sup>

(Nor is this understood by many soloists! I have heard many performances, often magnificent in other ways, where this essential point has been ignored, and recently listened to what is otherwise a fine live performance of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony conducted by Stokowski, which is seriously disfigured by manipulation of the tempo that, if not so grossly overdone, might have been very effective but is essentially unnecessary.)

There are plenty of examples of symphonic music in which tempo changes are in some way manipulated or disguised. In Elliott Carter's *Variations for Orchestra* (1954/5), for instance, there are frequent tempo changes which are to some extent hidden by the activity or otherwise within or around the beats, and of course he famously employed his metrical modulation to achieve a written-out rubato of tempi within some of the variations. In the splendid *Finale*, he built the tension by the accretion of detail so that the powerfully dramatic trombone theme at the climax is a true resolution of all the processes, and can allow the work to die down quietly at the end (just as several Simpson symphonies do, including the Ninth, though here the quiet final section is much longer than Carter's brief flickers of sound). The first movement of Lutosławski's magnificent *Third Symphony* was described by the composer as consisting of 'three episodes, the first being the fastest, the third the slowest. As a matter of fact, the tempo remains the same, and the difference in speed is achieved only by the use of longer rhythmical values. Even in Vaughan Williams's *Fifth Symphony*'s final *Passacaglia*, the composer increases the tempo and the tension by introducing first some jazzy off-beat rhythms (going into figure 3) and then introducing triplet figures (just after figure 9), which almost inevitably have the effect of increasing the pace simply by increasing the amount of activity within the beat.

<sup>7</sup> 'Sibelius and Musical Movement', *Tonic* 19, 2009, p. 30.

## Maestoso, tempo giusto

Simpson once wrote that a symphony must 'travel', and this work sets out on what proves to be a formidable journey in apparently a very simple fashion, a D# pedal note, pulsing in triplets, over which a wedge-shaped theme gradually insinuates itself forward – the feeling of embarking on a significant narrative is palpable. The outline of the theme (Example 1a) shows its wealth of material ripe for development and variation: a three-note cluster (*a*), the interval of a fourth (*b*), a group of three notes giving us a major-minor tonal ambiguity (*c*), and a scale pattern (*d*, the upper line of notes from D# to G#, while the lower ones descend in roughly motion contrary to the upper part).

### Example 1a



Example 1b (p. 188) gives the opening of the work, the wedge theme and the pedal combining with hesitant, groping gestures in the violins that explore a 7th/octave figure that could be said to relate immediately to the 7th/octave figure at the end of the wedge (*e*). It might be noticed that his articulation and phrasing for the violin figuration is extremely precise and well thought-out – throughout this work, as in all his music, Simpson is always very clear in his indications for the players, and here the articulation helps to enhance the hesitant cross-rhythmic phrasing, emphasizing the music's exploratory feeling. The simple octave interval (*f*) also plays an important part as the work progresses. It is clear from this that, like many classical masters, he is already beginning to develop his material, to relate themes or motifs to each other, from the very start. It is also worth noting the three-note cluster, the central tone and its semitonal neighbours either side described by Lionel Pike in his notes for the CD booklet as clinging 'like barnacles to a ship's hull'. A melodic cluster of this kind immediately means that *any* cluster, melodic or harmonic, can be related to this figure (*a* in Example 1a).

The pedal notes, apart from anchoring the texture and allowing the upper parts to float more freely, serve two prime functions: to affirm the tonality, and thus make changes more audible, and to build tension, so that each change is a step forward on the journey. And one of the most important aspects of this symphony is the handling

## Example 1b: bars 2–15

**Maestoso, tempo giusto** (♩ = c. 60)

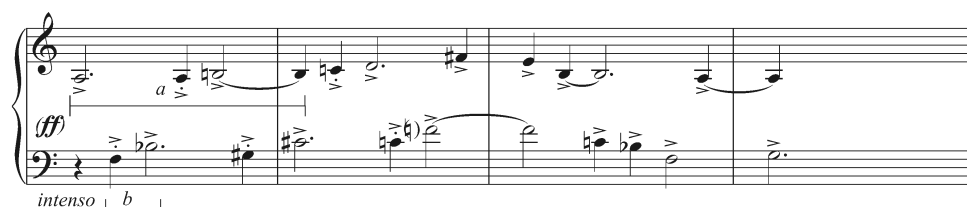
The musical score is written for a piano and includes parts for Woodwind (WW), Violin (Vln.), Double Bass (Db.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The tempo is **Maestoso, tempo giusto** with a quarter note equal to approximately 60 beats per minute. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is divided into four systems. The first system shows the initial entries of the instruments. The piano part is marked *pp non spiccato* and includes a forte (*f*) section. The second system continues the piano part with markings *b*, *c*, and *d*. The third system introduces the Violoncello part. The fourth system concludes the piano part with a final chord.

of tonal change, sometimes over a long period of time and, in this work, also tied in very carefully with almost mathematical treatment of the duration of tonal centres. In bars 8–15, the second and third pedal notes are G# and C#, with their attendant variations of the wedge theme – note that the cellos take over this theme in bar 11. The

pedal note has moved up from D $\sharp$  through G $\sharp$  (bar 8) to C $\sharp$ , and it is this tonal movement up (or down) a fourth (or fifth, if inverted) that is one of the fundamental structural principles of the whole symphony. But even this principle is referred to melodically in the main theme (the C $\sharp$ -F $\sharp$  in bar 4), both in the theme in sustained woodwinds and in the little string phrases accompanying it. Very few major works known to me so clearly demonstrate the detailed inter-relationship of their constituent parts in such a short space of time at the very beginning.

This first paragraph of the symphony moves upwards by fourths through all twelve key centres, ending with a short B $\flat$  pedal and then a unison E $\flat$  (i.e. D $\sharp$ , the note with which we started), a gradual crescendo having developed through the music along with the changes of pedal note – which occur at gradually shorter intervals of time as the music has proceeded, another device for creating accumulated tension, so that the next phase of music can begin with the marking *ff intensivo*. During the next section the music is freed from the discipline imposed by pedal points for a while, but the rigorousness of the thematic processes is maintained – some two-part counterpoint in strings and woodwinds, for instance, closely explores the motifs *b* and *a* from Example 1 (see Example 2), the interval of a fourth and the three-note cluster. This comes after the start of a freer, more contrapuntal development of the ideas, and there are three statements of this – one detects another relationship with the wedge theme in the arch-like shape, up and then down again to its starting-point. (This is almost like a miniaturisation of the scheme of the whole work.) A feature he introduces in this section, slowly-rising scales (Example 3), becomes another important building-block in the development of the material, reaching its purest, most extended form in the closing pages of the symphony.

Example 2: bars 45–48 (woodwind/strings)





As the music proceeds, the major/minor cadence in thirds (see Example 1b, figure c) becomes more and more significant – it has concluded the first few chorale statements, but it comes increasingly to the fore as these moments become grander and, with the aid of ever more persistent quaver figuration giving a motoristic propulsion above the slow-moving brass theme, it leads to a change of time-signature from 3/2 to 2/2. This change is not particularly audible, since the slow-moving brass continue as before, but the string variation of the wedge theme above this exploits the octave leap implied at the end of the wedge itself (stated as a unison in bar 8, Example 1b) (Example 5).

Example 5: bars 306–309 (strings)



The inexorable, almost machine-like progress of this mixture of the striding octave figuration in strings with the slow-moving minims in brass and woodwind seems as inevitable and unstoppable as the massive tripods devouring the countryside in H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* – Simpson, though utterly different in every way from Glass or Reich, had the same penchant for setting in motion a vast, cosmic process that has to work its way inexorably through its permutations before reaching a point either of resolution or change (and, it must be said, he did it in a way that is frequently more interesting than theirs). This huge section eventually leads to a change of time-signature back to 3/2 and a pedal note (in upper woodwind) of G $\flat$ . It has been a large type of crescendo-development, combined now with the chorale-prelude style. Simpson increases the tension by reintroducing in the strings and timpani the triplet rhythm with which the work started, combining it with a two-part variation of the chorale off the beat in trumpets and horns, doubled with another version on the beat in the lower brass (Example 6) – and in bar 409 there is a strong reiteration of the major/minor cadence that punctuates so much of this symphony.

Example 6: bars 406–409 (brass)



In his book about the Beethoven symphonies, Simpson says:

In the opening movement of the Eighth Symphony Beethoven emphasizes this function of the development by making its total effect that of a single vast crescendo, so that when we arrive at the reprise it is with a simple but thrilling sense of climax ... Nielsen also shows consistent mastery of the 'crescendo-type' development, though usually with a different purpose involving progressive tonality.<sup>8</sup>

(He later preferred the term 'emergent tonality', but these two descriptions could mean slightly different and equally valid things.)

James Hepokoski refers to the famous transition from first part to scherzo in the first movement of Sibelius's Fifth Symphony (which famously telescopes two movements into one) thus:

Technically, the 'B major' breakthrough at bar 106 [the swinging return of the opening theme] is a re-composition of the symphony's original opening ... it serves as a climactic 'thematic recapitulation' ... as if into some elemental, generative current. Simultaneously, Sibelius subjects this brief passage to an *accelerando* that drives directly into the  $\frac{3}{4}$  *Allegro moderato* (*ma poco a poco stretto*) (bar 114), in which four bars of the new metre correspond to one of the earlier 12/8.<sup>9</sup>

This particular section, where the music turns a corner from a steady-paced movement to a one-in-a-bar scherzo (there can be some argument about where the scherzo actually starts), gives us the sensation of two speeds going on simultaneously, an active quick pace and a much slower underlying rate of harmonic or tonal change – not unlike Bruckner (think of his symphonic finales, where there is fast surface activity over a slow underpinning). In this Simpson symphony, this is also true of the Scherzo, where quite often the hectic rate of activity is underpinned by the slow unfolding of a version of the 'wedge' theme, or the brass chorale. It is worth recalling that in his talk on his Ninth Symphony, recorded as the final track on the Hyperion CD recording, Simpson makes the point that he initially wrote a discrete first movement and then embarked on a fast second before realizing that he could telescope these and make the music continuous.

Hugh Ottaway writes of the second movement of Simpson's Third Symphony:

From one point of view it may be said to combine slow movement, scherzo and finale, though not in any sectional sense. Simpson describes it as "a huge compressed *accelerando*, but with the dynamics repressed: the pace gradually quickens from *Adagio* to *Presto*, and much of the way the dynamic level is

<sup>8</sup> *Beethoven Symphonies*, BBC Music Guide, London 1970, pp. 50.

<sup>9</sup> *Sibelius: Symphony No. 5*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993 (Cambridge Music Handbook), pp. 67–68.

*pp* accentuated by sporadic bursts of *f* and *ff*; then suddenly the whole orchestra is ablaze and we find ourselves in something very like a Beethovenian finale.<sup>10</sup>

Discussing the same work, John Pickard says that by 'composed *accelerando*',

the composer implies an *accelerando* achieved not by speeding up the basic pulse, but by gradually increasing the amount of activity within that pulse and creating new tempi from this. Pulse does not in itself create movement; harmonic change does. As soon as the changes become frequent, pulse inevitably becomes a contributory factor.<sup>11</sup>

Of the change into the Tempo 3 of this movement, he comments that 'This tempo change retains the same crotchet pulse but reduces the bar-lengths from 3/2 (six crotchets) to 3/4 transforming the music into a graceful one-in-a-bar *Allegretto*' (there is actually a *pochettino mosso* for the seven bars before the time-signature change). Of the move into Tempo 7, 'A crescendo through descending quavers... leads into the final, fastest, tempo – Presto. Here the beat does not change, nor does the stress: it is the amount of activity within the (now 'alla breve') beat which increases.' All these are pointers to the procedures Simpson adopts in the Ninth Symphony, and with a massive release of the pent-up energy accumulated through the whole of the previous part of the symphony, he bursts out into the very fast, one-in-a-bar scherzo (the inspiration provided by Beethoven's symphonies springs to mind). In his recording, Vernon Handley makes an unwritten but convincing one-bar *accelerando* into the scherzo, and similarly in bar 1561 draws out the bar before the final climax, making it even more powerful. All the tension gradually built up is released in the unleashing of a furious torrent of notes, motifs and superbly thought-out orchestral colours (Simpson is not, it seems to me, thought of as an orchestral colourist, but his imagination in this respect is second to none).

### **Molto vivace**

Discussing the Scherzo of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, in *Beethoven Symphonies*, Simpson makes the point that by contrast with the first movement

the *molto vivace* (*allegro molto vivace* in the manuscript) concentrates on pure energy which, like that trapped in an atom, might well exist indefinitely, until it were released and dissipated. ... Beethoven possessed a power of movement greater than any other composer's; here it attains its utmost expression.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> 'Symphony No. 3', in *The Symphonies of Robert Simpson*, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> 'Simpson's Third Symphony – An Analysis', *Tonic* 6, 1994, p. 16, in this volume p. 150.

<sup>12</sup> *Beethoven Symphonies*, BBC Music Guide, London 1970, p. 61.

While Simpson has taken enormous pains to make the movements indissoluble, nobody, once it has got under way, could make any mistake – we are now in the midst of a gigantic, turbulent, exciting scherzo.

Again, pedal notes, either sustained or quickly repeated and either low or high, form a helpful centre of gravity for the listener, something rather necessary for us – the rate of eventuation, as Roberto Gerhard would have called it, is enormously fast and it is almost impossible to follow all the quicksilver detail consciously. Better to relax (perhaps that is the wrong word for music with this degree of nervous intensity) and let the music sweep over one. There is a good deal of rhythmic dislocation as it proceeds, giving the impression of different time-signatures having a game with each other. Once more we can refer to Simpson on the *Beethoven Symphonies*, because in discussing the Beethoven Fourth Symphony he writes:

there is something curiously fascinating in the way the scherzo, after the vast concealed syncopation of the period-structure of the *adagio*, takes obvious pleasure in the deliberate disruption of smaller-scaled rhythms. The larger periods are all regular fours with interspersed sixes, but their *enchaînement* is unusual – five four-bar periods before the double bar, and a delightful stretching effect up to the return of the theme at bar 53 (4+4+6 and 4+4+4+6), all enlivened in the most deliciously contradictory manner by cross-rhythms and rapid modulations, like fish darting towards a morsel of bread, their erratic movements contained and carried by a firm current.<sup>13</sup>

– a description which can delightfully apply also to the passage from bar 605, constantly crossing over the barline to create effectively a momentary, different groupings (e.g. 3 crotchets plus 3 plus 2), all at very high speed (Example 7).

Example 7: bars 605-615 (woodwind, with string octave punctuation)

Molto vivace (♩. = c. 120)

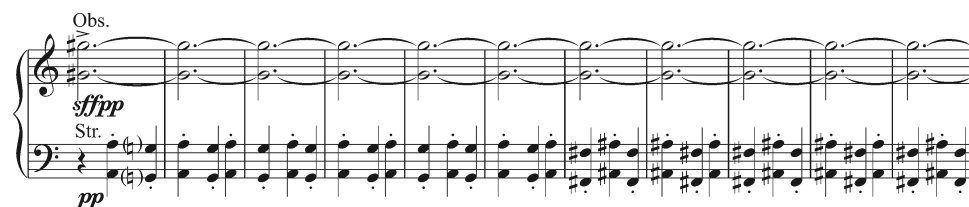
The musical score for Example 7, bars 605-615, is presented in three staves: Treble, Bass, and Piano. The tempo is 'Molto vivace' with a quarter note equal to approximately 120 beats per minute. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score shows a complex rhythmic pattern with frequent bar line crossings. Dynamics include piano (p), crescendo (cresc.), forte (f), mezzo-piano (mp), and fortissimo (f). There are also markings for '8va' (octave up) and '8va' (octave down).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 32.



The woodwind chords are built out of fourths, and it is this interval that, combined with the wedge theme itself, drives the music forward most strongly. The fast speed, however, does not preclude the slow nature of the underlying harmonic change – as Harold Truscott said: ‘Unlike his imitators, Sibelius has the secret of suggesting great speed even in passages which are harmonically rooted’,<sup>14</sup> a secret shared with Simpson, as this Scherzo suggests. The lengthy passage from bar 688 in which, while the scherzo material quietly but vigorously develops its own variation of the ‘wedge’ theme in the strings, the woodwinds gradually sustain first a single note, then two, then three, and so on, building downwards a series of chords based on fourths (one of the main intervallic building blocks of his material) – this passage brilliantly illustrates just this point (Track 8 on the Hyperion CD). It is worth noting the fact that ultimately the chord built in this way contains all twelve notes, relating to the opening section of the symphony, where the rotation of the material and the development right from the start of the ‘wedge’ theme has been superimposed on pedal notes rising a fourth for each variation and gradually travelling through all twelve tones (Example 8a).

#### Example 8a: bars 688–709



<sup>14</sup> In an article about Sibelius in the Pelican Book *The Symphony: 2: Elgar to the Present Day* (edited, in an unsurprising coincidence, by Robert Simpson), Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967, p. 85.

Example 8b: Outline of woodwind chords, bars 688–831

Example 8a shows how he starts this process, high woodwind sustaining a note, then two, then three and so on, while the strings merrily (or menacingly?) play around with the wedge theme. This gradual crescendo culminates in the chord with all twelve notes (the sequence of chords is shown in Example 8b). As the music, through wave after wave of crescendo and cumulative excitement, builds to the second of the three main climaxes of the symphony (the three points of balance of the whole structure), scale figures assume greater importance melodically – Example 9 shows one way he uses this (the flutes and bassoons are given here, to make clear both the essentially two-part nature of this idea, the equally bipartite nature of its presentation by pairs of instruments, and the resulting inverted canon).

Example 9: woodwind, bars 1051–1058

Simpson is able to create enormous pent-up excitement by means of these pedal notes, enabling him to allow the music to burst out of this tension and move to a new area. The same is true of ostinato figurations, which have a similar function, and the use of rising string scales adds to the cumulative excitement, much as with Bruckner in many of his symphonies, or Sibelius in the finale of his Second Symphony, where at a steady tempo he inexorably builds to a point at which the main theme can make its last triumphant peroration. Finally, after the brass chorale has at last reached its peak, a great tidal wave of sound, Simpson wrenches the time-signature back to 3/2 and the tempo back to *Maestoso* for a last massive reminder of the wedge-chorale. The music dies away to a state of suspended animation over a low A, and we are ready for the final section.

### Maestoso

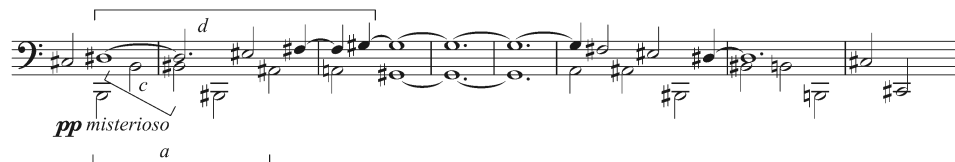
Once we have passed the climactic chords and the diminuendo, and after what is effectively a pause, the violins commence a fugue based on a theme which is part of the wedge, played backwards (Example 10).

Example 10: Violins, bars 1237–1247

**Maestoso** (♩ = c. 60)  
con sord.

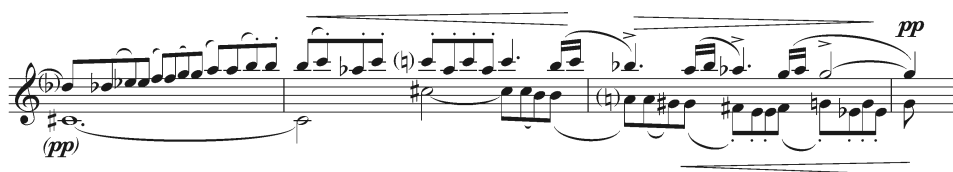
The contrast of this utterly peaceful, almost static music with the frantic pursuit and monolithic grandeur (the two combining to emphasize the contrast between them) of the scherzo is extraordinary, but Simpson has written such a large scherzo with so devastating an impact that he can turn this huge corner with total conviction – the quietude of this slow music is given a strange inevitability by the impact of this contrast. If a symphony must ‘travel’, this one has reached a point where it is clearly searching for the right route, which it finds by way of this enormous contrast between epic activity and near-stasis.

## Example 11: Bassoons: palindrome, bars 1301–1308

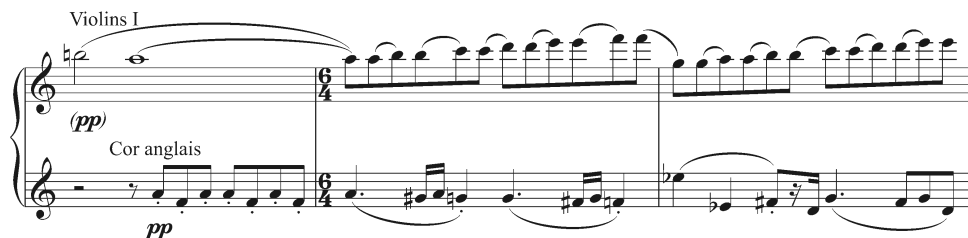


Gradually, the woodwind develop a palindromic theme (Example 11) clearly derived from the wedge tune, and at one point the palindrome (in woodwinds) and the wedge (in horns) are heard together. Quaver figuration inveigles its way into the texture (one can also note the bar-long crescendo hairpin and then diminuendo in the first violins, the second violins echoing this a bar later, his fine judgement of orchestral balance making clearer the inverted canon) (Example 12a), and when the time signature changes to 6/4, though the pulse remains the same, the notes themselves are faster (Example 12b).

## Example 12a: Violins, bars 1380–1383



## Example 12b: bars 1393–1395



It is clear from Examples 12a and 12b that scale figures are becoming more and more prominent, a natural development from the scalic element in the basic motto of the whole work (Example 1a, figure *d*, top line), and after a move towards and then away from the epic again, it is they that, though in the background, drive the music on to its final, third main climax (Example 13) This passage begins with Brucknerian scales in sextuplets, reminding one of the all-important triplet rhythm, combined with the palindrome in the woodwinds, joined after a while by the horns:

## Example 13: bars 1451–1453

Flutes

*p cantabile e sostenuto*

*ppp*

Oboes

Simpson is actually tying the whole work together. He reintroduces pedal notes (high, in strings and woodwinds), reminds one of the octave figurations from Example 5 while simultaneously introducing a passage of rhythmic dislocation somewhat reminiscent of Example 7, and when finally the trombones *forte* declaim the palindrome, they are joined by woodwind and string triplets playing an insistent upper pedal tone. The brass, employing a dotted rhythm, have a variation of the wedge theme, repeated with a rise of a fourth each time to build an extended, climactic and sustained explosion of affirmation (the triplet's upper pedal makes a similar shift of a fourth each time). This climax, the work's third and final one is formed by a massive statement of the major/minor cadence one more time, followed by a huge tutti chord of a thirteenth on E $\flat$ , which tone provides the pedal note for what is effectively an epilogue. This final climactic chord, by the way, has a similar, enormously powerful effect to the chord just before the end of the Third Symphony, a huge dominant seventh that leaves a few quiet notes echoing in its wake.

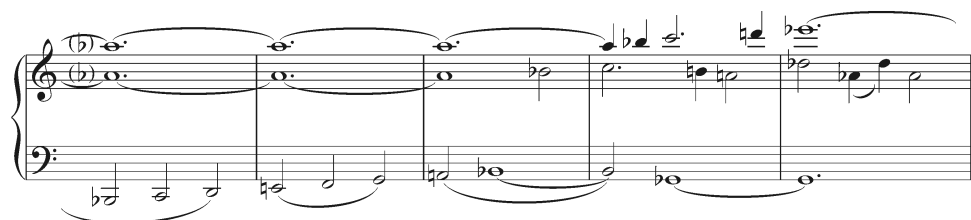
The last section of the Ninth Symphony is entirely *pianissimo* (echoes of Vaughan Williams's Sixth perhaps, though while that one is the epitome of bleakness, even negativity, this is, however meandering, rather more questing), and while it initiates what appears to be another string fugue, over rising doublebass scales (Example 14), this turns out to be an unfulfilled gesture.

## Example 14: bars 1572–1581

Violins

*pp tranquillo*

Doublebasses



The counterpoint is not so purposeful as it might need to have been in a fugue – instead, it moves very beautifully through a series of slowly unfolding tonal centres and rising figures related to Example 3, the symphony ending with a scale quietly weaving through the strings as if slowly ascending to infinite space, from a low F# up to a very high D# harmonic (D# was the note with which the symphony began, though in the bass on that occasion). The final harmony also contains E#, A#, and Cb. It is a hauntingly beautiful question with which to end such an intensely involving and complex journey. We have, indeed, travelled, a long way.

### What is the Question?

What is the question Simpson seems to be asking at the enigmatic conclusion of this great work? Of course, if we could answer it, he needn't have bothered writing the music – probably the answer lies in each listener's response to the music, and in that listener's own view of the world. Simpson was both a 'ferocious anti-pessimist', a very positive character whose music possesses a life-enhancing (and life-enhanced) nature, and a pessimist, in the sense that he saw with dismay (to say the least) the gradual destruction or obliteration of ideals that he, along with many of us, have perceived in recent decades. In any case, his profound commitment to Socialism marks him out as a man deeply concerned with humanity (though he must towards the end have become thoroughly disenchanted with the misuse of that philosophy, just as my own father was in his late years). The end of the symphony follows a section whose seeming passivity could be interpreted as negative – but this, I believe, was something light years away from his own philosophy. It is significant that, in writing his own text for a choral work and then getting it translated into Latin (for the greater objectivity of the language), he chose to reverse the old burial saying 'in the midst of life we are in death' and chose to call the work *Media morte in vita sumus* ('in the midst of death we are in life'). Not as a religious or mystical statement, but simply an expression of his belief in the importance of human existence: 'whatever you do is of vital impor-

tance'.<sup>15</sup> Simpson's music is in its own way a stimulating and moving expression of that belief, and the Ninth Symphony (*pace* the fine works which followed it) its greatest expression.

<sup>15</sup> Simpson interview with Lewis Foreman, *Tonic* 16, 2006, p. 10.



# String Quartets



## The Cosmos and the String Quartet – The Music of Robert Simpson in Philosophic Perspective Edward Green

To write on the string chamber music of Robert Simpson is to feel a powerful debt to those who did so earlier. Lionel Pike and Matthew Taylor come immediately to mind, as does Malcolm MacDonald – whose eloquent, insightful ‘Introduction’ to Simpson’s string quartets, available as an illustrated talk on Dunelm Records,<sup>1</sup> lays a solid groundwork for all who wish to give further commentary. In that talk, MacDonald is bold: in cheerful defiance of academic opinion, he simply declares Robert Simpson the creator of the finest body of chamber music for strings in the twentieth century. In fact, he goes further: in his estimation, Simpson was the most significant composer in the genre since Beethoven. From the author of one of the best recent books on Brahms – a scholar who also has penned careful volumes on the music of Schoenberg and Shostakovich – this is some statement, indeed!

To those who have taken the time to weigh the evidence and have not been deafened by the ever-shifting stylistic politics of the world of contemporary music, MacDonald’s opinion not only is plausible, but persuasive. I would hesitate only at granting Simpson sole possession of the field; a rough parity of artistic achievement between Bartók, with his six, and Simpson, with his fifteen quartets, seems a more accurate assessment. And were I to decide the issue by the ‘lazy man’s method of music criticism’ – asking which music appeals more swiftly to my individual temperament – then the greater riot of color,<sup>2</sup> the more frequent presence of whimsy, and the more overt earthiness of Bartók’s quartets compels me to declare the Hungarian closer to my heart.

Thankfully, my job is not to promote my personal tastes, but to be an honorable observer of the musical scene: to try to judge things (as Spinoza might, had he

<sup>1</sup> Divine Art Dunelm Records DRDO 110.

<sup>2</sup> Simpson’s string writing relies almost exclusively on the basic timbral contrast of arco and pizzicato. There are very few harmonics to be found in his quartets, and these are almost entirely ‘natural’ harmonics. He also denies himself the use of glissandi, scordatura and col legno – let alone the ‘Bartók snap.’

given himself over to musicology) *sub specie aeternitas*. And if Simpson excelled in anything, it was in the field of the ‘eternal’ – the ability to use the String Quartet as a medium through which to make enduring accurate artistic comments about the Cosmos and Humanity's place in it. That is, as a conduit for Truth.

### ‘Music Tells What the World Is Like’

The reader, I am sure, has noted my capital letters: Truth, Cosmos, Humanity – let alone String Quartet. Later I'll also capitalize Art. Why? Because Simpson was a dauntless musician and aimed big; and capitals help to convey that bigness. In fact, I have found that the only way to do justice to Robert Simpson is to consider his music in the light of that mode of thought which takes on Truth, Art, Humanity, and the Cosmos without fear of their bigness. That is: to look at his music in the light of Philosophy; and specifically in the light of the philosophy of Aesthetic Realism, founded in 1941 by the great American poet and scholar Eli Siegel.<sup>3</sup>

The heading for this section, ‘Music Tells What the World Is Like’, are words taken from an essay by Siegel.<sup>4</sup> They are, as one might expect from a great philosopher who was also a great poet, simple on the surface yet deeply reverberant in their meaning. How, then? How, since music from a phenomenological point-of-view is an ever-changing flow of sound, can the *abiding* truth about reality be found in it? The answer, he showed, lies in this principle, which forms the bedrock of Aesthetic Realism: ‘*The world, art, and self explain each other: each is the aesthetic oneness of opposites.*’<sup>5</sup>

Let us see what this idea has to do with Simpson, and how it can help us discern his true place in music history.

Though it is often not made conscious, every person has felt that some music has more substance, more scope, more subtlety, more honest mystery than some other. Some music, in other words, has ‘more world’ in it: ranges farther and deeper; evokes a larger, more delicately fine, more complete sense of what reality is and what hu-

<sup>3</sup> For a compact presentation of this philosophic viewpoint, see Edward Green, ‘A Note on Two Conceptions of Aesthetic Realism,’ *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 45/4, October 2005, pp. 438–440. See also Deborah A. Straub's entry on ‘Eli Siegel’ in *Contemporary Authors – New Revision Series*, Vol. 9, eds. Ann Evory and Linda Metzger, Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1982, pp. 453–455.

<sup>4</sup> Eli Siegel, ‘Letter to Robert Sherman: Music Tells What the World Is Like,’ *The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known* No. 93, 8<sup>th</sup> January 8, 1975, pp. 1–2.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in my essay, ‘Donald Francis Tovey, Aesthetic Realism, and the Need for a Philosophic Musicology,’ *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 36/2, December 2005, p.230.

manity can do. Mozart simply has more of the world in him than does Clementi; Brahms than Bruch; Prokofiev than Kabalevsky; Ellington than Glenn Miller; the Beatles than Herman's Hermits. (And I like *all* these musicians.)

But good and great are not equivalent things; and Simpson's music rises to greatness. At its best, it is capable of giving a vivid sense of the Cosmos in its grandeur – a grandeur that certainly may be frightening (for Simpson was capable of some of the most torrential and intense music ever penned), but also is warm: spacious and warm. And in this fact, in the coming together of two qualities that people most often see as inimical – impersonal grandeur and intimate warmth – lies Simpson's ultimate value as an artist.

As Eli Siegel explained, the deepest need of every human being is to like the world on an honest basis. We need to see reality as it is, directly, objectively, without making it any smaller or simpler than it is. At the same time, we need to find warmth, logic, and beauty in it. Whatever other 'successes' one might achieve in life, if the world itself seems irremediably cold, senseless, and ugly to a person, it is hard to see how that person can sincerely look upon his or her life other than as a failure. And if, in some unconscious way, a person actually *hopes* to find the world (and other people) senseless, cold, and ugly as a way – seemingly – of elevating oneself, that person, Aesthetic Realism insists, is making the most dangerous mistake possible: choosing contempt over respect as a mode of life.<sup>6</sup>

An earthy analogy can make the logic vivid: we ourselves are instances of reality. How can any single portion of a pie be healthful if the ingredients found everywhere in the pie are poisonous? We have contempt for the world, therefore, at our own peril. Our opinion of it, inevitably, is our opinion of ourselves.

One senses, in Robert Simpson's finest music, that the composer has looked at the world with a desire to see it deeply and accurately, and found beauty there. Not superficially, but at its core. In terms, shall we say, of reality's ultimate 'ingredients'. One senses that this music was impelled from a deep-seated feeling that the drama of opposites in reality is a beautiful drama.

Consider, as an example, the opening page of his String Quartet No. 12 (1987). Is

<sup>6</sup> As Aesthetic Realism sees it, the hope for contempt is the greatest enemy humanity has within itself. For a specifically musical study of this issue, see Edward Green, 'Biography as Ethics: A Study in the Combat between Respect and Contempt in the Mind of Felix Mendelssohn', *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 37/2, December 2006, pp. 157–166. For a more general study, see the Preface to Eli Siegel's classic text, *Self and World: An Explanation of Aesthetic Realism*, New York: Definition Press, 1981, pp. 1–20. This Preface is given the subtitle, 'Contempt Causes Insanity.'

this music floating, or imbued with purpose and direction? Simple, or intricate? Sweetly consoling, or implicitly edgy?

### Example 1

Adagio (♩ = c.63)

*p espress. ma calmo*

*p espress. ma calmo*

*p espress. ma calmo*



It is all of these qualities, conjoined. And perhaps the most salient dialectic expressed in this music is one we hear throughout the work of Robert Simpson: mystery is evoked, but without mystification. Moment-by-moment the fugue which comprises the opening movement of Quartet No. 12 has remarkable lucidity. Its subject is built up of crystal-clear elements: the minor third and the perfect fourth. Primal intervals. Yet despite the almost folk-like quality of this conjunction of musical intervals – they form the most common module of pentatonic thought, worldwide – the music never settles into an unambiguous tonality.

We thus hear naïveté and sophistication together: a state of mind that is beautiful, and (sadly enough) rare. Rare not only among modern composers, but among modern academics. Rare, in fact, in our tormented times, among all people.

There is, in other words, something for people to learn from Robert Simpson's music. All people; not just musicians. In it, we hear sonic patterns ceaselessly evolving, giving an impression of the inexhaustible diversity of reality; yet one never doubts their tight-knit unity. So a question arises, which Aesthetic Realism alone among philosophies asks clearly: does this beautiful, artistic procedure also stand for what every person hopes for in his or her life? Do we want our lives to have the utmost integrity and at the same time unimpeded freedom, adventure and diversity?

The sane answer, of course, is yes.

To think of art and life as deeply conjoined, is wisdom. Yet, as Eli Siegel explained, there is a third element which should never be lost sight of – for not only, through the oneness of opposites, does music inform us about our lives, it also 'tells what the world is like'. Music, understood rightly, is a means of apprehending reality truly: at its philosophic depths. And if what I just said about Simpson's

music is accurate, then with justice (and, of course, with humor) one can say: ‘Reality, itself, is *Simpsonesque*.’<sup>7</sup>

That is: the Cosmos behaves in keeping with what we hear in his string quartets. The Cosmos, too, is mysterious and law-abiding; infinite in its diversity, yet unified. Reality, too, is simple and intricate; sweetly consoling and implicitly edgy.

I wrote, just before, of a deep and lovely naïveté in Robert Simpson. This goes, hand-in-glove, with another quality found in his best work – charm. A manly charm, to be sure; but charm, nonetheless. To be dead-serious and winsome at once, weighty and light, rigorous and easy-going is a beautiful thing. Moreover, it is an *accurate* thing: the world has massive glaciers, also puffy clouds; hippopotami and thistle-down, galaxies and infinitesimal sub-atomic filaments. This being unarguably so, it would be unhealthy (let alone inartistic) to specialize in one aspect of the Cosmos at the expense of another.

For Simpson, the Cosmos was not just grand and sublime – though no one in the twentieth-century expressed this fact musically better than he. It was likewise playful and miniature. For example, his Eighth Quartet (1979) has a scherzo subtitled *Eretmapodites gilletti* – a delightful portrait of a mosquito which more than holds its own with the *Flight of the Bumblebee* for top-honor in the world of insect-inspired music. Here are its opening bars:

## Example 2

**Molto vivace** (♩ = c.96)  
(ERETMAPODITES GILLETTI)

The musical score is for the opening of Robert Simpson's Eighth Quartet, Scherzo 'Eretmapodites gilletti'. It is in 3/4 time and consists of four staves. The first staff (treble clef) starts with a whole rest followed by a series of eighth notes with a 'pp' dynamic. The second staff (treble clef) starts with a whole rest followed by a series of eighth notes with a 'f > pp' dynamic. The third staff (bass clef) starts with a whole rest followed by a series of eighth notes with a 'pp' dynamic. The fourth staff (bass clef) starts with a whole rest followed by a series of eighth notes with a 'pizz.' and 'pp' dynamic.

<sup>7</sup> I am indebted to Eli Siegel for this methodological and philosophic point. In his 1975 essay, ‘Letter to Robert Sherman: Music Tells What the World Is Like,’ op. cit., Eli Siegel writes – charmingly, and with intellectual rigor: ‘The structure of the world is both Orlando di Lasso and Stravinsky; is both Guillaume de Machaut and Duke Ellington.’ (p. 1).

4

5

6

7

*f* *pp*

*f* *pp*

*pp* *f* *arco* *f*

*p* *pp*

And here is the mosquito in a more determined mood:

### Example 3

57

58

59

60

*f* *pp*

*ff* *ffpp*

*pizz.* *ff*

*ff* *arco* *f* *ffpp*

63

arco

pizz.

*ff*

*f*

*ffpp*

66

*f*

*ffpp*

pizz.

*ff*

As Ellington might have said, ‘It don’t mean a thing, if it ain’t got that sting!’

Commenting on the programmatic origins of this music, Simpson spoke of the ‘formidable delicacy’ of a mosquito. From the two extracts just provided it is clear that the composer was successful in honoring the paradoxical reality – the power and delicacy – of that annoying yet undervalued entomological being. Why undervalued? Because if a mosquito *is* formidable and delicate, that much it resembles the Cosmos – than which nothing is more impressive or more subtle. If it continuously buzzes yet suddenly darts, that much it behaves as all life does – for life, too, (even when not buzzing) is an inevitable interplay of steadiness and surprise.

The mosquito, then, is an honest Microcosm: a specific reality standing for what reality is in general. As such, it has a true dignity, and deserves our respect. How many of us grant this dignified depth of meaning to the dear mosquito? Few, I suppose; but Robert Simpson did – and imaginatively so.

Meanwhile, let us set the programmatic aspect of the work aside. Not even the crabbiest of absolutist critics, I believe, could sincerely fault this composition. It

stands as one of the most perfect of Simpson's creations, considered purely on the most abstract, the most impersonal of architectonic grounds. It has a wonderfully clear ternary design, and a coda whose gradually slowing pace provides a perfect counterbalance (and complement) to the delicate torrent of energy that preceded it.

The movement also takes its place accurately within a marvelously symmetrical structure that guides the composition as a whole. The opening movement cadences in C#, the 'mosquito scherzo' is set in G#, the ensuing *Allegretto grazioso* is in D#, and the finale brings the quartet to a vigorous conclusion in the key of A#. A design in rising fifths: the same tonal design which characterizes the open strings of each member of a string quartet.

The quartet, incidentally, is dedicated to the discoverer of the *Eretmapodites gilletti*, the noted biologist J. D. Gillett, and his wife Irena.

## A Look at the Early Quartets

Returning directly to the theme of the oneness of opposites as a guide both to truth and to beauty, another of the composer's most salient qualities ought to be noted in these early paragraphs: hearing his music, a listener is constantly surprised, yet equally convinced the composition is 'on the right course' and proceeding in strict accordance with a clear, long-range musical design. It is a situation of logic and surprise felt at once. Put in other terms, it is a coming together of stability and adventure.

One can observe this particular junction of opposites prominently in Simpson's very first published essay in the medium: the Quartet No. 1 of 1951. (There was at least one earlier student work.) It begins and ends with almost Haydnesque naïveté and wistfulness. How heterodox, in the year of Schoenberg's death, the year of Boulez' *Polyphonie X*, Stockhausen's *Kreuzspiel*, and Cage's Concerto for Prepared Piano and Chamber Orchestra, to open with a texture like this –

## Example 4

*Allegro moderato, semplice* ♩ = 72

Measures 1-5 of the score. The first staff has a whole rest in measures 1-3, followed by a half note G4 and a quarter note A4 in measure 4. The second staff has a whole rest in measure 1, followed by a half note G4 and a quarter note A4 in measure 2, then a half note G4 and a quarter note A4 in measure 3, and a half note G4 and a quarter note A4 in measure 4. The third and fourth staves contain a continuous bass line with eighth and quarter notes, mostly in the lower register. Dynamics include *pp* (pianissimo) in measures 2, 3, and 4.

and to make this the 'coda tune' for its second (and final) movement:

## Example 5

(K)

Measures 1-5 of the score. The first staff has a half note G4 and a quarter note A4 in measure 1, followed by a half note G4 and a quarter note A4 in measure 2, then a half note G4 and a quarter note A4 in measure 3, and a half note G4 and a quarter note A4 in measure 4. The second staff has a half note G4 and a quarter note A4 in measure 1, followed by a half note G4 and a quarter note A4 in measure 2, then a half note G4 and a quarter note A4 in measure 3, and a half note G4 and a quarter note A4 in measure 4. The third and fourth staves contain a continuous bass line with eighth and quarter notes, mostly in the lower register. Dynamics include *f* (forte) in measures 1, 2, and 3, and *dim.* (diminuendo) in measures 3 and 4. The final measure has a *p* (piano) dynamic.

One might say – ‘Yes, heterodox; but not without compeer. What of Stravinsky’s *Rake’s Progress* or Britten’s *Billy Budd*, each also of 1951? Do not these works also display distinct neo-classic traits?’ Surely; but in neither will you also find a passage such as this – the opening of the second movement, so haunting in its tonal strangeness and oddly hesitant rhythm:

## Example 6

Andante, grave ♩ = 69

The musical score is written for a string quartet, with the solo viola part being the focus. The tempo is Andante, grave, with a quarter note equal to 69 beats per minute. The time signature is 2/4. The score is divided into two systems. The first system begins with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic and a *cresc. poco* (crescendo poco) marking. The melody is characterized by a series of half notes and quarter notes, with a *a poco* (poco) marking. The second system continues the melody, with a *f* (forte) dynamic and a *dimin. poco a poco* (diminuendo poco a poco) marking. The score concludes with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic and a *pp* (pianissimo) marking.

This music seems a world apart from the earlier extracts. Yet – and here is where the deep consistency of Simpson’s music can be found, its astonishing junction of logic and surprise – this melody for solo viola presents, in compact distillation, the central tonal issue driving the entire work.<sup>8</sup>

Notice: it is written as a strict palindrome. It begins implying  $E_b$  major, rises to a climax on A major (the antipodal key), then traces its way back to  $E_b$  in precisely reversed melodic motion. We’ll meet palindromes again in Simpson; most notably in

<sup>8</sup> Music, like the other arts, has proceeded on a kind of ‘fractal’ logic – the logic which says part and whole reflect each other. It has done so for millennia; far before Benoît Mandelbrot suggested the fruitfulness of this mode of thought for mathematical research. Robert Simpson was particularly fond of showing, in musical terms, the parallelism of large and small, part and whole. Simpson and Mandelbrot are rough contemporaries; the composer was born in 1921, the mathematician in 1924.

his Quartet No. 9 (1982). There, as here, a theme in palindrome is followed by a set of variations, each of which is also designed as a self-contained mirror. But what I need most to bring forward at this point in my essay is the fact that in the course of a mere 15 bars, we have a theme which restates, in a compact manner, the overarching tonal design which spanned the entire opening movement: all 468 bars of it.

How? Because in that earlier movement, too, there was a progressive motion from the key of E $\flat$  to that of A, and then back again. Simpson renders its modulatory arch vivid by having the opening theme recapitulate close to the exact center of the movement – and not in E $\flat$ , as one might expect, but in A.<sup>9</sup>

In effect, what we hear in the first movement, freely evolving over a large arch of time, we soon will hear in a completely contrary (and complimentary) manner at the onset of the second. There, the modulatory design is bound by the strictest of rules and presented in a compressed period of time.

Moreover, what earlier took place in rich, four-part string textures, and Allegro, now unfolds in a single voice, and Andante. An *Andante grave*, in fact. It is as if Simpson were saying to his listeners, ‘Let us now take exactly the same journey, but do so in as different, in as fresh a manner as possible.’

Quartet No. 1 concludes in A major, thus making the work one of the very earliest in which the composer employed a musical technique which he loved in Nielsen and came to excel in himself: *emergent tonality* – sometimes called *progressive tonality*. The tonal center of the composition now is worked for, earned, sought after; perhaps it is glimpsed early on, but its true confirmation only comes later.

There is, as I implied, a choice of adjectives when it comes to this view of tonality. May I take this opportunity to muddy the terminological waters even further? I do so only because I would like to suggest there may be an even better way to describe the phenomenon and the diverse ways Simpson treats it: to employ the phrase *elliptical tonality*.

If the customary image of tonality is of a circle, having a single gravitational focus to which all other keys directly relate, then Simpson is a lover of ellipses, with their dual foci. There is inherent tonal drama in this idea, and the composer goes at that drama in contrasting ways. For example, both Quartet No. 3 and Quartet No. 5 have C and E as their tonal foci, yet where the earlier work (1953–4) ‘progresses’ from C to E, the later one (1974) begins and ends with E as its clear center. All four of its movement are firmly in that tonality. Nevertheless, the key of C stands at every turn in loyal – and sometimes not-so-loyal – opposition.

<sup>9</sup> See reh. G, p. 13 of the Alfred Legnick & Co. score.

In Quartet No. 2 (1953), we see still another Simpsonian attitude towards the drama of *elliptical tonality*. Here he evokes a competing sense of two tonal centers only to merge the foci at the end of the composition. (It is a one-movement work.) The quartet begins with a chipper theme in A major, of distinctly Haydnesque physiognomy,

### Example 7

Allegro vivace e grazioso ( $\text{♩} = 56$ )

which soon is contrasted, as strongly as possible, by a rather more Bartókian tune in C major.

### Example 8

In its closing pages, we hear an intense debate between A major and A minor, which eventually culminates in the dark victory of the parallel minor. The pitch which creates the darkness, of course, is C♭; the tonic of that vibrant secondary theme.

As an aside: a revealing comparison can be made of this early quartet and his Quartet No. 13, written a full 36 years later, in 1989. It is a comparison as useful to students of Simpson as a study of Brahms' 1889 revision of the Piano Trio in B, Op. 8 – first written 35 years earlier – is to lovers of that composer.

Like Quartet No. 2, Simpson's 1989 composition begins in a Haydnesque mood. It, too, is cast as a single movement with various internal sections whose tempi are unified by means of a single continuous pulse. And, like the earlier work, it also opens and ends in the key of A.

Yet, as might be expected, its tonal design is more complex. Each of the four instruments enters with an unmistakable flourish: a swiftly rising first-inversion major triad. Sequentially, these flourishes imply the keys of A, F, C#, and B $\flat$  major. The process continues; and by bar 29, all twelve keys have been presented.

### Example 9

*Allegro molto* ( $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 72$ )

The musical score for Example 9 is presented in three systems, each containing three staves (treble, alto, and bass clefs). The tempo is marked *Allegro molto* with a quarter note equal to approximately 72 beats per minute. The key signature is A major (one sharp). The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (*ff*, *sf*, *sf dim.*), articulation (>), and key signatures. The first system shows the initial entry of the instruments with a flourish. The second system continues the development of the piece. The third system shows the piece concluding with a final flourish.



Surely, this tonal kaleidoscope implies a sense of key, and a pace of modulation, distinctly different from that of Quartet No. 2. Yet there is also a subtle kinship. As we just saw, Quartet No. 2 melded tonalities in its final cadence. So does this quartet. What is the last key to be heard in its initial ‘dodecaphonic’ unfolding? G major. How does Simpson conclude the work? By mingling A major and G major: its final chord is an A major triad colored by its seventh: G. A close analysis of the score, moreover, shows that the key of G is prominent at nearly all of its most crucial points of structural articulation.<sup>10</sup>

Thinking of the phenomenon of elliptical tonality, and returning to the idea of the Cosmos and its awesome and pervasive meaning for Simpson, it is valuable to bring once more to mind the composer’s love for the objective facts of astronomy, and his sense of the beauty to be found in those facts. Planets, comets and pretty much all celestial bodies obey the power of the ellipse – as has been clear ever since the time of Kepler. One might easily imagine Simpson asking: Why shouldn’t music, as well, reflect this fact?<sup>11</sup>

Having taken a bit of a technical (even scientific) excursus, let us return to Quartet No. 1 and give a closer look at Example 5. Notice how this surprising Haydnesque coda tune incorporates (at the onset of its second bar) the pitches as well as the swift and striking rhythm that began bar 4 of Example 6. What is this, if not the oneness of surprise and logic? – for no listener, no matter how adept a musical Nostradamus, could possibly have predicted that coda theme!

<sup>10</sup> The quartet is designed in four linked sections. Section II cadences in G, and Section III begins by continuing this tonality. (See bars 312–315). Section IV also begins with G as its tonal center. (See bars 642–648).

<sup>11</sup> Analogies between the technical facts of astronomy, and the technical procedures of music, are found in many of Simpson’s writings. See, in particular, how he writes of the symphonies of Sibelius throughout *Sibelius and Nielsen: A Centenary Essay*, London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1965 – a short, but superbly insightful book.

It certainly seems to ‘come out of the blue’. Meanwhile, how logical it is. Not only, as we just saw, is it explicitly related to the primary theme of the second movement, its most salient tonal feature was also implicit in the very first melody heard in the entire quartet. Like the ‘coda theme’, with its gritty flattened 6th placed strikingly in the midst of an otherwise purely diatonic texture (an F♯ in the midst of A major), this melody has, as its first significant chromatic tone, a B♭: the sharpened fifth of E♭ major – the enharmonic equivalent of a flattened sixth. (See Example 4, bar 6).

The ability to make a one of beginning and end has long been recognized as a classic feature of successful musical aesthetics. To be able to present ‘onset’ and ‘conclusion’ as dramatically distinct and yet also fundamentally akin, is to be an artist. To do so in the context of a composition which ends at the tonal antipode to where it began (the key of A being at the furthest remove from E♭) is to be an audacious artist.

If Robert Simpson was anything, he was audacious.<sup>12</sup>

## An Organic Attitude to Music

Even in this, his first ‘official’ quartet, one can see the organic nature of Simpson’s musical thought. He loves the unexpected, yet is equally determined to allow his music develop in a natural manner. He is determined to give it *life*. No matter how slow the tempo, the music *grows* from its initial seed.

A parallel arises: for the evolution of the art of music is itself organic. What Parry and others noted a century ago remains true: music is an ‘evolutionary’ art. The vibrantly new has roots in the living music of the past. Strictly speaking, uniqueness is

<sup>12</sup> Audacity – fearlessness – was a quality noted even in his student work. In the library of Durham University (Archives and Special Collections), where Simpson received his doctorate in 1951, and earlier his baccalaureate, one can find, listed as ‘Music Exercise No. 609,’ a String Quartet (in D major) dated 26<sup>th</sup> March 1945. Simpson wrote the piece for his B.Mus. examination, and it has never been published. In four movements, it is a sturdy and successful student piece, complete with a strongly fugal last movement. Meanwhile, there are several comments in pencil made presumably by his examiner – and it is in these comments that one can see the early appreciation of his compositional boldness. At the end of the second movement, for example, we read: ‘There is an enterprise and distinct purpose about this. Some of it may not come off, but it is fearless.’ At the end of the first movement, during which Simpson’s examiner noted two passages whose ‘purport’ he found puzzling, he nevertheless judges that: ‘At all events, there is no paucity of ideas or lack of content.’ And at the end of the finale, there is a statement which can only bring a smile to the face of anyone who knows the later quartets and their musical character: ‘This has rhythmic life and invention, and is not at all like organ music.’ Yes! Rhythmic vigor, and an ability to be ‘fugal’ without sounding ‘quasi-baroque’ – these are distinctly Simpsonian virtues.

simultaneous with and inseparable from relatedness; and the richer a composer's relation to the past, the more likely it is that he or she will create music with vitality in it, and thereby achieve authentic individuality – as opposed to mere eccentricism: self-referential and ultimately sterile.<sup>13</sup>

Simpson knew all this and rejoiced in it, as cannot be said for some of his contemporaries, who often gave the impression of being more eager to stake out an 'exclusive patent' to a 'new musical language' than to give birth to individual, living musical work. I am sure I am not the only person who keenly remembers the unintended humor of many a new music concert of the 1960s, at which it took longer to read the composers' program notes than hear their pieces.

So there is a lovely series of 'debts of gratitude' which Simpson happily pays to prior masters in his inaugural quartet. Haydn has already been mentioned, as has Nielsen; moreover, the composition is dedicated to Georges Enescu 'in deepest admiration'. Meanwhile, serving as the primary engine of the development section of its first movement is a fugue whose subject – in D – sounds like a witty gloss on the subject of Bach's fugue in the same key in Book I of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.

Yet there is still another figure to be mentioned: Béla Bartók. Not only is the solo viola theme which opens the second movement eerily reminiscent (both in mood and structural gesture) of the solo viola melody which opens Bartók's Sixth Quartet (1939), but the tonal design of Simpson's first movement appears to be a reversal of that found in the celebrated (and much-studied) opening movement of another of the Hungarian's masterpieces: the *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta* of 1936. Simpson travels from E $\flat$  to A, and back to E $\flat$ ; Bartók, fifteen years earlier, from A to E $\flat$  to A.

For an even more obvious example of Bartókian influence on early Simpson, let us consider the Englishman's Quartet No. 3, written in the years 1953 and 1954. (His first three quartets were composed swiftly: between 1951 and 1954. He did not return to the medium until 1973.) Early in this work, there is a melancholy fugato, whose subject proceeds with a characteristically Bartókian alternation of contradictory minor and major seconds:

<sup>13</sup> Perhaps Simpson might be faulted for not being adequately interested in 'vernacular' music. He might also be faulted for not exploring the rich treasures of other musical traditions: Indian, Chinese, Balinese, etc. Meanwhile, I emphasize 'might be' – for it is patently clear that most 'western concert composers' who make use of these other streams of musical thought fall into a kind of superficial eclecticism – something Simpson was sedulous to avoid. Perhaps the 20<sup>th</sup>-century composer whose music is nurtured on both 'folk' and 'classical' sources, and yet achieves integrity, was Bartók. For examples of composers who attempted this synthesis, yet only succeeded on occasion, one might consider Gershwin and Ellington. The number of composers who have tried, and who have never succeeded in making their divergent musical sources function beautifully together, are legion.

## Example 10

(B)

pp malinconico

p

pp malinconico

p

pp malinconico

p

pp

pp

poco a poco cresc.

f

pp

poco a poco cresc.

f

pp

poco a poco cresc.

f

pp

pp

Yet despite the obvious influence of Haydn, Nielsen, Bach, and Bartók (the impact of Enescu I find harder to trace), these early works are anything but warmed-over imitations. They are already pure Simpson: at once structurally unimpeachable and ever-so-passionate. This fugato may be marked *malinconico*, but it breathes a melancholy which is strong, objective, un-self-pitying. While we cannot miss hearing their compositional antecedents, the music of Simpson's early quartets is the result of a *healthy* ability to assimilate the outside world.

Let us linger with this: with the question of musical Health. (Another capital letter!) What if the ability to study, honor, and deeply assimilate others' creative insights is an indicator of health? What if being *impressed* by *others* is the best possible means for *self-expression*? Of gaining the clarity of mind that enables one to be a true critic of one's own thoughts? Of separating what is weak from what is strong? Of finding one's own unique voice and setting one's imagination to work to its utmost degree of freedom?

If all this be true, then – without exaggeration – we must declare Simpson one of the healthiest musical minds of the twentieth century. The evidence is everywhere (and not least in his critical and musicological writings) that here was a man who enjoyed appreciating others; who profited doing so.

Perhaps the greatest treasure trove of evidence for the truth of what I have just asserted is in the set of three quartets, numbered 4 through 6, which Simpson wrote in the mid-1970s. Written respectively in 1973, 1974, and 1975, they are sustained meditations on Beethoven's 'Rasumowsky' Quartets, Op. 59. In Simpson's own words they are 'musical analogies.'

Yet they are also works of supreme inventiveness, fully capable of standing on their own. In his modesty, Simpson would never say this himself, so it is left for us to do so: they are among the greatest quartets ever written.

I will not attempt to justify that critical judgment in the small amount of space available here; there simply isn't enough room to explore the matter in adequate technical detail. So I encourage readers to listen for themselves and judge. But to give a taste – just a taste – of the astonishing manner in which Simpson is true to Beethoven while simultaneously giving birth to new musical ideas of equal vibrancy, let me present a series of comparative incipits.

Here is the opening of the second movement of Op. 59, No. 1,

## Example 11

**Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando** (♩ = 56)

*pp*

and here is how the second movement of Simpson's 1973 quartet begins:

## Example 12

**Presto** (♩ = 132)

*p cresc.*

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

14

In 1974, Simpson opens his Quartet No. 5 this way,

### Example 13

**Allegro molto** ( $\text{♩} = \text{c.88}$ )

and here is the parallel passage in Beethoven's Op. 59, No. 2:

## Example 14

**Allegro**

The musical score for Example 14 is written for four staves in 8/8 time, key of D major. The tempo is marked **Allegro**. The score is divided into two systems of four staves each. The first system begins with a forte (*f*) chord in the first two measures, followed by a piano (*pp*) section. The second system continues the *pp* section, then a sforzando (*sf*) section, and ends with a piano (*p*) section. Dynamics include *f*, *pp*, *sf*, and *p*.

Simpson's Quartet No. 6 (1975) concludes with a very vigorous sonata-allegro, which, like its Beethovenian antecessor, Op. 59, No. 3, is simply chock-full of fugal writing. Beethoven first;

## Example 15

**Allegro molto**

The musical score for Example 15 is written for four staves in common time (C), key of D major. The tempo is marked **Allegro molto**. The first two staves are empty. The third and fourth staves contain a continuous eighth-note pattern starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

6

11

*p*

*cre - - - - scen - - - - do poco*

*cre - - - - scen - - - - do poco*

and now Simpson's imaginative reconsideration:

### Example 16

**Molto rapido** (♩ = c.144)

*p*

*sf*

*pizz.*

*f*

*pizz.*

*f*

*pizz.*

*f*

\* : full length note

6

*sf* *cresc.* *f*

11

*p* *arco* *sf* *f*

In these quartets, the most daring passages arise from Simpson's refusal to stop at the surface of Beethoven's music, but rather to dig deep and penetrate to its bedrock: its structural and emotional intent. Consider the famed *Introduzione* to Op. 59, No. 3, with its dramatic initial diminished 7th chord and the (seemingly) wandering harmonies which ensue:

### Example 17

**Introduzione**  
Andante con moto

*f* *pp* *sempre pp* *f* *p*

*f* *pp* *sempre pp* *f* *p*

*f* *pp* *sempre pp* *f* *p*

*f* *pp* *sempre pp* *f* *p*

*tr*

10

*sempre pp*

*tr*

*tr*

*sempre pp*

*sempre pp*

*sempre pp*

19

Quite clearly, Simpson could not open with such a chord, or even one too closely modeled upon it, lest he risk creating an impression of a second-rate paraphrase of von Weber rather than a first-class transformation of Beethoven. He needed to find a chord which, to the ears of our time, would convey the *spirit* of Beethoven's music rather than its early nineteenth-century *letter* – would imply a similar structural symmetry and evoke a similar tonal uncertainty.

Here is Robert Simpson's brilliant act of translation.

### Example 18

Adagio (♩ = c.60)

*f* *pp*

*f* *pp*

*f* *pp*

*f* *pp*

The image displays three systems of musical notation, each consisting of three staves (treble, alto, and bass clefs). The first system (measures 6-11) features a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. It includes dynamic markings of *pp* (pianissimo) and a trill (*tr*) in the bass staff. The second system (measures 12-17) continues the melodic and harmonic development. The third system (measures 18-23) shows a dynamic shift from *mf* (mezzo-forte) to *pp* (pianissimo) in the first two staves, and a trill (*tr*) in the bass staff. The notation includes various note values, rests, and phrasing slurs.

The entire passage, moreover, ends with a gracious (and slyly knowing) wink from one master composer to another. This music, too, ‘with wandering steps and slow’, finds its way towards exactly the same harmonic point: a first-inversion G dominant-seventh chord. In each case, a vigorous Allegro in C major immediately follows. Whether paved in early nineteenth-century cobblestone, or late twentieth-century asphalt, all roads, it seems, lead to Rome!

If this be the art of paraphrase, then it is a liberating art: the principle of variation form taken to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  power. Possibly, just possibly, Simpson was affected by Hans

Keller, who during the 1950s and 1960s pioneered what he called Wordless Functional Analysis, and broadcast dozens of such analyses over BBC Radio. ‘Music about music,’ Keller declared, ‘is immeasurably more objective than words about music.’ Perhaps so; perhaps not; yet in either case, if Simpson did a masterful job analyzing Beethoven (and it is obvious that he did), he was even more effective metamorphosing those analyses into a new tonal synthesis: into living, original music. There is not the slightest trace of academic dustiness about these quartets.

As is well known, Beethoven was Simpson’s greatest inspiration, and these works are hardly the only ones which declare that fact – lovingly so. His Eleventh Quartet (1984), for example, has Beethoven’s Op. 95 Quartet in F minor quite plainly behind it. Unlike Simpson’s ‘Rasumowsky’ set, the correspondences here, while audible, are looser – are even more patently a matter of kindred content rather than kindred statement. (For one thing, the Beethoven work is cast in four movements; Simpson’s quartet, in one.)

Let us compare Beethoven’s opening seven bars

#### Example 19

*Allegro con brio*

The musical score for Example 19 is presented in two systems. The first system contains the first four bars of the piece, marked *Allegro con brio*. The tempo is indicated above the first staff. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The time signature is common time (C). The first staff is in treble clef, and the second staff is in bass clef. The third staff is in treble clef, and the fourth staff is in bass clef. The first system shows the initial four bars, with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second system shows bars 5 through 7, with dynamics ranging from *sf* (sforzando) to *p* (piano). The score is written for four staves, with the first two staves in treble clef and the last two in bass clef. The first system shows the initial four bars, with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second system shows bars 5 through 7, with dynamics ranging from *sf* (sforzando) to *p* (piano).

to Simpson's fourteen; and given Beethoven's common-time meter, and Simpson's 2/4, we are talking about an equivalent number of beats:

### Example 20

The musical score for Example 20 consists of two systems, each with four staves. The first system begins with a treble clef staff (violin), a second treble clef staff (violin), a bass clef staff (cello), and a double bass clef staff (bass). The first staff has a 'pizz.' (pizzicato) marking above the first measure, followed by 'sf' (sforzando). The second staff has 'ff' (fortissimo) and 'sf' markings. The third staff has 'sf' and 'arco' (arco) markings. The fourth staff has 'sf' and 'arco' markings. The second system begins at measure 8, marked with an '8' above the first staff. It continues with similar dynamics and markings, including 'ff' and 'sf' throughout.

Now it may seem, in this sustained comparison of Beethoven and Simpson, I have strayed rather far from my central purpose: to look at Simpson's chamber music for strings in philosophic perspective. But only apparently, I hope. For the question of Health, musical or otherwise, (which is where this excursus began), is not a narrowly clinical question. To the contrary: it is grounded, as I learned from Eli Siegel, in the most inescapable of philosophic facts – that our selves are never separate from the world. Any attempt to conceive of our selves out of relation to reality (or superior to it) is a dangerous illusion.

Whether it be physical, mental, or musical, our health depends on the ability to look upon the outside world as friendly. It depends, Aesthetic Realism makes clear, on our power of authentic appreciation, authentic assimilation. Food, ideas, or music – we take into ourselves something that originates in the outside world, and if we are

healthy we are able to make it a living part of ourselves: learn how to use it, respectfully, for our own strength and sincerity. We become original not by turning our backs on reality, but by welcoming it.

Ethics, Siegel once famously observed, is ‘the art of enjoying justice.’ Indeed, he taught that Ethics and Aesthetics are so intimately related, they are two aspects of a single fact. Our intelligence, our kindness, and our capacity for beauty, he explained, all depend on our ability to see the depths of ourselves as related directly to the depths of external reality. We need to honor difference *and* sameness; and one’s self-expression can never be complete until the oneness of Self and World – the most primal relation of sameness and difference – is felt by us with intensity, awe, and gratitude.

### The Music of the Spheres; or, Quartet No. 7

As Aesthetic Realism sees it, the ability of a composer to let the universe shine through his music is the highest of all musical abilities. It is, quite literally, greatness: the power of a lone human self honestly to speak for ‘all things,’ and, in the process, to speak for all humanity.

Simpson, I believe, agreed. In his BBC Music Guide to the *Beethoven Symphonies*, he notes with obvious approval how, in the coda of the Finale of the Second Symphony, the ‘magical pianissimo interruptions on the edge of foreign keys...enlarge our conception of the world’<sup>14</sup> – which phrase surely implies that the grander our sense of the world, the saner and more beautiful our minds. And if there was one thing Simpson insisted on, avid member of the Royal Astronomical Society that he was, it was that great art required the courage to try to make beautiful sense of the immensity of things. Commenting in the same text on the Ninth Symphony, he wrote: ‘the greatest art inevitably reminds us of awesome matters.’<sup>15</sup> When one sees the context of this sentence, it is clear that Robert Simpson meant nothing smaller than the Cosmos itself.

The danger in writing philosophically about music is that, taken just by itself, it might seem far removed from the technical ‘nitty-gritty’. After all, composers put notes on the page, not verbal syllogisms. It is for this reason I have tried throughout this essay to mingle the technical and the philosophic: to give substance to wide philo-

<sup>14</sup> Robert Simpson, *Beethoven Symphonies*, London: BBC Publications, 1970, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 56.

sophic points and perspective to narrowly focused technical ones. To mingle Fact and Value, which, in authentic musicology, ought never to be separated.

I continue now with a close look at Simpson's Quartet No. 7, written in 1977 in honor of the centenary of the famed astronomer Sir James Jeans. It is demonstrably 'cosmic' in its intent. As Professor Pike remarks in his linear notes for the Delmé Quartet recording, the composer himself drew 'parallels between the music of this work and aspects of the universe – quiet and mysterious and yet pulsing with energy.'<sup>16</sup>

Pike continues: 'At first the vastnesses of space are invoked.' True enough! – for this is indeed the emotional impact of the first large arch of sound we encounter. Thirty-two bars long, and lasting about a minute and a half, it is structured around a series of long-held pedal tones. The first of these pedals is on D, and is heard initially on the first violin. It serenely pulses with a rocking motion caused by the alternation of open and fingered strings.

Soon, the second violin enters, and on the last beat of bar 4 takes the D over – presenting it now in a subtly altered manner: sustained rather than pulsing. Against this newly 'quieted' D, the first violin responds by adding a fresh form of energy: spinning out a rising, chromatically-inflected melody.

How quiet, and yet how active this music is! One literally feels space expanding from a center.

### Example 21

**Tranquillo** (♩ = c.56)

Violin I

Violin II

*pp*

*pp*

6

<sup>16</sup> Hyperion: CDA66117, p.3.

What are we experiencing in these bars? The oneness of perhaps the most ontological of opposites, Stability and Change: the world as Rest and Motion. (Aristotle famously attempted to deal with the metaphysics of the situation by declaring God ‘the unmoved Mover’.) Nor would Simpson be the first composer to sense the philosophic weight of this dialectic and its implications for the art of musical composition. Stravinsky, in his *Poetics of Music*, writes probingly about the ancient dispute between Parmenides (advocate of the view that reality never changes) and Heraclitus (proclaimer that it is ceaseless in its mutability), and concludes that music must find a way to reconcile these two competing perspectives on reality.<sup>17</sup>

Another ontological pair, Unity and Diversity, is also expressed here – and with a depth and beauty that only become apparent when the score is scrutinized in almost microscopic detail. Unity, of course, is symbolized by the unchanging pedal tone D; diversity, at its utmost, is implied by the fact that these bars encompass the *entire world of chromaticism*. All twelve tones are there. As a medieval theologian might have said – and since Robert Simpson is an Englishman, why not imagine Anselm of Canterbury making the point – they are a *plenum*: a symbol of ‘all that is.’<sup>18</sup>

Leaving theology out of it (and Simpson, from what I know of him, would likely have preferred we did just that) and looking upon the matter strictly in terms of secular philosophy and science, it appears that it is the presence of opposites, experienced as one, which renders this passage both beautiful and true. Try as we may, we cannot conceive of reality – we cannot get the full *reality* of reality into our minds – except as the oneness of opposites.

That is: we cannot conceive of reality as anything else, and still feel its *beauty*. And Simpson, authentic artist that he was, was reluctant, even in his most hard-bitten moods, to give up the idea that reality *is* beauty and that it was his job to perceive that beauty and convey it to his fellow man.

I am not saying that Robert Simpson put it to himself in just these terms. I am rather sure he didn’t. It is Eli Siegel, after all, who first stated the full equation of Ontology and Aesthetics, which is why he called his revolutionary philosophy Aesthetic Realism. What Simpson did, however, was to write, persistently and with great feeling, of the need for art to be ‘positive and constructive’ – of its need to be ‘essentially hopeful.’<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *The Poetics of Music*, New York: Vintage Books, 1960, pp. 32–34.

<sup>18</sup> Music is, of course, a symbolic language. To my knowledge, Simpson was not interested in microtonalism – and so, in his musical language,  $12=\infty$ . In a different musical language, the symbolism of ‘all-inclusiveness’ might involve quite a different number of tones.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Simpson, *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist*, New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1979, p. 18.

The question is: unless we see opposites as ultimately friendly to each other, can we have any solid, objective basis for hopefulness? I think not; and all through Robert Simpson's musicological writings there is continuous evidence that he instinctively sensed the junction of opposites to be the cause of beauty, and the reason for the aesthetic and emotional thrill he got from the music of the composers he admired.<sup>20</sup>

Let me give a brief sample, and assure the reader that for every instance I bring forward, dozens more could easily be cited:

- *Blaze and Calm in Bruckner*

'The massive endings in all Bruckner's symphonies are (with the exception of that of the Fifth) not really culminative in the old sense; they are formal intensifications that blaze with calm.'<sup>21</sup>

- *New and Old in Nielsen*

The 'use of emergent tonality [in his First Symphony] is a demonstration of personal mastery and of that truest kind of artistic courage that can risk saying new things in old terms.'<sup>22</sup>

- *Slowness and Speed, Background and Foreground in Sibelius*

Sibelius 'is very fond of long pedal-points, but they are in his mature symphonic works the background to an intense activity and create a vast slow movement of their own, like that of the sky as the earth rotates, while upon the planet's surface there is teeming human and animal movement.'<sup>23</sup>

- *The Festive and the Tragic in Rachmaninoff*

'The D major finale [of the First Symphony] (*Allegro con fuoco*), with its vivid fanfares, is outwardly festive, yet it leaves the hearer with an underlying sense of tragedy.'<sup>24</sup>

As for Beethoven, the samples are endless. Here are just a few from his masterly BBC guide to the symphonies – some technical in nature, others more a comment on the emotional impact of the music. Of the 'Storm' in the *Pastoral Symphony*, he notes 'it stands as a separate (though not separable) part of the whole scheme' (p. 9) –

<sup>20</sup> It is not inconceivable that Simpson knew something of Siegel's work. For one thing, a seminal essay of Aesthetic Realism, 'Is Beauty the Making One of Opposites?' was published in 1995 in vol. 14, No. 2 of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, perhaps the most respected scholarly journal of its kind at that time, world-wide. Siegel's essay was also reprinted in the *Hibbert Journal of London* in April 1964 (issue 246) – likewise a popular and much esteemed journal.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Simpson, *The Essence of Bruckner*, London: Victor Gollancz, 3rd edition 1992, p. 232.

<sup>22</sup> Simpson, *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist*, op. cit., p. 184.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Simpson, ed., *The Symphony*, Vol. 2, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 130.

which, technically speaking, is quite an achievement. Simpson himself declares what Beethoven does here a phenomenon ‘at once mysterious and clear ... baffling and revealing’ (ibid.). Of the Seventh Symphony, he notes that due to the repeats within it and the startling symmetry of its tonal design (the ‘three tonal protagonists, A, C, and F seem more like dimensions than keys’, he tells us), the symphony displays ‘a kind of paradox – at the same time as the listener is swept off his feet he is subtly impressed by a sense of unity so immutable as to be a static phenomenon’ (pp. 47 and 49). Note the relation of ‘static’ and being ‘swept off [one’s] feet’. The relation of rest and motion was, I believe, a crucial thing in Robert Simpson’s mind – a topic to which he returned, as a composer, again and again.<sup>25</sup>

Back to Beethoven: when it comes to the undervalued Fourth Symphony, Robert Simpson’s enthusiasm for its dialectical nature is on particularly vivid display. Of the work as a whole, he says: ‘There are muscles of steel beneath [its] silken skin’ (p. 25). Of its Adagio, he notes: ‘its inner contrast between a pervasively rigid rhythm and the most gloriously free melodic invention Beethoven had yet achieved creates a unique fascination, a sublime discomfort of mind and senses’ (ibid.). And of the very last moments of its Scherzo, that celebrated ‘extra’ phrase for the horns of which Robert Schumann made such quizzical note, Simpson asks: ‘Does this sound right because it’s wrong or wrong because it’s right?’ And answers, charmingly: ‘It is meant to sound gloriously wrong, and with perfect rightness’ (p. 33) – which, to my mind, is a way of implying: reality itself is perfect and imperfect at once!<sup>26</sup>

After this quick look at Simpson as musicologist and critic, let us now return to him as composer – and to the score of Quartet No. 7. Let us now return to the score of Quartet No. 7. Note what he does in the remainder of the opening 32-bar paragraph. Its basic ‘seed’ is the ten-bar phrase we earlier analyzed, with its central D and the chromatically inclusive melody which grows first around and then above it. That seed now germinates as Simpson iterates, reiterates, and then presents this basic design still one more time – and each time transposed; each time varied. Yet there is also something invariant: he is always true to what we met in the opening ten bars. He is always true to the *plenum*.

Notice how, against each of the pedal tones which follow (E, G, and then A), the full world of chromaticism likewise unfolds.

<sup>25</sup> Also as a commentator on the work of other composers. See, in particular, Simpson’s tracing of this very issue across the seven symphonies of Sibelius in his 1965 study *Sibelius and Nielsen: A Centenary Essay*, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> Consider the circle: the most perfect of geometrical shapes, it has no difficulty harboring within itself an utterly ‘irrational’ relation of radius to circumference.

## Example 22

Example 22 is a musical score for piano, spanning measures 10 to 26. The score is written for three staves: Treble, Bass, and a lower Treble (likely for a second piano or a specific register). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4.

The score is divided into four systems, each containing two staves (Treble and Bass). The first system (measures 10-15) features a complex melodic line in the Treble staff, with a bass line in the Bass staff. The second system (measures 16-20) continues the melodic development, with a prominent *pp* (pianissimo) marking in the Bass staff. The third system (measures 21-25) includes a *sempre pp* (sempre pianissimo) marking in the Bass staff, indicating a sustained soft dynamic. The fourth system (measures 26-30) concludes the passage with a final *pp* marking in the Treble staff.

The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, accidentals, and dynamic markings. The score is presented in a clear, professional layout, typical of a published musical score.

The musical score shows measures 31 through 38. The first violin part begins with a melodic phrase in measure 31, marked with a *p* dynamic. The second violin part has a more active, chromatic line. The viola and cello parts provide a harmonic foundation with sustained notes and moving lines. The bass part has a low, sustained pedal point. Dynamics include *ppp* (pianissimo) and *p* (piano).

Notice, as well, Simpson's technique of foreshortening – something he undoubtedly learned on contrapuntal terms from Bach, and on motivic and harmonic terms from Beethoven. The first pedal, D, lasted ten bars; the next, E, only eight (bars 11–18); the third, G, also eight (bars 17–24), but with a feeling of *stretto* since it overlaps the previous pedal. All this gives a subtle sense of intensifying the pace.

The final phrase, with A as its pedal tone, likewise is eight bars in length. It, too, suggests a *stretto* since in its seventh bar the cello enters with a long-sustained low C: the very deepest note possible for a traditional (i.e. non-scordatura) quartet. Nor is it accidental that these five pedal tones – D, E, G, A, and C – represent the only tones playable on the open strings of a string quartet. Oh – shall we neglect to mention that against this low C, also, the entire chromatic universe unfolds?

Five times, then, as Quartet No. 7 begins, Simpson implies, through the symbolic power of musical language, that the Cosmos ought to be experienced as the oneness of Change and Sameness, Rest and Motion, Quiet and Activity, Unity and Diversity. If we 'pull the camera back', and consider the composition as a whole, the philosophic message is the same.

Consider first – and we shall do so at length – the relation of Rest and Motion, Quiet and Activity specifically in this quartet, and also in Simpson's compositional procedures across his career. Quartet No. 7 is cast as a single, 19-minute, continuous movement with a central *Vivace* flanked by outer sections marked 'Tranquillo'. Two-thirds of the way through, it reaches a phenomenal intensity and a bracing harshness: a whirlwind of energy one could hardly surmise from its modest beginnings. Yet it all evolves naturally, convincingly. Its energy and its quiet symmetry work as a team.

The ever-growing momentum of the center of this quartet is something we meet in many a Simpson composition. He is, of course, renowned for his power of musical impetus; see, for example, the almost vertiginous energy of the final movement of

Quartet No. 5, or the finale to his Quartet No. 12 (1987) – a *molto vivace* in a Beethovenian ‘1-to-the-bar’ triple meter. All 1800 bars of it! Likely the longest scherzo in all of chamber music.

Simpson was, in fact, particularly enamored of the momentum engendered by this prototypically Beethovenian meter. Another fine example (though weighing in at a ‘mere’ 489 bars) is the scherzo movement from Quartet No. 14 (1990), for which Matthew Taylor offers a set of adjectives in his linear notes which provides a fine summary of its impact: ‘lithe, energetic and vital’, adding ‘with plenty of dynamism packed into a mere four minutes’.<sup>27</sup>

What perhaps has not been noticed adequately, however, is Simpson’s equal power of creating momentum at *slow* tempi. The foreshortening technique I mentioned earlier is just one of many ways he accomplishes this.

It goes without saying that the mastery of rhythm is at the very center of musical ability. In this field, Simpson was not only a master, but a daringly original one – a fact which has escaped the notice of those journalistic advocates of ‘new music’ who, lacking the capacity to go beyond the sonic surface, associate originality with something overtly radical: forgetting that the man in the neatly-pressed three-piece suit may be thinking far more adventurous thoughts than someone whose outwardly colorful raiment may imply ‘revolution’, but whose inward mental activity is deeply complacent. Perhaps even reactionary.

But enough of this! – for I have no desire to make invidious comparisons. There is no need to place Simpson against a straw man in order to show how valuable he is. Instead, let us consider him in relation to another authentically bold composer: Elliott Carter. As soon as we do, it is clear that the ‘press coverage’ of the two has not been equitable. Carter has gained – and rightly so – a good deal of critical and scholarly attention for his achievements in the field of ‘metric modulation’. Through a constant flux of various tempi, Carter strives to make a one of speed and slowness; continuity and surprise. Simpson went after something similar; and just as early as Carter. Only his ‘constant’ is truly a *constant*. He finds all the drama he needs of steady and spasmodic, tranquil and agitated, subtle and blunt, repeating and diverging rhythms by means of a subtle variety of pacing within and above a *single unifying pulse*.

This singleness – this sense of a unified center in the midst of reality’s unceasing variety and turbulence of activity – is never the case with Carter. Now, tastes can differ as to which of these composers has the greater command of rhythm. In terms of surface rhythms, immediate rhythms, Carter surely has the greater variety, and the

<sup>27</sup> Hyperion: CDA66626, p.3.

greater suppleness. Simpson, in fact, may be faulted on occasion for an over-reliance on one particular pattern: the use of eighth-note triplets in a cross rhythm. (That is: where the motivic pattern changes every two notes and the beat, every three). In terms of deeper and more long-range (or architectonic) rhythms, however, I believe the palm just as surely goes to Simpson. In his ability to present constancy and change as one, he simply reaches a point of greater philosophic gravity.

Among the quartets, 'one-pulse' designs underlie numbers 2, 7, 11, and 13. It is also the rhythmic basis for the first of Simpson's two string quintets. This 1987 work sustains its pulse for over 34 minutes. Long enough, certainly, to amaze. Yet Simpson's most astonishing achievement in this field is not found in his chamber music, but rather in his music for full orchestra. His Ninth Symphony (also from 1987) is likely the longest piece ever composed in an unvarying tempo. Without doubt, the longest such piece that doesn't bore you to death! A symphony in one movement, 50 minutes long.

This symphony, incidentally, was funded by (of all organizations) the Rex Foundation: the administrators of the Grateful Dead's charitable fund; and Simpson was anything but a rocker! On the other hand, given Robert Simpson's daring (even daredevil ways), we ought to remember the early advertising slogan of MTV, the famed American Rock Music Video station. It read: 'Too much is never enough.' So perhaps Robert Simpson was closer in spirit to Jerry Garcia and Mick Jagger than any one of has realized. Simpson, himself, included!

Switching to a different emphasis – upon Change and Sameness, Unity and Diversity – let us now look at two further passages from Quartet No. 7. And do so, specifically, in order to observe its composer's sovereign command of the art of recapitulation.

As everyone knows, a recapitulation by definition is a reassertion. Most primally, in our musical culture, it is a restatement after a period of departure of a previous (and centrally important) tonality. But the 'recapitulatory feeling' can take in more: the return of a theme, a tempo, a texture – or any combination of these, including in conjunction with a reassertion of tonality.

The key point is this: whatever makes for a sense of recapitulation in a listener's experience of music, a substantial degree of sameness has to be felt between two moments adequately separated in time.

As Eli Siegel noted in his classic work, *Definitions and Comment: Being a Description of the World*, the perception of sameness – per se – is not enough to evoke aesthetic emotion. Aesthetics proceeds on a different basis. 'Aesthetics,' he wrote,

‘is the showing of an object in such a way that the difference and sameness of reality as a whole is seen in that object.’<sup>28</sup>

Now as one reads his published studies of Beethoven, Nielsen, and Bruckner, it is hard to miss the fact that one of the things Robert Simpson most appreciated in the work of these earlier composers is the care they took to make their recapitulations *dynamic*. He valued how their recapitulations were fresh experiences, filled with renewed energy and momentum – how they made crucial points of structural reaffirmation feel *new*, even as a perceptive listener could easily recognize them to be the return of something *old*.

This is what happens in Quartet No. 7. In it, Simpson created a complex, ‘dove-tailed’ recapitulation. More to the aesthetic (and philosophic) point: he designed the recapitulation in such a manner that, through the active use of our musical memory, we do indeed sense what reality is ‘as a whole’. We do so by keeping in mind the startling difference between how it sounds now, and the sound of the initial presentation of the quartet’s basic thematic material, almost fifteen minutes earlier.

To explain the above: while the Vivace is still underway, spinning in near constant eight-note triplet motion at a *ff* dynamic, Simpson brings back both the thematic material and the tonality (D) of his quiet opening. The moment we are conscious of this ‘recapitulatory fact’, opposites join in our minds: quiet and intensity, speed and slowness. And when opposites join, the world in its primal drama is there, as well.

Only later, as the pedal shifts from D to E (as it did in the beginning of the piece), does the composer recapitulate his tranquil opening tempo. The last element is now in place; and it is this ‘recapitulation in two distinct steps’ that creates the *dove-tail* effect.

It is an audacious stroke. What earlier was conceived as a single musical Gestalt, a self-standing musical concept or form, is now divided radically in half. The result is an experience of the world as continuous and discontinuous, as broken, imperfect, and yet – ultimately – integrated.

We touch again on a theme sounded early in this essay: Simpson’s power of being mysterious, yet resplendently clear. If he is audacious, he is also intensely logical, once one realizes that the logic of art is to show – by means of a sensuous yet symbolic language – what reality is in its completeness. To show what is *true* and avoid subjective one-sidedness. Whatever impression one might first have of reality, that impression can only be imbalanced until one is equally aware of its opposite.

<sup>28</sup> The definition of ‘Aesthetics,’ excerpted from the larger work, was first published in *Definition*, vol. 8, 1962, pp. 1–2.

Simpson, in his recapitulatory technique, works on precisely this basis. He *confirms* everything we knew before about the material which opened the quartet while simultaneously *contradicting* it utterly.

What Drama! And – What Truth!

To appreciate more fully this compositional tour-de-force, a technical ‘close-up’ once again is required. Looking back at Example 21, we observe that the first interval heard in the quartet was a major second. It occurs as those pulsing eighth-note Ds are contrasted by a significantly slower C $\flat$ . This is soon followed by a C $\sharp$  which then rises to D, making for a brief unison. From this unison, the first violin then continues the upward melodic course of this melody. And all this happens at a tranquil, unwavering pianissimo, and at an equally quiet, and equally unwavering, tempo.

What do we hear in the recapitulation? From one point of view, exactly the same thing. From another, a complete reversal. The C enters *before* the D and instead of an atmosphere that is hushed in its tone, the pitch is hammered *sff* in the cello against an on-rush of rapid eighth-note triplets in the strings above. That rude whirlwind is, of course, paced utterly differently than the modest, considerate pace we heard at the opening of the quartet.

Eventually, the second violin emerges from this violent torrent of sound and forcefully insists on the long-deferred tonic.

The thematic materials, and the main key, have thus returned. The composer is certainly asserting sameness. But so different is the sonic impact – the sheer ‘phenomenology’ of the moment – one hardly realizes at first that this is, indeed, a recapitulation. It seems more the climax of an ever-intensifying hurricane.

Meanwhile, everything is properly in its place. The cello, joined at first by the viola, moves to C $\sharp$  and then rapidly up to D for the unison: perfectly paralleling what happened at the opening of the composition. Then, beginning in bar 591, the first violin restates the long, winding chromatic melody we heard in the quartet’s initial bars. At the start of the composition, that melody impressed one with an almost unearthly serenity; here it seems gritty, tough, and in a ‘fight for its very life’.

And is not life both serenity and struggle? And is not Simpson a truth-teller? I, for one, would answer Yes to these questions. And so, once again, let us call Reality *Simpsonesque*.

### Example 23

[illegible]

[illegible]

627

*molto intensivo*

*molto intensivo*

Robert Simpson, I am implying, was in love with an idea which Nature, itself, seems never to get out of Her Eternal Mind: the idea of variation – how one thing is identical with another, yet also as different as different can be. He employs this elemental musical technique as a means of telling what, in the field of jurisprudence, is called ‘the truth, the *whole* truth’.

And so we arrive at yet another aspect of the technical issue being examined: ‘recapitulation as transformation’. For having looked at the opening of Quartet No. 7 and its formal recapitulation, consider now its interior Vivace. Does this middle section not restate what we heard in Example 18, yet metamorphose it utterly?

### Example 24

**Vivace** (♩ = ♩ del prec)

*pp*

126

*pp*

*pp*

## Simpson's Masterpiece: Quartet No. 9

We have just caught Simpson committing a sustained act of 'free variation'. Beautifully so; but he was equally adept at the strictest of variation forms; and in Quartet No. 9 (1982) produced a work which, for sheer technical audacity, is without peer in contemporary music. One might even say: without peer in the entire history of the art. In my critical estimate, it is his masterpiece – not just in terms of his chamber music for strings, but as regards his entire life's work.

Who knows? Perhaps the freedom he felt after resigning from the BBC in 1980 – on ethical principle, and in despite of the fact that, by doing so, he would lose a pension honorably earned after decades of service – perhaps this act of personal courage set the stage for an act of breath-taking musical courage.

The quartet is designed as a set of 32 variations, followed by a fugue, on a theme of Haydn. And what a theme! A minuet – from Symphony No. 47 – which turns back on itself half-way through.<sup>29</sup> A palindrome. Here it is, as Simpson used it to set his quartet in motion –

### Example 25

**THEMA**  
Tempo di minuetto (♩ = c.120)

<sup>29</sup> It is an interesting fact (and a surprising parallel) that this symphony was written in the same year as the 'Farewell Symphony' – that is, 1782. With its celebrated Finale, Haydn put his own comfort and position on the line, in a very public manner, in behalf of good will for the musicians in his orchestra. Simpson, by fighting to prevent the disbanding of several orchestras that were part of the BBC, was doing something deeply akin. Esterházy's conciliatory response was, sadly for Simpson, far better than that of the pro-Thatcherite forces at the helm of the BBC.

11

*p f p f p f p f p f p f p f*

and here are just two of the variations he makes upon it: each a startling transformation of Haydn's original, and yet each – investigated carefully – a strict paraphrase.

### Example 26a

85 **IV Poco più mosso** ( $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 96$ )

*pp cresc. arco pp cresc. arco pp cresc. pp cresc.*

88

91

Measures 91-93 of a string quartet score. The score is written for four staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. Dynamic markings include *sf* (sforzando) in measures 92 and 93. The first staff has a *sf* marking in measure 92. The second staff has *sf* markings in measures 91, 92, and 93. The third staff has *sf* markings in measures 91, 92, and 93. The fourth staff has *sf* markings in measures 91, 92, and 93.

94

Measures 94-96 of a string quartet score. The score is written for four staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. Dynamic markings include *ff* (fortissimo) in measures 94 and 95, and *sf dim.* (sforzando diminuendo) in measure 96. The first staff has *ff* markings in measures 94 and 95, and *sf dim.* and *sf* markings in measure 96. The second staff has *ff* markings in measures 94 and 95, and *sf dim.* and *sf* markings in measure 96. The third staff has *ff* markings in measures 94 and 95, and *sf dim.* and *sf* markings in measure 96. The fourth staff has *ff* markings in measures 94 and 95, and *sf dim.* and *sf* markings in measure 96.

97

Measures 97-99 of a string quartet score. The score is written for four staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. Dynamic markings include *sf* (sforzando) in measures 97, 98, and 99. The first staff has *sf* markings in measures 97, 98, and 99. The second staff has *sf* markings in measures 97, 98, and 99. The third staff has *sf* markings in measures 97, 98, and 99. The fourth staff has *sf* markings in measures 97, 98, and 99.

100

103

## Example 26b

471 **XXI** Adagio ( $\text{♩} = \text{c.60}$ )

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a string quartet. The first system, starting at measure 478, consists of four staves (treble and bass clefs for two parts each). It features a complex melodic line with many slurs and ties, and a dense harmonic texture. The second system, starting at measure 485, continues the piece with similar melodic and harmonic complexity. Both systems include the dynamic marking *sempre pp* (pianissimo) on the right side of the staves.

No one, not even Webern or Guillaume de Machaut (author of the three-voiced rondeau ‘Ma fin est mon commencement’), was as interested in the musical potential of palindromes as was Robert Simpson. Perhaps it is because he sensed in them a means, richly, of reconciling opposites. A palindrome puts together sameness and difference, advance and retreat, departure and arrival. It has the stability and quietude of pure symmetry and the surprise and adventure of presenting its harmonic and melodic content (once we pass the mid-point) in ever-new (and often strange) relations. And the technique itself, while utterly rigorous and sophisticated, is also light-hearted and playful: almost childlike in its lovely belief that ‘what goes up, must come down!’

What is most remarkable about this music is not its fearsomely complex mathematics. There are many composers (and not just denizens of the twentieth-century) who were enamored of arithmetic thickets, abstract briar-patches – and who, in terms of human feeling, never created anything remotely worth listening to. Nor, for that matter, is this the only work of Simpson that scales arcane technical heights. One could point also to the third movement of his Quartet No. 6: a double canon at the twelfth, sustained with complete strictness for nearly  $8\frac{1}{2}$  minutes.

Ockeghem would be impressed, let alone J. S. Bach, or Simpson's fellow-countryman of an earlier epoch: John Dunstable. As with their music, too, the mathematics in Simpson serve to intensify our emotional experience and support its truthfulness. They (the mathematics) are not there to function as clever, cold, evasions; and it is useful to remember at this point Robert Simpson's own remark about Sibelius and Nielsen: 'What they shared was a common ideal, a desire for discipline and forceful economy achieved without sacrificing warmth of expression.'<sup>30</sup> Discipline and warmth: surely a description of Robert Simpson, too.

The fugue has long been seen as a proof-test of a composer's technical acumen and prowess. Yet, it is one thing to master the discipline, the 'rules' of this high contrapuntal form, and quite another to use the form with emotional freedom and precision. Of the *true* art of fugal composition, Simpson, in my opinion, is modern music's greatest master. Moreover, the fugue which concludes Quartet No. 9 is one of his very finest. It grows organically out of the final palindromic variation and, in its own way, is just as technically remarkable as everything which came before.

It is a study in sustained momentum. Bit by bit, by subtle bit, this fugue grows ever faster over its 13-minute course, transforming its subject along the way many times, and ending with a terrifying (yet equally exhilarating) vortex of sound: a forty-odd bars coda in which the note G, the tonic of the work, functions almost as a 'black hole' – a 'singularity' which pulls everything towards it, until all other pitches are gone. An awesome moment, with, to my ear, no true parallel in all of chamber music.

### Example 27

The musical score for Example 27, measures 1385 to 1400, is presented in a four-staff format. The top staff is for Soprano (treble clef), the second for Alto (treble clef), the third for Tenor (bass clef), and the bottom for Bass (bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#), indicating G major. Measure 1385 begins with a rest in the Soprano part, followed by the entry of the fugue subject. The subject is marked *ff* (fortissimo). The subject is a short, rhythmic phrase. In measures 1391-1395, the subject is taken up by the other parts in sequence. Measures 1396-1400 show a complex contrapuntal texture with all four parts moving rapidly, marked *sf* (sforzando). The texture becomes increasingly dense and complex, leading to a powerful conclusion.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Simpson, *Sibelius and Nielsen*, op. cit., p. 6.

1391

[illegible]

1403

Violino I  
Violino II  
Violoncello  
Contrabbasso

[illegible]

1416

The musical score shows four staves. The top two staves (Violin I and Violin II) are in treble clef, and the bottom two (Viola and Cello/Double Bass) are in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score consists of six measures. Measures 1416-1420 are chromatic aggregates of twelve tones, with each instrument playing a different pitch. Measure 1421 is a final chord of G major, marked 'pizz.' and 'ff'. Dynamics include 'sfzp' and 'ff' with hairpins.

Yet if Simpson ends his quartet on an assertive note of sheer unity, he has taken care also to do so in a manner that gives equal justice (albeit more subtly) to its ontological opposite: comprehensive diversity. Look again: from bar 1385 to bar 1391, all twelve tones appear – swirling around that G on the low open string of the first violin. Then, more swiftly, the same thing happens in bars 1392 to 1394.

Beginning with bar 1395, the second violin joins in on the open G, doubling the orchestrated strength of the tonic; and by bar 1400 all the possibilities of the twelve-fold chromatic division of musical space have once again been expressed.

What happens at bar 1401? The viola now adds yet further gravity to the tonic G, adding the weight of its own open string to the sonic mix. How long does the cello swirl around this G? Through bar 1414; and it is precisely in that bar that the chromatic aggregate is again fulfilled. After this, nothing but pure G – played out by the entire quartet. Simpson marks this final passage *sfz sempre*.

As we have already seen in our earlier analysis of Quartet No. 1, Simpson likes to play out, on a large scale, a tonal design he presents elsewhere in a composition in a highly compact manner. So I suppose by now the reader will not be surprised to learn that this quartet does something similar. It begins in G and ends there – so there is no doubt in the listener's ear that this tone is the *fons et origo*, the very center of the musical universe: its point of unity. The first fourteen variations, moreover, are in the tonic key, as are variations 20–22 and variations 29–32.

From variation 15 through 19, however, the key center progressively shifts a second downwards for each variation (F, E $\flat$ , A $\flat$ , B, and A), and from variation 23–28 upward – beginning a half-step above the tonic, and thus yielding the keys A $\flat$ , B $\flat$ , A, D, D, F $\sharp$ . Thus, across the scope of the entire work, Simpson does exactly what we just observed, far more compactly, in its thrilling final moments. He honors the *plenum*.

He does so in a very different technical manner than in his Seventh Quartet – but, I would argue, ultimately with a similar artistic and even philosophic intent. Nor are these the only compositions in which Simpson engages what can be called ‘the art of chromatic completion’<sup>31</sup> – an art in which color and form are one. How? By making the point at which the full palette of chromaticism has been expressed likewise a moment of decided structural significance.

Here are three further examples. The second movement of Quartet No. 14 (1990) has this six-bar phrase as its motivic engine:

### Example 28

**Presto** ( $\text{♩} = \text{c.}132$ )

Given the extraordinarily fast tempo (a bar passes by in under a half second), the *plenum* rushes past us in less than three seconds! And yet – unlike a good deal of recent dodecaphony – this is no chromatic blur. We hear a clear center: these six bars are unmistakably designed as a cadence in D.

Three years earlier, we can see the technique at work in Simpson’s String Quintet No. 1 (1987). Its first arch of sound likewise is designed as a set of symmetrically imitative entries, each instrument joining the texture a perfect fifth below its predecessor. There are two ‘unfoldings’ of the plenum during this 29-bars phrase, and they occur with complete symmetry.

They are tonally symmetrical since they appear precisely a tritone apart; temporally symmetrical since each unfolding takes precisely fourteen bars. The first unfolding concludes with the arrival of A♭ in bar 14 – as the 1<sup>st</sup> viola concludes its presentation

<sup>31</sup> My doctoral thesis (New York University) was on this subject, and was entitled *Chromatic Completion in the Late Vocal Music of Haydn and Mozart – A Technical, Philosophic, and Historical Study*. Among my other published essays on the subject is ‘Bach and Chromatic Completion: A New Field for Analytical Research’, *Bach Notes* No. 9, Spring 2008, pp. 1–7.

of the theme. The second unfolding finds its fulfillment in bar 28 with the appearance of D simultaneously on the 2nd viola and 2nd violin – making way, just a bar later, for the entire ensemble to reach what it appears to have been searching for from the onset: a serene, pure, and full tonal cadence: an unimpeded G major triad.

### Example 29

Andante (♩ = c.76) (Tempo I)

The musical score for Example 29 consists of three systems of five staves each, representing Violin I, Violin II, Viola I, Viola II, and Cello/Double Bass. The time signature is 3/4, and the tempo is Andante (♩ = c.76) (Tempo I). The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music is characterized by long, flowing lines with many ties and slurs. Measures 1-8 show the initial theme in Violin I and II. Measures 9-15 show a development with more complex rhythmic patterns and ties. Measures 16-28 lead to a cadence, with the Cello/Double Bass staff showing a prominent G major triad in the final bars. Dynamics include *pp* (pianissimo) in measures 1, 10, 17, and 28.

The image shows a musical score for a string quartet, specifically measures 24 through 29. The score is written for five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. Measures 24-28 show sustained notes with long horizontal lines above them, indicating they are held. Measure 29 shows the notes being released. Dynamics include *ppp* and *pp*.

A more subtle instance of the art of chromatic completion can be observed in the composer's one-and-only String Trio, also written in 1987. Its Prelude (the first of three movements) opens with a rapid, five-bar figure for the violin. This figure presents eight different tones, omitting only the members of the diminished seventh chord built on C. The viola then enters a major third lower, in precise imitation of the violin's melody – and rapidly provides the four missing tones. (They are all heard in its very first bar: bar 6.)

In keeping with its strict imitation, the viola likewise presents just eight pitches. Now it is the diminished seventh built on  $A\flat$  which is missing. Since the violin, however, has been playing an ostinato figure in counterpoint during the viola's entrance, and D and F are provided in that counter figure, we lack only the presence of  $A\flat$  and B to complete the *plenum* once again.

We expect the cello now to do for the viola what the viola had so kindly done for the violin. And it will, but only after a bit of playful delay – a typical act of Simpsonian subtlety, learned perhaps from Beethoven.<sup>32</sup> For though the cello enters in bar 12, its actual imitation of the violin and viola figure (down another symmetrical major third) will not be encountered until bar 22. Where is the universe of chromaticism finally completed? During the very opening gesture of that upwardly-rushing scalar figure – with the appearance of the pitch B in bar 23. ( $A\flat$  had earlier appeared in the long sustained pianissimo that begins in bar 16.)

<sup>32</sup> Simpson began an analytic talk on Beethoven's *Op. 95* pointing to just such a beautiful 'stalling tactic' on the part of the composer he most deeply admired. The talk was given on BBC Radio 3 talk on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1984.

The instruments thus enter with double tonal symmetry: at a distance of the major third – B, G, E $\flat$  (thus perfectly trisecting the octave), and with each instrument linked to its predecessor by means of chromatic completion.

Example 30: Opening 27 bars

**Presto** ( $\text{♩} = \text{c.}132$ )

VI *pp* *f* *pp*

Va *pp* *f* *pp*

Vc *pp* *f* *pp*

6 *pp* *f* *pp*

11 *pp* *pp* *ff* *pp*

16 *ff*

22 *f* *pp cresc.*

None of the music I have just described – from the Sixth, Seventh, Ninth, and Fourteenth Quartets, or from the late trio or quintet – is dry or academic. It is all vibrant, expressive. Still – what a cool head Simpson needed to pull these various technical wonders off. There is passion and there is control. And present at the same moment: a situation, I learned from Eli Siegel, which is a *sine qua non* of all great art.

In this music there is no swarming, ego-centered Neo-Romanticism. There is also no sterile, chillingly cramped Abstract Formalism. Against each of these distortions of true music, Simpson spoke out vehemently – see, for example, the opening pages of his *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist* – earning him, I am afraid, enemies in the process.

For what Robert Simpson was after was not popularity, but honor. He wished to create Art, and with a conscious, capital A. He set his sights on sublimity: a *muscular* sublimity most often, to be sure – but still sublimity. He wished to be like the composers he admired most: Beethoven, and Nielsen – about whom he wrote: ‘He [Nielsen] subscribed to no school, but expressed himself with scrupulous truthfulness.’<sup>33</sup>

## Musical Intervals

In the last period of his compositional career, Simpson moved beyond the idea of *emergent tonality* to the employment of a musical technique in which the functioning center was no longer a key (or a set of keys in dramatic dialogue) but rather the sustained contemplation of a musical interval, or a select group of intervals. We have already observed several instances of this. I began this essay, for example, with Quartet No. 12, which has, as its ‘topic for discussion,’ the interplay of the minor third and the perfect fourth. Another work using similar material is the String Trio. It is designed in three movements. What joins these movements? Again: an ongoing exploration of the meaning of thirds and fourths: separately, and in relation.

A different set of intervals are Simpson’s central concern in Quartet No. 15 (1991) – his final quartet. Here the salient intervals are the widely disjunct minor seventh, placed in immediate juxtaposition with tightly conjunct scale fragments. That is, with sets of continuous seconds.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Simpson, *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist*, op. cit., p. 19.

## Example 31

Adagio (♩ = c.54)

The musical score for Example 31 is written for four staves. The tempo is Adagio, with a half note equal to approximately 54 beats per minute. The score begins with a forte (ff) dynamic. The first staff (treble clef) starts with a half note, followed by a series of intervals, including a perfect fifth and a tritone. The second staff (treble clef) also starts with a half note, followed by a series of intervals, including a perfect fifth and a tritone. The third staff (bass clef) starts with a half note, followed by a series of intervals, including a perfect fifth and a tritone. The fourth staff (bass clef) starts with a half note, followed by a series of intervals, including a perfect fifth and a tritone. The score ends with a dim. (diminuendo) marking.

Similarly, the last work of ‘pure string’ chamber music composed by Robert Simpson, his String Quintet No. 2, is an on-going meditation on the contrast between perfect fifths (and their inversion, perfect fourths) and tritones: the only interval which inverts unto itself. Simpson has also written several pieces of chamber music that join instruments of other families to the basic string sonority – but these are outside the scope of this chapter.

The quintet was largely written in 1991. It is scored for two celli; its predecessor having made use of two violas. Like Simpson’s last quartet, written in the same year, String Quintet No. 2 is in one movement; moreover, they each have – uniquely among his chamber works for strings cast in continuous single movements – internal tempi that do *not* share a common pulse. The quartet encompasses three different, and incommensurable, tempi; the quintet, two.

Tempo I, in the quintet, equals 88 m.m.; Tempo II, 228. What is this ratio? An infinitely regressive  $2.59090909 \rightarrow$ . The 09 simply persists forever. Meanwhile, while these oddly paired tempi fight on, the music within them – on both sides of the temporal divide, so-to-speak – is, harmonically speaking, in complete agreement with itself. There is no conflict about which intervals to emphasize! If we could speak of a ‘spiritual ratio’ here, it would be 1:1.

All this is apparent as soon as we compare the opening twelve bars

## Example 32

**Moderato** (♩ = c.88) **Tempo I**

Violoncello 1

Violoncello 2

Vla

Vc

8

with the music which appears with the arrival of its second tempo.

## Example 33

**Allegro** (♩ = c.76) (**Tempo II**)

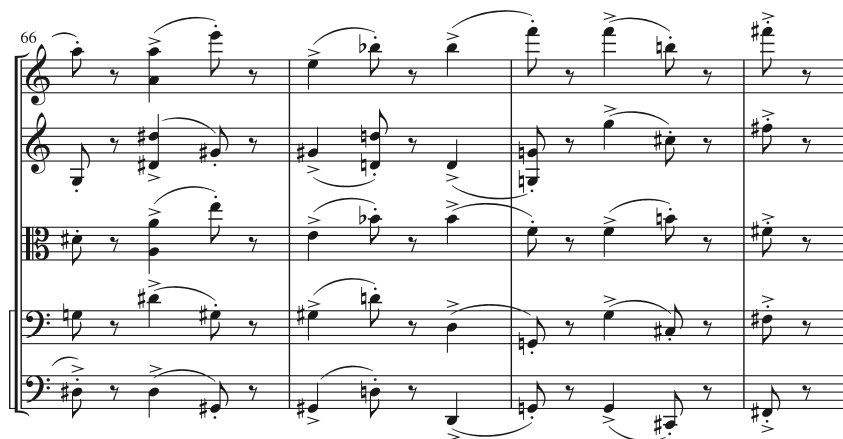
Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

8



Plainly, this quintet trumpets forth the fact that Simpson is a bold and subtle artist. On a rhythmic level, there is permanent strife and contention; on a motivic (or intervallic) level, an equally permanent sense of harmony. Few composers ever create music on such a profound basis; few ever give us – in as clearly defined a symbolic manner – such a vivid analogue to the ultimate aesthetics of the universe. For conflict and peace are made one in this music.

In a 1991 interview with Bruce Duffie, Simpson explained what he was aiming after in the music of what would prove his final period; though, of course, he did not know it at the time, having no intimation of the stroke which would hit him – in such a disastrous manner – just shortly later. As one can see, energy is Simpson's primary concern:

And I try to see what kind of energy can be got from the differences between, say, the 4th and the 5th and the 3rd and the 7th and all the intervals between the notes. They create resonances which created tonality in the first place and there are new ways of looking at that.... It's a question of deriving energy from the actual sounds themselves, from the intervals.<sup>34</sup>

When did this shift of compositional perspective begin: away from tonality towards what might be called 'pure interval music'? Perhaps, in embryo, as early as 1975 with his Quartet No. 6. Consider, again, Example 17. It shows the result of Simpson's search for a sonority which might parallel the impact of Beethoven's diminished 7th without citing it too directly. His answer? A chord with two major seconds – G#/F# above and C#/B below – separated by a perfect fifth. (Technically, a perfect twelfth).

<sup>34</sup> [www.bruceduffie.com/simpson.html](http://www.bruceduffie.com/simpson.html); published in *Tonic* 17, 2007, p. 34.

Now observe how the second movement of this quartet begins: with a series of descending imitative entries. What are the pitches at which the voices enter? A, G, D, and C: precisely the same intervallic relation only transposed up a semitone.

## Example 34

**Con moto; grazioso ed intensivo** (♩ = c.120)  
con sord.

The musical score for Example 34 is written for a string quartet in 6/8 time. It begins with the tempo and mood markings "Con moto; grazioso ed intensivo" and a tempo indication of "♩ = c.120". The first system shows the first two measures, with the first violin playing a descending melodic line starting on A4, and the second violin entering on G4. The second system shows measures 3-5, with the first violin playing a descending melodic line starting on D5, and the second violin entering on C5. The third system shows measures 6-8, with the first violin playing a descending melodic line starting on A5, and the second violin entering on G5. The score includes dynamic markings (pp, mf, f) and articulation (accents, slurs).

The same order – A, G, D, and C – is likewise found for the entries of the four voices in the double canon which comprises movement three, and the fugal entries at the beginning of movement four.

Only one work remains to be touched upon, and it is fitting that it comes last in this essay. It is the only one of the series which bears a subtitle: Quartet No. 10, '*For peace*' (1983). This composition seems to have had an unusually deep and personal meaning for the composer. It was written in the midst of the vast wave of fear had across the world that a nuclear holocaust might soon be at hand – a fear largely occasioned by NATO's decision to confront the socialist nations of the Warsaw Pact with a massive installment of medium-range ballistic missiles near their borders. Simpson, an ardent pacifist as early as his teenage years, felt compelled to respond as an artist.

And what a response! The quartet, he tells us in the note which accompanies its published score, acknowledges the pessimism felt so strongly at the time. But in its composition, Simpson aimed to transcend that state of mind. Its music, he writes, 'is not an outburst of tormented anxiety; instead it tries to define the condition of peace.' Then he adds, crucially: 'This excludes aggression but not strong feeling.'<sup>35</sup>

Earlier in this essay, I said that a great artist can, in an authentic way, give voice to the universe and also speak for humanity. Here, Simpson seems to be speaking for a *future* humanity: one that has learned how to equate 'strong feeling' – that is, the ability to be sincere – with great gentleness; how to see intensity as inseparable from peace; how to make a one of undiluted personal emotion and unbounded consideration of others. One senses, it was also what Simpson hoped for himself: simply as a person among other persons.

What humanity needs is what Simpson, in a sense, is hinting at: a belief in the *practical necessity* of aesthetics – of living a life in which kindness and power, tenderness and might are inseparable. As Eli Siegel once so powerfully put it – and not hintingly, but explicitly – it would be a humanity that understands that 'criticism is love.'

Is this what we hear evidenced in Simpson's quartet? Criticism as love? I believe so; and on technical grounds. The music, the composer notes, has 'a generally pacific character'. Yet the counterpoint in this quartet (and counterpoint is the very *soul* of chamber music) largely emphasizes oblique and contrary motion. It is, therefore, a counterpoint which most often prefers to avoid 'agreement'. That is: it is a counterpoint which emphasizes inter-criticism. And what, from a harmonic point of view, are the first sets of sounds we hear in each of its three movements? A motion from a peaceful unison to a dissonant second. Again – conflict and criticism are welcomed, not eschewed; are boldly encountered, not slunk away from in cowardly retreat.

<sup>35</sup> Robertson Publications, 95448, p. 2.

The over-all sound of this quartet, if ‘pacific,’ is nevertheless not in the least ‘quietistic’ – the perversion of true pacifism: a pacifism without backbone. As Robert Simpson says, we should never leave ‘strong feeling’ out of our lives. So the question immediately arises; and it is at once a burningly ethical question and an inevitably aesthetic one: how can we do it? How can we make a one of intensity and quietude? This, I believe, was the central question Simpson wrestled with across his entire life: as a man, and as a musician.

And may I go further? I think this music exemplifies the truth of one of the principal ideas of Aesthetic Realism: ‘The resolution of conflict in self is like the making one of opposites in art.’<sup>36</sup> How, I hope now to illustrate more fully.

We have in this composition of 1983 a meeting ground of Simpson the intervallic composer and Simpson the lover of progressive tonality. Movement I cadences on an A, heard on all four instruments in unison; movement II completes itself on a lone and very high C (a rare Simpsonian artificial harmonic); and movement III – continuing the structural symmetry of ascending minor thirds – concludes with a full E $\flat$  major triad.

Doesn’t this seem to ring a bell? Have we not met this long-range motion before? Yes: in Simpson’s very first quartet. It likewise concludes at a distance of a tritone. In fact, with the very same tritone, only reversed: A to E $\flat$ . Knowing of Simpson’s profound understanding of European music history – off-hand, I cannot think of any other twentieth-century composer who wrote with such consistent depth and clarity about the work of other composers, contemporary or of the past – what significance might we draw from this tonal relation? Why would he choose a tritone to govern the over-all structure of a quartet dedicated to defining ‘the condition of peace’?

The answer appears to lie in the fact that the tritone is the most *negative*, the most *contrary* tonal relation imaginable. So thought medieval musicians, who declared it the *tonos diabolous* – the ‘devil in music’. Centuries later, the feeling obviously persists.

Now if Goethe were correct in having Mephistopheles announce himself to Faust as ‘der Geist der stets verneint’ [the spirit who always negates], then Simpson is equally correct in employing the tritone to deal with the ultimate question every peace-loving person must answer: how to give full weight to the unconquerable desire for combat in people – which Simpson surely recognized in himself, not being a person to shy away from controversy – while yet finding a way to make that desire

<sup>36</sup> Eli Siegel, cited in Martha Baird, *Two Aesthetic Realism Papers: Opposites in the Drama; Opposites in Myself*, New York: Definition Press, 1971, p. v.

serve an even larger desire for peace. How, as William James once put it, to find ‘a moral equivalent to war’. How to show that in the ultimate depths of the human mind combat and peace can be reconciled – with peace emerging as the upshot.

Simpson’s symbolic answer? That tonal arch: the fact that the piece drives towards a final statement which, while ever-so-quiet, gentle and unaggressive in immediate sonic impact, nevertheless embodies the potential for the greatest possible conflict.

Here is the quartet’s magnificent conclusion. Notice, too, another arch-Simpsonesque feature: it ‘recapitulates in miniature’ the over-all tonal plan of the entire composition. These eleven bars also travel from A to E $\flat$ .

### Example 35

151 (8<sup>va</sup>)

*ppp ma espress.*

*ppp ma espress.*

*ppp ma espress.*

*ppp ma espress.*

156

*mp > pp*

*ppp*

*mp > pp*

*ppp*

*mp > pp*

*ppp*

*mp > pp*

*ppp*

It happens that Simpson considered the ‘search for pacification’ as the essence, the spiritual core, of another composer with whom he felt a deep kinship, and from whom he learned deeply: Anton Bruckner. (See, for example, his concluding ‘Reflections’ in his book on the Austrian).<sup>37</sup> And, as I implied earlier in my comments about his

<sup>37</sup> Robert Simpson, *The Essence of Bruckner*, op. cit., pp. 228–235.

anger at the BBC, there were likely certain subjects about which Robert Simpson never achieved the full inward peace he yearned for: certain experiences that remained ‘raw’ and unassimilated in his mind – that rankled and never quite settled into an acceptable relation to his other thoughts, feelings, memories. Perhaps he never found his way, fully, to make a one of two contrary drives in him: towards the conciliatory, and towards the contentious.

I am talking of his life; and art and life can never be separated except by weakening our understanding of both. As Simpson himself once wrote, ‘no artistic matter can be divorced from its human origins’.<sup>38</sup> While it is obviously true that in their finest music, composers transcend the flaws that may be present in their personalities, it is equally true that at other times these weaknesses show – and, in the process, mar the music.

Since we all need to learn from music how to have more beautiful, more integrated, more complete selves, I trust Robert Simpson would not object were I to mention that even the persons who love his music most sincerely and heartily have been struck by moments in which the music verges on the overly-aggressive, the exaggeratedly harsh, the unremittingly ‘driving’. These passages are mercifully few and far between; and as has been justly observed: ‘even Homer nods’.

Still, as Robert Simpson himself wrote: ‘A man’s art is his considered verdict on life, and must be judged by what it omits as well as by what it contains.’<sup>39</sup> His verdict was largely a beautiful one; but it is only fair to say, he could have believed in that verdict even more fully than he did.

Simpson, it seems to me, tended in his view of the world to emphasize energy. And when his music falls off in quality, it is because his ardent belief in the necessity of expressing the dynamism of reality was not fully at one with an equal conviction that musical honesty requires likewise the expression of its utter quietude. It is not accidental that among Simpson’s works are self-standing pieces entitled *Volcano* and *Vortex*. Not for him an explicit *Barcarolle* or *Berceuse*. And when a miniature living being inspires him, it is the vigorous mosquito, not the amiable tardigrade, the ‘slow walking water bear’ – a species which has been known to survive, in a spore-like, immobile state, for up to ten years at a stretch.

So the subtitle of Quartet No. 10, ‘*For peace*’, matters – and profoundly so. It may, in fact, provide the truest entry into Simpson’s soul available to us. It appears to embody his profoundest hope: to achieve a state of mind in which energy and quietude

<sup>38</sup> Robert Simpson, *Sibelius and Nielsen*, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Simpson, *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist*, op. cit., p. 17.

were friendly to each other; in which the assertive, active self and the yielding, meditative self were one.

A further bit of technical evidence: this is a composition dedicated to peace. How does it end? Not with a stable root position triad, but an inversion – a chord implying motion.

### Concluding on a Philosophic Note

Before this essay concludes, I would like to consider more deeply why Robert Simpson, in his final period, turned his creative energies and his adventurous thought towards a deeper appreciation of the meaning of musical intervals. Perhaps it is because he sensed that a possible *philosophic* wisdom (let alone a practical, musical wisdom) could be gleaned from that study.

For intervals are, as we shall see, realities that make a one of the utmost stir and the utmost quiet. From one point of view, they are utterly abstract and impersonal. They are mathematical ratios: eternally quiet in their Platonic perfection. Yet these ratios – insofar as they are *musical* – are apprehended in a ‘fleshly’ form; they are given to us *sensually*. We hear them through sound and through the motions of time, and they put our feelings into motion. It is not accidental that *motion* is the central element in the word *emotion*.

I have long believed that intervals have emotional meaning of a universal nature: that, in essence, they mean to us now what they have meant to humanity throughout the ages. Nor am I alone thinking so: one might give a long and careful look at Deryck Cooke’s imperfect, but indispensable masterpiece, *The Language of Music*<sup>40</sup> to see a distinguished scholar mulling the issue over. My main criticism of Cooke has less to do with his basic thesis than with tentativeness in its application, for I think one can expand his core insight far beyond western concert music to take in *all* of human music-making – on every continent, in every age.

Be this as it may (and I can only announce my beliefs here, hardly justify them, since that would require thousands of pages of evidence), this much I think can be agreed to fairly easily by most lovers of music: a person who prefers the abstract aspect of music to its sensual aspect (or visa-versa) is a person who is false to the fullness of music’s meaning.

<sup>40</sup> Deryck Cooke, *The Language of Music*, London: Oxford University Press, 1959.

It follows then, since the essential building blocks of melody, harmony, and counterpoint are intervals, that anyone who is one-sided about these ‘atoms of musical meaning’ can never enter the Holy of Holies: can never obtain a true vision of the essence of music.

I believe Simpson was in search of that vision all his life, and very much so in the last period of his compositional career.

The issue is philosophic, ultimately, because what we are talking about here (in the symbolism of musical language) is the perennial issue faced by all serious thinkers – whether that thinker uses words (the most obvious vehicle for serious thought), or colors, equations, instrumental sounds, or the gestures of dance. The issue is this: What is the true relation of Form and Substance? Are we to be Idealists, or Materialists? What is the authentic relation of Mind and Body? Is one merely the epiphenomenon of the other, or is each the definition of the other – inseparable, so that neither is more primal than the other?

And perhaps most significantly of all: what is the relation of the Eternal to the Temporal: the never-changing to the always changing? Of Parmenides and Heraclitus?

If there is a way to unify these dualities, that would be wisdom, indeed! I have learned from Aesthetic Realism, great music does precisely this.

It is a stirring fact that many composers, in their last period, turned towards a renewed contemplation of the power inherent in musical intervals. We hear it in late Beethoven and late Sibelius; also in Bach. Stravinsky almost says as much as he writes of Webern’s ‘pure interval music’ and implies that he needed to learn from it. I would include late Wagner and Haydn as well.

Meanwhile, the list is hardly exhaustive. Late Verdi comes to mind; even the late music of Monteverdi. My surmise is that at the summit of their careers, with decades of experience behind them, all these composers were on a quest to see – with a greater depth than they had ever done before – the true relation of emotion and mathematics; of the world as immediate and the world as abstract; of reality as tangible and reality as entirely intangible and ideal.

Of the Cosmos itself as personal and impersonal. Warmly personal; and yet grand impersonal and abstract. And did I not say, early on, that I thought Simpson’s ultimate value lay in his ability to bring these opposites together?

So my essay has come full circle. I have a notion Robert Simpson might enjoy that fact.

## Simpson's 'Rasumowsky' Quartets. An introduction<sup>1</sup>

Lionel Pike

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. The more a composer thinks in abstract terms, the more difficult it is to explain the working of his mind in non-musical terms. It is clear that the language which will explain all musical procedures without ambiguity has yet to be invented. Many analysts have tried in various ways to produce such a language; but it remains true that music is organised sound, and the moment one gets away from that sound, something essential is lost. Music is itself an extremely complex language, with its own modes of thought, grammar and syntax; for this reason, it cannot be fully translated into another medium, with (necessarily) a different set of rules. It is difficult to unravel the various simultaneous levels of argument which the musical ear instinctively appreciates: the attempt can lead to opaque prose, such as few readers would have sufficient patience to digest – even a score fully marked up with analysis is not necessarily very helpful, since the result can be so cluttered as to become indecipherable. The graphic analyses of Schenker seek to overcome this difficulty of expressing the simultaneity of musical levels, but they are hopelessly inadequate when applied to the subtleties of complete sonata structures.

Many analysts seem to view a piece of music as one might a piece of architecture; yet one cannot walk round a piece of music and touch it, or measure its height or depth. It exists in performance alone and its impact may well be at a different level for each hearer or for the same listener on different occasions. An architect can look at a Gothic cathedral and explain its structure in terms of stresses, strains and mathematical formulae. There are many points of contact between architecture and music, and a cathedral may affect us in different ways; but it is idle to pretend that you can measure the stresses and strains of sonata form, and reduce them to a formula. So intricate are the musical processes – so much is every single note of (for instance) Beethoven's sonata structures influenced by the forces involved – that words just will not provide suffi-

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in *Tonic* 1/4, 1982, pp. 8–10.

cient elucidation. Indeed, the balancing of levels of tension, and the handling of motion, both of which are of vital importance to sonata structures, are dealt with by no analyst: there does not exist any readily available non-musical means of discussing them.

All good analysts have the feeling – not at all unlike that of religious conversion – that the discoveries they make about a composer's thought processes are so thrilling that they must communicate them to others. The difficulty lies in this act of communication. The person most likely to have something to say about a composer – about Beethoven, for instance – is one who has spent a lifetime thinking deeply about that composer's music; one, moreover, who has such an affinity with that composer as to face similar problems in his own compositions. Such a man will not need the services of musical analysis: like the architect, he will be able to re-interpret in his own terms what he hears. Such a man is Robert Simpson. He knows that Beethoven's music is still inadequately understood; and when he makes a statement about this music, it behoves us all to sit up and take notice. Perhaps it really takes a composer's mind to understand the true essence of Beethoven's sonata structures, and since their significance cannot be adequately discussed in words, and has not been demonstrated even by Schenker in his graphs, Robert Simpson has chosen to explore them by tracing the thought processes for himself through the medium of his own composition. His Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Quartets, though they are themselves masterpieces, are also brilliant and succinct studies of Beethoven's three Opus 59 Quartets.

There is a tradition of using this kind of activity for educational purposes. Ingres used to trace as a means of training himself as a painter; while composition teachers used to make their pupils copy the form (in exact bar numbers) and tonal design of accepted classical masterpieces before allowing them to fill up this framework with their own notes. Although it is true that Simpson's bar numbers sometimes correspond closely to Beethoven's they do not always do so, for this is neither pastiche nor parody. Simpson's process of writing three new quartets which are close studies of existing masterpieces is unique in the history of music. Naturally, in works of this status, the form is an expression of the content; and since Robert Simpson's music uses different material from Beethoven's, it will at times lead him in different directions. For this is not merely a pedagogical exercise: Simpson's quartets are magnificent works of art in their own right.

The pedagogical value of Simpson's Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Quartets is nevertheless enormous, and no student of Beethoven can afford to ignore them. I have personally learned more about the Opus 59 Quartets from a close comparison of them with Simpson's Quartets than I have from any other analysis. As a brief example

I may take the opening movement of the First 'Rasumowsky'. I had not previously realised how Beethoven uses pedals to govern the ebb and flow of rhythm (on the large and small scale) as well as the tonality, or how he creates (at times) a feeling of uncertainty about strong and weak pulses. But to attempt to elucidate all that one has learned would be futile, because of the difficulties of communication already mentioned: one can only encourage others to study the correspondences for themselves.

Those who have no interest in analysis of music need not fear that this is merely an academic exercise, for Simpson's music is thoroughly approachable. We may well feel that his three quartets recapture for us some of the power the 'Rasumowskys' had for their first hearers: our ears are dulled to much of this impact because of all the music that continually assaults them and because of our familiarity with Beethoven's style. Moreover, Simpson's process can work in reverse: a knowledge of Beethoven's 'Rasumowskys' can in turn teach us much about Robert Simpson's music. All this apart, Simpson's Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Quartets represent an important twentieth-century contribution to the string repertoire: they are powerful masterpieces, which cry out to be made available to the world at large in a commercial recording.

### Simpson's 'Rasumowskys'. Three discussions on the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth String Quartets<sup>1</sup>

Malcolm MacDonald & Robert Simpson

MM: Let me start this discussion on the relationship between your Fourth String Quartet and the first Beethoven 'Rasumowsky' Quartet by quoting the note at the beginning of the published scores of the Fourth Quartet and of its two successors:

The Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Quartets constitute a close study of Beethoven's three Rasumovsky Quartets, Opus 59; that is to say, the attempt to understand those great works resulted in not a verbal analysis, but music. The hope is that anyone studying intelligently the musical analogies offered here will find the experience of benefit in approaching and entering Beethoven's masterpieces. To try to describe such analogies in words would defeat the object. Some of them are obvious, of the kind that Brahms would say any fool can see. Others are much less so and reflect subtleties that defy language. They may be perceived only by those with ears to hear them. If these three string quartets enhance the understanding of the genius of Beethoven at their own expense, their purpose will have been served.

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in *Tonic* 1/4, 1982, pp. 11–16, 3/4, 1990, pp. 21–27 and 3/1, 1987, pp. 18–25 (strangely in this order). These discussions were first broadcast early in 1980.

Before we go any further, in fairness to you I ought to say something about the appalling modesty of that last sentence, something which you cannot say yourself, but which I as an independent listener can; namely, that though your quartets – like nearly anybody else's – may surrender something in direct comparison with the 'Rasumowskys', in their own right, as mature and characteristic pieces of Robert Simpson they stand four-square on their own two feet. The listener will have no difficulty in enjoying them and in being able to assess their worth as string quartets. Personally, I think they are among the finest string quartets written in these islands.

RS: As far as modesty is concerned, I was sticking my neck out by writing what amount to variations on the 'Rasumowsky' Quartets. In saying at the end of the paragraph that if these works enhance the understanding of Beethoven at their own expense, their purpose will have been served, I was only stating what happened to me when I was composing them. I learned such a lot in this process that I only hope that somebody else might get some sort of benefit from it. I think I would have been less than just if I had said that if Beethoven's 'Rasumowsky' Quartets enhance the understanding of mine at *their* own expense, their purpose will have been served.

MM: The whole idea of structuring these three quartets as analogies to the 'Rasumowskys' is fascinating, because it is not something that one meets with in music at all. It is, perhaps, more familiar in painting where a painter might use the general composition and subject of another painter's work as the basis of a free composition of his own. We are more familiar in music with the idea of music written in the style of another composer (that is, pastiche) than with these 'analogies'. As far as I can see, you have taken the 'Rasumowskys' as a kind of extremely specific background that provides certain proportions, a certain succession of events for ordering your own music in your own particular way. Would you agree with that?

RS: Yes. It is quite common for one composer to write variations on another composer's theme. Very often with these variations one finds that as the composer, in his variations, gets deeper and deeper into the structure of the theme, the variations become less and less like the original. Some of the Diabelli Variations are barely remotely connected with the theme, except in terms of structure. If one heard the theme followed by one of the later variations (for instance, that very mysterious *pianissimo* one, No. 20) one would hardly associate it with Diabelli's Waltz.

Thus it is that, when you come to study some great masterpiece on a large scale, you immediately begin to sense tensions, and distributions of tensions and proportions, in the work as a whole. It teaches you something about momentum, about harmonic spacing, about counterpoint, about structure in general. You begin to feel: well, if only I can

do something like that. How can this kind of appreciation or knowledge be somehow reflected in another language, in one's own contemporary language? Since one of my aims as a composer has always been to try to recapture classical momentum, which has been largely lost in a lot of contemporary music, this was one way of getting very close to the matter. It started when I had to do a television programme about 'Rasumowsky' No. 3. I had to study it very closely. People asked me after the programme, which seemed to have gone down quite well, why I didn't write a book on the Beethoven quartets, and on the 'Rasumowskys' in particular. But I don't really want to write any more books. Words seem to be rather an inadequate means of expression. More and more, as I went looking into the 'Rasumowsky' Quartets, which I have known since I was a boy, I felt that somehow I could learn something about composing from them in a positive way, by taking them as models. The interesting thing was that although each one of my Quartets starts off in a way which is obviously similar to the Beethoven, each began to develop along lines of its own, and the nature of the material itself dictated the nature of the work, so that in the end what I produced are not attempts to recapture the mood of Beethoven's quartets – heaven forbid that anyone should attempt to do that! – but I took the 'Rasumowskys' as their starting point, then allowed the music to develop, keeping an eye on the model all the time and seeing the interesting, fascinating, compelling things that can happen to one during this process. And so you find the proportions of the work are much the same as those of the Beethoven. But the material itself is different, therefore producing different results, different developments, different modulations, different key distributions in places, and so, in the end, different works. It is the differences, rather than the similarities, between my Quartets and Beethoven's masterpieces which should shed light on both of us – I hope.

MM: I think it does; in fact, it is noticeable that as soon as one has listened to your Fourth Quartet even once, how the whole expressive weight of the piece is differently slanted. To take perhaps the most obvious instance: the finale of your Quartet, when compared to Beethoven's finale. Yours is much more of a 'finale quartet', in that a great deal of the weight falls on the finale, whereas Beethoven, with the Russian folk theme and the more pastoral vision of his finale, produced something lighter and calmer in spirit than yours. It could be said that the main argument of the quartet is conducted with the greatest fierceness in your finale.

RS: That's quite true. There is also another difference arising from the same thing: the first movement of my Quartet is shorter than Beethoven's first movement simply because – this sounds silly and naïve – it is in 3/4 time instead of 4/4 – In other words, there is one beat less in each bar, and so the entire movement is considerably shorter.

The effect is to lighten the movement, to make it generally feel quicker and more animated in a different way. This means that whereas Beethoven put the main weight of his argument in the first movement, mine has to go the other way: it expands, and the last movement tends to be bigger and weightier than Beethoven's, which is intentionally Arcadian after the dark slow movement. In Beethoven's last movement, too, we find a very delicate contest between the very plain F major and the Dorian D minor of the Russian folk tune, and he makes wonderful play with this. Naturally, with the influence of composers like Nielsen behind me, I became fascinated by this and began to think of it spread out not in the finale particularly but throughout the whole Quartet, in a way which Beethoven doesn't entertain; and so the very first theme of the first movement of this Quartet oscillates in a way between F and D. If you listen to the opening of the Beethoven you will hear how the second violin and the viola are playing in thirds, while the cello plays his plain F major theme underneath it. The effect is like a sustained, extended  $\frac{6}{4}$  chord of F; there's no real doubt about where the tonality is going to go.

### Example 1

**Allegro** ( $\text{♩} = \text{c.88}$ )

The musical score for Example 1 is in F major, 2/4 time, with a tempo of Allegro (♩ = c.88). It consists of two systems of four staves each. The first system (measures 1-5) shows a steady accompaniment in the strings with a melody in the Violin II. The second system (measures 6-10) shows a change in the Cello part, marked 'cresc.' and 'p', which suggests a shift towards D minor.

Now, Beethoven makes that plain F major and what I have done in this case is, instead of putting a simple third on the two other instruments against the cello, I have made quite a simple change to accompany the cello – an A and a G which immediately suggest the possibility of D minor. If you listen to the cello, you will see that he very soon

does a little twist out of F and back again, and the same thing happens when the violin comes in. The whole thing builds up in a more ambiguous way than with Beethoven. This was one of the things that Brahms would have said any fool could see: it is so obviously connected with the Beethoven. But that is the basic difference from which the rest of the work develops.

### Example 2

**Allegro** ( $\text{♩} = \text{c.}52$ )

The musical score for Example 2 is in 3/4 time, marked **Allegro** with a tempo of  $\text{♩} = \text{c.}52$ . It consists of two systems of music. The first system contains five measures. The second system begins at measure 7 and also contains five measures. The score is written for four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Cello, and Double Bass. The Violin I part starts with a *p* dynamic and includes a *cresc.* marking in the fifth measure. The Violin II part also starts with a *p* dynamic and includes a *cresc.* marking in the fifth measure. The Cello part is marked *cantabile e risoluto* and starts with a *mf* dynamic, with a *cresc.* marking in the fifth measure. The Double Bass part starts with a *mf* dynamic and includes a *cresc.* marking in the fifth measure. The second system begins at measure 7. The Violin I part starts with a *p* dynamic. The Violin II part starts with a *mf > pp* dynamic. The Cello part starts with a *mf > pp* dynamic. The Double Bass part starts with a *f* dynamic, followed by a *p* dynamic, and then a *pp* dynamic in the fifth measure.

MM: How is this developed through the movement?

RS: Throughout the whole movement there are not very violent, but sometimes quite subtle, examples of this, but in the first movement I didn't want the thing to develop into a full-scale war between these two tonalities. I thought that if that were to happen, it would be better to leave it to the last movement which seemed the right place for it. Compare these two passages. See, for instance, what happened at the beginning of the development section in the Beethoven. Beethoven comes back as if he is going to repeat the exposition: we get the cello passage just as it was at the beginning and then suddenly it takes another turn; a  $G\flat$  intervenes and the music goes off into another key (bars 103–114).

## Example 3

Example 3 is a musical score for a piano quartet, showing three systems of music. The key signature is G major (one sharp).

The first system (measures 95-100) is marked *G*. It features a piano introduction with a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, marked *mf e dol.* (mezzo-forte, ad libitum).

The second system (measures 107-110) is marked *cresc.* (crescendo) in the right hand and *f* (forte) in the left hand. The right hand melody is marked *cresc.* and the left hand melody is marked *f*. The system concludes with a *sf* (sforzando) accent on the final measure.

The third system (measures 111-114) is marked *H*. It features a piano introduction in the right hand and a forte (f) melody in the left hand, marked *p* (piano) and *f* (forte) respectively. The right hand melody is marked *p* and the left hand melody is marked *f*. The system concludes with a *sf* (sforzando) accent on the final measure.

Now when I came to this point myself, having gone through exactly the same proportions in the exposition, I had also to suggest that I was going to repeat the exposition and yet not do so – in other words, take another twist just as Beethoven did. But with my other scheme in mind, with this conflict between these tonalities, I thought I would turn my G $\flat$  (Beethoven's G $\flat$ ) into an F $\sharp$ , and we'll go into D, and D major it is.

## Example 4

100

*cresc.* *f* *p* *f* *mf*

105

*cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.*

110

*sf* *p* *f* *f* *f* *mp* *f*

From there on the movement develops as a normal sonata movement, but without a repeated exposition. It expands a little bit more than Beethoven's just at the end to make up for the fact that it is shorter and lighter and needs a little bit more weight. Then in the scherzo, the second movement, again I have done the I same. In this scherzo D minor comes in from time to time with obviously slightly disruptive intent.

The slow movement is unlike Beethoven's, in that whereas the Beethoven is like a very solidly established kind of private funeral march in F minor, in a very solidly rooted F minor with both feet on the ground – almost with one in the grave in a sense – my movement isn't rooted to the same extent in F minor. F is behind it, but it purposely avoids this solid establishment for the simple reason that it has to be a preparation for what is going to happen in the last movement.

The last movement is going to be the crux of this contest between these two keys. There is nothing sinister, by the way, about the contest between these two keys. It is all very high-spirited and energetic and is not a conflict in the usual sense of the term. It is a good-natured contest between two tonal centres. But the slow movement, like Beethoven's, is dark and sad, and forms the necessary contrast to the last. By the time the slow movement comes to an end we think the key is almost C minor, not F minor. It sounds almost like C minor until the last C that is left at the bottom on the cello begins to hang on. As Tovey said, if you hang on to a note long enough, it will sound like a dominant, and that is what happens to it in this case: it sounds like the dominant of F. But when the finale theme begins, it is itself a miniaturised contest between F and D, D minor, D major, all mixed up together. Incidentally, you know how, at the end of the slow movement of the Beethoven, the air clears marvellously; you get a kind of cadenza passage on the violin, it all goes into a bright C major which is only the dominant of F major, and at last all the darkness has vanished. What I have done is not this – it would have been too obvious and too difficult to compete with that. I have made the transition not in the tempo of the slow movement but in that of the finale, so that the actual transition between the darkness of the slow movement and the brightness of the last movement is *after* the *allegro* begins. So we have this rhythm of the last movement, and when the theme comes in the tempo is thoroughly established and the air lighter: but there's a little bit of needle in it as well.

## Example 5

145 **Assai vivace** ( $\text{♩} = \text{c.80}$ )

The musical score is written for piano and consists of four systems of staves. The first system (measures 145-148) shows a piano introduction with *pp* dynamics. The second system (measures 149-152) continues the piano texture. The third system (measures 153-156) features a more active piano part with triplets and *pp* dynamics. The fourth system (measures 157-160) shows a transition to a more rhythmic, *molto vivo* section with *f* and *pp* dynamics. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings.

19

*f*

*p*

*cresc.*

*p*

*cresc.*

*p cresc.*

Throughout the last movement, then, we get this conflict. One last illustration of that is one passage where it really is fierce: bars 411–444. There is a heck of a lot going on in all the parts, but the note D is continually trying to force its way through the texture, through everything, like a knife; and in the end it forces the music into its own dominant. The music comes to the dominant of D with absolute classical clarity. You couldn't have a clearer dominant of D in a Beethoven or Haydn quartet than when you get to the end of this passage.

### Example 6

411

*f*

*ff*

*sf*

*ff*

*sf*

*ff*

*sf*

416

*sf*

*sf*

*sf*

*sf*

*sf*



MM: This contest or conflict is, then, never wholly resolved.

RS: Not in the sense that Beethoven's is, but Beethoven marvellously absorbs the Dorian mode somehow into F. I didn't intend to do anything like that. What happens is that in the last movement there is a slow passage, just as there is in the Beethoven, except that in my quartet it is longer. In there is the ambiguity between the keys, and just towards the end of it, it sideslips dangerously in the direction of D, which gives D a chance to slam in *ff* – the big ferocious passage at the end of the last movement. The only thing one can do against that is to dismiss it, and so it is dismissed by the note F and that's the end of it. You may or may not feel that that is conclusive.

MM: Let us look at a couple of other aspects of the work. In the scherzo, for instance, Beethoven's is a unique kind of structure and unique in character, too, even for Beethoven. Your scherzo, strangely enough, has much more of the feeling, in its pace, of what one thinks of as the typical Beethoven scherzo.

RS: That was deliberate. How on earth could I write a unique type of Beethoven scherzo in an idiom which Beethoven only used in that scherzo? Nobody could possibly attempt to do that. On the other hand the structure of the scherzo is also very idiosyncratic. There is no other Beethoven scherzo constructed like this one. Stylistically, the only subsequent scherzos that resemble it at all are Mahler's, in their construction, in the kind of texture they produce, and in their quick changes of style, of texture, of feeling and of movement. Also they have a moderate tempo in general – not a fast tempo, but a moderately paced scherzo. To some extent Mendelssohn also learned something from it; but they are the only two composers I can think of who did that. I didn't want to try and imitate it in any way, and so I thought it would be, at least, not a bad joke to turn my version of it into a typical Beethoven scherzo tempo. If he didn't want to do that, I'll have a go at it. There is one slightly different element:

there is a passage which you referred to in conversation as a sort of trio.

MM: This, I feel, is much more the Arcadian, pastoral moment in your Quartet. Beethoven does have a contrasting theme at the same stage in the structure as you introduce this theme I call the 'trio', but the contrast in your scherzo, as far as I can see, is even greater. It is a contrast partly of tempo as well as of character. There is also the fact that you bring this theme back at the end of the scherzo, which Beethoven does not do with his contrasting theme, so that it has much more the feeling of a Beethoven scherzo in which the 'trio element' (I agree it is a very small trio for such a large scherzo) is repeated just as the scherzo is repeated.

RS: Do you mean the way Beethoven brings back the trio at the end of his Seventh, or his Ninth, Symphony, and then cuts it off?

MM: Yes, it does have something of that feeling.

RS: I didn't really intend that, but I can see what you mean. It's not really a trio, of course.

MM: But it does have a great deal of weight in the movement. The contrast etches it in the mind almost as if it were a self-contained section like a trio.

RS: Perhaps I could just show the difference. Beethoven's theme really goes in to the key of B major (or C $\flat$ , this is). It is a wonderful new idea, so completely simple that when I heard it, I wondered what on earth I could do.

### Example 7

I couldn't do anything as marvellous as that in the same tempo, especially in this fast

185 *p* *poco rit.* *a tempo*  
*dim.* *ff*  
*dim.* *ff*  
*dim.* *ff*  
*dim.* *ff*

tempo which is going flat-out like a presto. And so I thought, I must have a contrast of that nature, something that is going to be very noticeable, and it must be in that key at that particular point for reasons of my own as well as Beethoven's. I thought, I'll have the same tempo basically but I'll make two crochets equal three, and with a new theme which is, incidentally, not unconnected with the other material.

### Example 8

340 ( $d = d.$ ) *a tempo* *pp*  
*pp dolce*  
*pp dolce*  
*poco rit.* *ppp*  
*ppp*  
*ppp*  
*ppp*

348 *a tempo*

*pp*

*pp*

352 *ravvivando*

*pp*

*pp*

Now, this was an enormous contrast with the rest of the texture and tempo of the movement as compared with Beethoven's; indeed, I felt it was such a contrast that, unlike Beethoven, I had to bring it back at the end. It demands somehow to be heard again, to give the listener some sense of symmetry, and so it turns up again just before the end of the scherzo.

MM: It certainly gives a very different feel to the whole movement. Of course, these expressive differences between the two quartets are really important. In the slow movement, you have already said something about how Beethoven's movement is weighted down to F minor within its funeral march rhythms, whereas yours seems to be somehow suspended in mid-air, although it is still emotionally very weighty. There are other strange things I have noticed.

At three recurrent points Beethoven uses a texture with funeral march rhythms, in the first violin and cello, that is, at the bottom and top of the texture (bars 37–40),

## Example 9

and you also at the appropriate points in your movements have the texture with a first violin high up and a cello low down and inner parts on the second violin and the viola, but what the violin and cello are playing is something much less clearly defined, much less commanding of the attention than Beethoven's middle figures. It is more just this mysterious oscillation which, in any case, I find rather common to your style, but this seems to throw the whole balance of the texture in a different way, so that one is concentrating much more on the inner parts. Was that your intention?

RS: Yes. Again, where you have got something in the Beethoven Quartet which is so obviously characteristic as those funeral march rhythms, simply to produce some different funeral march rhythms is going to be frightfully obvious and laughable. I wasn't going to be drawn into a trap of that kind, and I felt that this passage must also have another function. Its function is to turn the tonality into a different direction each time it comes. The way I have done it is to use the same inner parts on the same notes, while the 'shake' is on a different note.

## Example 10

Example 10 shows measures 46, 47, and 48 of a musical score. The score is written for four staves: Treble 1, Treble 2, Bass 1, and Bass 2. Measure 46 features a complex texture with rapid sixteenth-note passages in the upper staves and a more melodic line in the lower staves. Measure 47 continues this texture, with a prominent tremolo in the upper right. Measure 48 shows a continuation of the tremolo in the upper right and a more active bass line. The dynamic marking *pp* (pianissimo) is indicated at the end of measure 48.

The last time it occurs, the shake is on a  $D\flat$ . There is a big modulation in Beethoven's movement to  $D\flat$  before the recapitulation, and at this point I also wanted to go into  $D\flat$ . But I didn't want to make it such a dramatic event as the denial of an expected recapitulation, which is what Beethoven's is, and I anticipated it by putting that shake on the  $D\flat$  over those very same inner parts which float along quietly. It then goes into  $D\flat$  in a natural way rather than in a dramatic way.

## Example 11

Example 11 shows measures 78, 79, and 80 of a musical score. The score is written for four staves: Treble 1, Treble 2, Bass 1, and Bass 2. Measure 78 features a complex texture with rapid sixteenth-note passages in the upper staves and a more melodic line in the lower staves. Measure 79 continues this texture, with a prominent tremolo in the upper right. Measure 80 shows a continuation of the tremolo in the upper right and a more active bass line. The dynamic marking *pp* (pianissimo) is indicated at the end of measure 80.

81

83

87

*sempre pp*

*pp*

*ppp*

*pp*

*ppp*

*pp*

*ppp*

*tr*

*< poco > pp sereno, semplice*

*< poco > pp*

*< poco > pp*

*< poco > pp*

\*

MM: Now that we're going to talk about your 5th String Quartet, which is the one which bears an apprehensible relationship to the second of the Beethoven 'Rasumowsky' Quartets, I'd like to ask you to think about it, not in relation to the second Beethoven 'Rasumowsky' Quartet, but in relation to your Fourth Quartet, and your Sixth Quartet. I do this because it's a quite often expressed view that the 'Ra-

sumowsky' Quartets have more in common with each other than simply a common opus number, and that in some sense they form a self-consistent and mutually reacting or interacting group of works: at least, to a much greater extent than say the Opus 18 quartets of Beethoven do. I have even heard it said occasionally that in some sense they are one gigantic work in three enormous movements. Although you probably wouldn't want to go as far as that, I think I've seen you say somewhere that the second 'Rasumowsky' is, on many levels, a reaction from the sensibility of the First 'Rasumowsky' Quartet, and I wondered how you might view these three quartets as a group reacting against one another as the 'Rasumowsky' Quartets might do.

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

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

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

Actually, as I was thinking in terms of the 'Rasumowskys' all the time, and thinking of what Beethoven had intended to do, or trying to find out from the inside what was happening in these works, I was also conscious of trying to create another piece which was a contrast to the previous one in perhaps a similar way, in that in No. 5 there is a certain nervous intensity which one won't find in No. 4. The slow move-

ment is also a search for calmness and serenity, just as Beethoven's is, and the last two movements have a certain humour in them – I think. They are not completely without humour, and the last movement is a very fierce exploration of the C major / E minor conflict that you find in Beethoven's finale. But, in the Beethoven it is humorous: he gets this tune starting in C and then going on in E minor, and every time the thing comes back it's C major – and it's prepared on the dominant of C major – and it's as if he can't escape it. It's as if this damned C major keeps coming back, and the last time he says with a kind of twinkle, 'For God's sake – not that again!', and then scurries off with a *più allegro* in E minor, and sticks to that, and before it can come back he stops. This is a superb joke.

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

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

Now, instead I hit on another idea, which struck me at the time as rather a good idea, and that was to make this Trio into a crescendo, so that by the time it reached *ff* the original delicate Scherzo came back in the middle *ff*. When the Trio came back for the second time it was a diminuendo, so that that led back to a *p* and the original Scherzo

in a *p* at the end. So the whole movement is sort of a crescendo and a diminuendo, like an arch, and this seemed to me to solve my problem. I don't know what Beethoven would think of it – he would probably laugh.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

peating it! I wondered really what you saw the function of the repeat as being, both in the 'Rasumowskys' and also now in the mid-twentieth century in your own quartets.

RS: Well, you see the whole argument against repeats (which regards repeats as a sort of tautology, if you like) is the false idea that music is meant to convey information, and that once a piece of information has been conveyed that's that, and there's no need to convey it again. Now this is a load of nonsense. Of course music doesn't convey information: music conveys form. In fact if we repeat something it means that we want it to make an effect as a repeat and not merely to convey information twice. Beethoven has special reasons, always, for repeats, whether it's the ordinary repeat of the exposition, or whether it's something special, like the repeat of the whole development and recapitulation in the E minor quartet. One of the things that I tried to find out in studying these works was the reason for this.

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

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

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

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

RS: That's reassuring!

MM: I wonder in fact if you've gone about the construction of the themes specifically to do this: in fact, to give reminiscences of the actual Beethovenian procedures within the actual melodic lines.

RS: I think that very often starting off one tends to be much more similar to the model than when one goes on. For instance if you take the opening of the F major (cf. pp. 276f.), that is very similar to the opening of the Beethoven F major in the fact that you have a cello theme rising up from under some repeated notes on the other instruments. We have the same sort of similarity here – a sharp ejaculation at the beginning, and then a soft answer, and then the soft answer a semitone higher and so on. The whole thing begins in the same textural way, but of course as it goes on the material begins to dictate its own terms and so we get differences. Again, in the slow movement of this I think the parallel between this slow movement and Beethoven's slow movement would be perfectly obvious in the way it begins and the way it continues in some ways. There are, of course, certain respects in which my movement has to go in a different way simply because the material and the language are different.

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

It might be a good idea if you listen to the beginning of the Beethoven with its C major start, then going on in E minor ...

### Example 12

6

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

Now, my finale starts off with an absolute whirlwind in C major, and this *ff* suddenly ceases, leaving the two violins playing *pianissimo* in E minor, as if they'd been in the background all the time, and this dichotomy between the two tonalities persists very much through the movement. It's an absolute whirlwind of a piece: they go at it furiously for quite a long time – 840 bars! – by which time the quartet is fit to drop, I think ...

### Example 13

Prestissimo (♩ = c.104)

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

*pp*

*pp*

6

*(ff)*

*(ff)*

It's diabolically difficult to play, and I must confess that I was absolutely staggered by the way in which the Gabrieli Quartet were able to play it at that speed. I didn't really think it was possible.

MM: We've been talking about the conflict or contest between C and E in this movement. I wondered if the overall tonal argument of the quartet wasn't in some ways very similar this time to the argument of the Fourth Quartet (cf. pp. 275ff.), in that Beethoven's ambiguity between D and F in the Finale of the Fourth Quartet gave you the idea both of intensifying that into a kind of contest in the finale, and retrospectively to embody some of that ambiguity in the previous movements of your Fourth Quartet. In the Second 'Rasumowsky' Beethoven's C and E equivocation is in some senses an outcome of various Neapolitan relationships etc. that have been happening in the previous movements. I think you did say, at one stage, that your finale again was an intensification of Beethoven's tonal conflict. I wondered if this was a general intensification throughout the work, more or less along the lines of the Fourth Quartet?

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

\*

MM: In our last discussion about your Fifth String Quartet we started by contrasting that Quartet with the Fourth Quartet and the Sixth, and by saying whether or not these three Quartets have contrasts and interactions in the same way that Beethoven's 'Rasumowskys' might be said to have. This time, perhaps I should begin with a per-

sonal opinion, which is that your Sixth Quartet is for me the one of these three which bears the closest *spiritual* relationship to the Beethoven 'Rasumowsky' on which it is based, that is, the Third, the C major, even though in certain places (especially in the middle movements) it might be said to depart quite some way from the letter of Beethoven's own structures.

In both Quartets there is a slow, tense, mysterious introduction that concentrates on a single dissonant harmony which eventually gives way to a highly energetic and positive Allegro. Both quartets have a *quasi allegretto* movement that has a strange obsessive quality about it, which brings back and reinforces the mystery. In both Quartets one has a movement which is, formally and emotionally, fairly straight, but its very orthodoxy turns out to be, in the context of the other movements, rather mysterious. Finally, both Quartets possess a finale that is a magnificent fusion of fugal and sonata style which ends the quartet in a tremendous burst of energy. How is that for a thumb-nail analysis?

RS: Well, it's a very kind analysis as far as my Quartet is concerned, but I think it is perfectly true what you say; that this Quartet does resemble its Beethoven model more obviously as a whole than the other two. When I started each one of these three Quartets, the resemblance was pretty obvious, although obviously as you go on it gets further away because the ideas begin to take on life of their own, begin to insist on developments which aren't altogether like the original Beethoven ones.

The slow introduction of the Sixth is mysterious, taking into account the fact that Beethoven had used a diminished seventh at the beginning – the old diminished seventh, for which he expressed so much contempt when other people used it – and then discovers mysteries in it, explores it to its depths in a way that it had never been explored before. In 'Rasumowsky' No. 3 the diminished seventh is also very important in the other movements in various ways which we don't need to go into now. But I wanted to find something equivalent, in more modern terms, if you like, which was equally ambiguous. Now, if you're going to be ambiguous, you've got to take in the possibility of meaning, so it is rather difficult for contemporary composers to be ambiguous when they don't mean anything. Thus I had to mean something, and so I had to use a chord which was connected with the traditional, basic, natural intervals, and which could create some sort of expectancy harmonically. I took this chord, with a major second, and then another major second a long way down (in fact, a fifth away, but a fifth plus a couple of octaves). You put them together and that is the dissonance with which this Quartet starts.

## Example 14

Adagio (♩ = c.60)

Now, if you take those four notes and you string them out in order, what you get is a succession of fifths.

## Example 15

That chord is as ambiguous as the diminished seventh; it can go in any one of several directions. There are many possibilities, and one can use this chord in all sorts of ways. And so, Beethoven explored the diminished seventh in his introduction. I have explored this one in mine. And it dominates the rest of the work too, perhaps more specifically than the diminished seventh does in Beethoven's case. But it still doesn't dominate the piece obsessively by merely excluding other possibilities; I think that is the worst kind of unity – when you say that a piece is developed, say, from one chord or from a few notes – these things mean something only in a context, having found the thing that you want to be meaningful, it's up to you to devise a context for it.

One way in which I have made this chord behave is as a beginning for each movement. It starts the first movement absolutely as it stands, as a dissonance, but in all the other movements the instruments come in one after the other on successive notes of the chord. The second movement and the third movement (which is a canon) do it, as does the last, which starts off like a fugue, just as Beethoven starts his off like a fugue. That's just one aspect of the way that chord is used. To go into a lot of detail now would be rather counter-productive, I think – our audience would be asleep long before the work started.

But you referred also to the formal nature of the third movement. It really interested me very much about Beethoven's Quartet that for the first time in many, many years he writes a minuet and, what's more, in the context of a work extremely energetic and rather disturbed as a whole, we get this completely calm minuet. It's the one point of repose in the whole work. Now I suppose I could have written some kind of pastiche minuet. But I thought to myself that a minuet wouldn't generally have much meaning for people nowadays, but on the other hand I think Beethoven *was* looking back.

I have a curious idea about Opus 59, No. 3. I am really quite convinced that there is an autobiographical significance to the whole Quartet. Beethoven was becoming aware of his deafness very acutely at this time. It was a terrible problem to him around the time that he was writing all these great works. That introduction has always struck me as being like someone struggling to hear something, twisting this was and that, trying to hear what's happening. When the *Allegro* breaks out there's a sort of sense of relief, as if he is saying, 'Well, that's all right. My inner ear is all right; I can hear inside my head perfectly well, everything is perfectly clear'.

The *Andante* that follows is very disturbing. Its very lonely and it suggests to me a man cut off from human communication, fighting against loneliness. And the third movement is a minuet. I really honestly believe that it is a minuet because Beethoven was now thinking in terms of the music he heard most clearly when his hearing was intact, when minuets were commonplace, when it was normally the third movement of a quartet.

And thus we have this minuet, the one movement in this work in which there is peace. And as to the last movement, as we all know Beethoven himself wrote on the sketches: 'Let your deafness be no longer a secret, even in your art'. That's a clue which I think is proof of some autobiographical intention in the work. Obviously I am fortunate enough not to have to express such terrible feelings in my work. When I came to write four movements of a quartet, my ideas about the personal element in Beethoven's Quartet weren't particularly relevant, except in this sense: Beethoven's minuet is there for a specific reason.

It is the one great moment of repose in the work and I, too, wanted a moment of repose, a peaceful part of the work. I couldn't have a stylised pastiche minute, and so I had to have something which, perhaps, had a sense of the archaic about it. I hit on the idea of an absolutely strict canon in four parts on the intervals stated at the beginning of the Quartet, this string of fifths. So each part enters at these same intervals, and the canon is maintained throughout.

Beethoven has a lively middle section – the trio of the minuet is more lively than the minuet itself. I also wanted to reflect that and I have a livelier middle section to the canon, but the canon itself persists through it and through the recapitulation, which is also stated a fifth away from the original pitch – so the fifths come into it in all sorts of ways. This is a very strict canon, note for note, interval for interval. The only way in which it departs from total strictness is in changes of register, where perhaps the cello or the viola has to go up or down an octave just to fit the part in – but I don't really count that as a departure from strictness. It cost me an enormous amount of work, this canon. I'm not ashamed of it; I think it is rather a fine canon, I think it's rather beautiful. So there it is, and that is what it's meant to be – the point of repose. And, of course, the finale (as Beethoven's does) breaks in on it at the end and lets rip in a way I hope players won't find too taxing.

MM: You were talking about the archaic nature of this canon. I can hear the archaism in Beethoven's minuet, but I cannot hear the archaism in your canon. It seems to me to be an absolutely mature Simpson canon of the mid-twentieth century. I think this has to do with the fact that the minuet as a form has certain inevitable archaic associations for us now ...

RS: It's stylised, isn't it?

MM: Yes, it's stylised, while canon as a device has continued to be a vital compositional resource for composers up to our day. Schoenberg, for instance, wrote all those lovely little tonal canons, possibly as style composition, possibly as exercises, but there are also totally Schoenbergian canons throughout his major works (*Pierrot Lunaire* is an obvious example). And I cannot really believe here that the canon in this work is more 'archaic' than, say, the canonic sections in your Fifth Symphony.

RS: Well, it's not stylised canon. It's not canon with a pastiche flavour. I only said archaic in the sense that the canon is one of the oldest devices in music. And so I went back to that and also to the idea of absolute strictness – not the kind of strictness which is possible nowadays, in which you put down the strict intervals whether or not they make sense, but a strictness in relation to fundamental natural harmonic phenomena – intervals such as fifths and fourths, thirds and octaves, and so on. The harmony is basically diatonic and classical in that sense. A lot of people would think it was archaic.

MM: Yes, I see what you mean. Could we say a little about your second movement? Beethoven's second movement is very obsessive and lonely, as you said, and a very disturbing movement, perhaps the most disturbing movement in this Quartet.

RS: It's unique in Beethoven, that kind of movement.

MM: One of the most obsessive things about it, of course, is the rhythm which hardly ever lets up at this point. In your Quartet you have done something rather different; there's a counterpart to Beethoven's rhythm, a sort of hypnotic, treadmill rhythm that goes on for large stretches of it. You seemed to have spotlighted first one instrument, then another as soloist, and each time that an instrument emerges in this way it seems to be trying desperately to break away, out of this psychotic treadmill notion. So this gives the movement an entirely different character.

RS: That's the result, of course, of using different material. I wasn't out to imitate Beethoven's mood, although I think there is something obsessive in common with these two pieces. The A-minorish feeling is very strong in my Quartet: A's and E's stick out like sore thumbs all over the place, and in Beethoven one is very conscious of A minor. Also in the centre of the movement Beethoven suddenly goes into the remote key of E $\flat$  with that second theme and a great cloud comes over the whole thing; then it drifts back into A minor. I've reflected that; I think that would be fairly obvious.

MM: It's just that I found very striking the idea of the instrument at one time or another bursting out in these very desperate-sounding solo passages.

RS: The viola especially.

MM: And the cello.

RS: But the viola is unmuted and the other instruments are muted. That was an idea I got from Brahms's B $\flat$  Quartet – so you see nothing I do is original! I think Goethe said, very kindly, the genius is the most indebted man. So I console myself with this.

MM: Perhaps we could talk a little more about originality in a minute. First I would like to say that I've come to feel studying your Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Quartets that they do – in their own right, quite apart from their relationship to the 'Rasumowskys' – form a self-consistent group; and for me this Sixth Quartet has very definitely the feeling of being the finale, the concluding and conclusive member of the group. I think this comes home especially in the last few pages of the Quartet, because neither the Fourth nor Fifth Quartet has a tonally absolutely decisive ending in the way that No. 6 seems to. In the Fourth Quartet there was a contest between the D and F which in the end isn't really resolved – it's simply ended by F slamming in with the final say; and in the Fifth Quartet the finale scurries off over the horizon and vanishes.

RS: I think the key of E is quite settled at the end, though.

MM: Yes, but the sense is of one of the argument still going on somewhere else, whereas in the Sixth Quartet it seems to me that the final cadence is absolutely decisive, as if putting an end to possibly more than just this Quartet – the whole

discussion that has been going on in all three Quartets. Do you think there is anything in that?

RS: Oh, I think there very well might be. I don't know; I wasn't really conscious of doing that. After all I suppose one is conscious of that in Beethoven's quartets, too. The finale of the C major is the finale to end all finales in a sense.

MM: Let me now be a sort of devil's advocate. What would you say to the criticism – and I'm sure there are going to be some who are going to raise it – that basically these quartets are extremely conservative works, that they don't extend the quartet medium in any way, in the way, for instance, the 'Rasumowskys' did in Beethoven's time; the fact that they are parasitic on Beethoven means they cannot really stand up on their own feet?

RS: Well, I react to that in rather the same way as Stravinsky (who is not one of my gods, incidentally) reacted when somebody asked him what he thought of Sibelius. He said, 'Why should I think of Sibelius?' And this is the way I react to hostile critics. I see no reason to give them an answer. In fact, I will give you an answer because I don't regard you as an hostile critic. I think that hostility is really pointless in a case like this. What really does matter to me is the fact that I learned a great deal from doing this, and having done it I then decided to come clean. Now I wonder – if I had not declared their origin – whether these works would stand on their own feet. I think probably they will.

MM: I am absolutely certain they will.

RS: Well then, there is no more to be said, really. I think there is an obsession nowadays with doing new things, making new sounds, extending the medium – all this stuff and nonsense. You can't extend the medium – a string quartet is a string quartet, it's four stringed instruments which are tuned, even nowadays, in the traditional manner of fifths. A great many composers who write for string quartets these days forget that altogether.

Many string players, quartet players, have said to me that when they play contemporary works they are not conscious any more of having four individuals in a quartet. All they are doing is making the same sort of noises at different pitches according to the compass of their instruments. The two fiddles don't feel that they are two fiddle players as opposed to a viola or a cello and that they are involved in a discussion. If you are going to get quartets to have some kind of discussion then you must write naturally for them as individuals, you must use basic intervals. This isn't being conservative, this is being conservationist, I would say. 'To be conservative' is the worst way of putting it because what we discover that is new is in us. It is not anywhere else.

It is no good some critic telling me that I haven't done anything new when I know myself that for me I have done something that I haven't done before, that I have not seen done before. Beethoven's Quartets in this case are starting points for something that I wanted to do. There are resemblances that you can see, and I see nothing wrong in that any more than I see anything wrong in a composer writing variations on somebody else's theme. Nobody ever criticises composers for doing that, so I don't really see that they should start doing that if somebody writes a variation on a whole work.

The great thing is to write naturally, as you feel. If you try desperately to be original, then that shows that you are not original, because the harder you try, the more of an effort it becomes, the less spontaneous it becomes. The fact is that you are a different person from anybody else, that we have different fingerprints, that we are totally different individuals, and so if I am myself, if I do what is natural, then I hope I will say something that is characteristic of me and meaningful because I am a person who lives in the twentieth century who is aware of what is going on and who has feelings.

And so I mustn't worry about this, I must just do what comes naturally, and if other people don't like it or don't see it, as far as I am concerned it's their funeral. They've had it. I just carry on doing what I think is right. If you haven't got any individuality at all, you can try as hard as you can, but very likely you won't get it. There are plenty of plodders who make a hell of a lot of effort but don't get it. The real effort should be in discovering what lies inside yourself, and any means is legitimate to do that, whether it is Beethoven's quartets, or Bach's fugues, or nothing at all, any means you might find stimulating, that starts you off, that starts a flow of ideas. The hostile critics can go and stuff themselves as far as I'm concerned.

MM: Beethoven in a sense gives you permission, or frees you into discovering what is in yourself, then?

RS: That's the way it seems to me. Everyone is entitled to his own view. People listening to these Quartets may say: 'For God's sake, what the hell is this chap doing, wasting his time? It's so impertinent to appear to be imitating Beethoven in this way'. It isn't imitation. It is a much sincerer form of flattery than that. It is a desire to discover what went on in Beethoven's musical mind when he was writing these Quartets, and to try and feel my way into them by means of music. I may say that it started because it was suggested to me by several people that I should write a book on Beethoven's Quartets, and the 'Rasumowskys' in particular, arising out of a TV programme that I did on the Third 'Rasumowsky' some years ago. I thought seriously about this, and then I thought, 'no, I don't want to write any more books, I want to write only music, and at least I can teach myself a lesson by doing this. If it doesn't

come off, all right, I'll put it away and nobody will see it or hear it'. But when they were finished, I thought 'they are worth hearing', and so I took my life in my hands, said 'That's what I've done. There it is. Take it or leave it.'

MM: Can you imagine ever doing the same kind of thing again with a masterwork by another great composer of the classic period?

RS: I doubt it but I don't know. It's possible, but I think if I did it again, I wouldn't declare my guilt, I wouldn't confess. I'd just do it and see whether anybody noticed it.

## Robert Simpson's String Quartets Nos. 4, 5, & 6 and their relationship to Beethoven's Opus 59 'Rasumowsky' Quartets<sup>1</sup> Simon Phillippo

Composers in most epochs have reworked the substance of existent music to make more. In the twentieth century borrowing from others has become a way of life for some composers, raised to the height of an artistic principle. Although Robert Simpson, with his vehemently classical view of music, would dissociate himself from the cannibal aesthetic, he too has ingested the music of other composers at various times to produce his own. In the 1970s he composed his Fourth, Fifth and Sixth String Quartets, modelling them closely on an entire set of quartets by Beethoven, the Opus 59 'Rasumowskys'. These quartets are remarkable, both as works in their own right and as what amounts to a set of musical commentaries on an unprecedented scale. It is the way in which Beethoven serves as a stimulus, and the diverse modelling procedures Simpson employs, which is the subject of this discussion.

A principal aim of Robert Simpson throughout his creative life was to 'recapture classical momentum'<sup>2</sup> – a momentum which he felt to be missing in much music of the twentieth century, and which powerfully drives the kind of symphonic forms that make up the majority of Simpson's output. Such large structures, he believed, require the clear direction, harmonic propulsion, and distribution of tensions and proportions that exist in the music of the classical masters, and in particular in that of Simpson's own 'gods', Beethoven, Haydn, Bruckner and Nielsen.

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in *Tonic* 8, 1997, pp. 7–23.

<sup>2</sup> From a conversation between Robert Simpson and Malcolm MacDonald, BBC Radio 3, 27 January 1980; in this volume p. 274.

Beethoven was a tangible influence on much of Simpson's music. His Second Symphony (1956) recalls the bacchanal rawness of the finale of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony; Simpson's Fourth (1970/72) is cast in the classical four-movement form, taking the *Eroica*'s E♭ as its principal tonality, with a very Ninth-like scherzo. John Pickard has demonstrated the correspondences between the Tenth Symphony (1988) and Beethoven's Opus 106 *Hammerklavier* Sonata,<sup>3</sup> and the very close relationship that Simpson's Third (1962) has to Beethoven's Ninth.<sup>4</sup> More explicitly, Simpson has also written Variations on a Theme by Beethoven, for piano.

All of this explains why Beethoven should here prove an enticing focus for Simpson, but the specific reason for his choosing the 'Rasumowskys' as models is more complex. The received explanation for the writing of Robert Simpson's Fourth (1973), Fifth (1974) and Sixth (1975) Quartets is as follows. The composer presented a television lecture on Opus 59, No. 3, which was a success, and Simpson was pressed to write a book on the 'Rasumowskys'. This he declined to do, favouring instead a kind of analysis-through-music. The composer's preface to the published scores modestly implies that these quartets may have little more than pedagogic value. While this is a gross understatement, from one perspective these works can certainly be heard as a 'close study' of the Beethoven quartets, and clearly their composition involved a thorough analysis of the models. Also, the project was a deeply personal homage to Simpson's beloved Beethoven. However, I suspect that there was a much more important, personal reason why these three works were written in this way. Beethoven's 'first' and 'second' periods were separated by the confessional document known as the 'Heiligenstadt Testament' of October 1802. This letter is a revelation of Beethoven's intense grief at his solitude and deafness. The emotional catastrophe behind the Testament marked a turning point in his artistic life, giving way to music of new determination, exemplified in the 'heroic' Third Symphony. After this work, in which proportion, thematic invention and tonality were carried to unprecedented levels of scale and intensity, Beethoven could not return to the modest classicism of his Opus 18 quartets. Thus, those of Opus 59 display a new symphonicism of design which makes the set such a landmark in the history of the genre.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> John Pickard, 'Robert Simpson's Tenth Symphony', *The Musical Times* cxxxii/1775, 1991, pp. 703–705.

<sup>4</sup> John Pickard, 'Simpson's Third Symphony – an analysis', *Tonic* 6, 1994, pp. 3–27; in this volume pp. 128–167.

<sup>5</sup> The string quartet was not the first of Beethoven's principal genres to be infected with the new 'heroic' style inaugurated by the *Eroica*; the *Kreutzer* Sonata for Violin and Piano, the *Waldstein* and *Appassionata* Piano Sonatas, and the first two versions of *Fidelio* (*Leonore*) all came before the 'Rasumowskys'. In the same year as these Quartets were written (1806), Beethoven also composed the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Fourth Symphony and the Violin Concerto.

Intensity is heightened by the sense that the three works might perhaps form an integrated whole, (though each is of very different character), ending with the colossal finale of the C major Quartet. Above the sketches of this movement is Beethoven's famous note: 'Let your deafness be no longer a secret, even in your art.' This brings the anguish of the 'Heiligenstadt Testament' once more to mind, signifying that this quartet, if not the whole set, has been a cathartic process, culminating in vigorous, affirmative conviction.

Such speculation can be extended to Simpson's quartets also; he had undergone a comparably catalytic experience shortly before writing them. The composition of the Fifth Symphony in 1972 was interrupted by a brain haemorrhage and a serious operation in which Simpson was in danger of losing his life. The symphony, completed during his convalescence, is a disturbing work, in which a still, steady chord is bombarded by violent elements of disruption. This symphony can thus be heard as an equivalent 'Testament' of Simpson at this time, following which a return to the intimacy of the string quartet (after nearly twenty years) seems understandable; and it is a telling coincidence that it was to the cathartic 'Rasumowskys' that Simpson turned, as if in an attempt to rebuild his language, to 'recapture' the 'classical (tonal) momentum' which had been such a feature of his previous music, but which had been much less central to the Fifth Symphony.<sup>6</sup>

While it is not the business of this discussion to attempt any amateur psychoanalysis or to pry into the private concerns of Robert Simpson, the above would seem a viable reason as to why this particular project was undertaken; a reason which might also explain the didactic stance, the sense of progression which binds these three works, the powerful feeling of conclusion in the Sixth Quartet and the specific modelling procedures which I shall investigate. Furthermore, I believe that these three quartets represent a turning point in Simpson's language with profound implications for his later works.

Certainly the composition of Simpson's 'Rasumowskys' was a process; partly to explore, partly to rehabilitate and, knowing Simpson's anti-modernist convictions, partly polemic. It is through a study of the composer's methods of modelling on Beethoven's Opus 59 that this process and the works themselves can best be understood.

The first movement of the Fourth Quartet is of them all the most closely and manifestly modelled on its counterpart in Opus 59. Simpson's approach at the beginning of the set is essentially that of *variation* on the model, with formal similarities. As well

<sup>6</sup> The swift Scherzino movement in the Fifth Symphony derives its speed more from insistent rhythmic repetition than from harmonic propulsion; and the outer sections of the Symphony, though highly active harmonically, violently resist the establishment of any fixed tonal centre.

as the usual sonata components, Beethoven's more innovative structural arrangements are replicated by Simpson; even the bar numbers correspond throughout most of its length.

The essential surface-variations applied to the 'Rasumowsky' movement are the faster tempo and the change to 3/4 time from Beethoven's 4/4. This gives the music a lighter character, which has implications for the quartet as a whole. This basic difference apart, Simpson is careful not to conceal the Beethoven in this movement: the initial theme and texture proclaim the model for all to hear:

### Example 1a (Beethoven)

**Allegro**

5

*mf e dolce*

*cresc.*

*p*

*cresc.*

*p*

### Example 1b (Simpson)

**Allegro**

*p*

*p*

*cantabile e risoluto*

5

Violin I: *cresc.* *mf* *pp*

Violin II: *cresc.* *mf* *pp*

Viola: *cresc.* *f* *p*

Both composers begin with a lyrical passage, over a background of dissonance and crescendo, and the opening accompaniment and cello themes have obvious similarities. By missing out Beethoven's e in bar one, Simpson creates a three-note motif [0, 2, 5] which permeates the entire movement, as does Beethoven's scalar figure. In both movements, this opening melody ascends through several octaves, and such ascent becomes a thematic principle of much of the ensuing music.

Throughout the piece, the themes share sufficient characteristics with their progenitors to allow recognition of the process taking place, and the texture of the quartets is often similar. This is true even at bar 30, where Beethoven's texture is inverted, with the moving parts in the viola and cello rather than the violins. The variation does not disguise the essentially flowing nature of this second theme, emphasised by its context.

This variation procedure extends to the lifting of details out of the model, to emphasise their function and to enhance their effect within the new context. For example, this happens at the start of the transition in Simpson's movement. The source of the dissonance at bar 45, the  $a^b$ –g trill-figure in the first violin, is derived from the model; these two notes form a harsh dissonance in bars 53 and 57 of the Beethoven.

#### Example 2a (Simpson)

45

Violin I: *sf* *f*

Violin II: *sf* *f*

Viola: *sf* *f*

Cello: *sf* *f*

## Example 2b (Beethoven)

This is not simply a heightened method of variation and derivation. It also has demonstrative value, highlighting the tension that Beethoven creates by means of his equivalent dissonance, and we know that such didacticism was one of the initial reasons for Simpson's quartets being composed. Simpson uses degrees of stability and instability, consonance and dissonance on the surface of the music, as a means of demonstrating the 'distribution of tensions' within the Beethoven. This is more profound than the layout of themes, the sonata structure and so on, and it tells us as much about how Simpson listens to Beethoven as it does about the 'Rasumowsky' itself.

Simpson's second subject, at bar 60, is the most consonant music in the movement, being purest C major until bar 66. There is a minimum of leaps in the melodic writing, and the use of hemiolas slows the music down. The clarity of this theme stands out after the harmonic and rhythmic pungency of the bridge-passage, but it is also a marked contrast to the primary material. This, in the Simpson, is never heard as a focused F major, and consequently the second subject stands out as harmonically secure. The long-term implication of this is in the recapitulation, where this theme returns in the tonic key.

## Example 3 (exposition; second subject)



Simpson's point is that Beethoven's first subject is not stable either: his first theme is underlined by  $\frac{4}{4}$  harmony;<sup>7</sup> his first 'tutti', at bar 19, comes to nothing but disintegrates into diminished sevenths; and in the recapitulation, Beethoven takes his meandering theme from bar 30 into the distant key of  $D\flat$  major before returning to the tonic for the second group. The effect of all this is to throw considerable tonal and structural weight onto the secondary theme, and Simpson's harmonisation emphasises this.

This demonstration of comparative thematic stability is extended by Simpson to the overall tonal architecture of the movement. Not only is the surface-dissonance of Simpson's chromatic tonal language used as an analogy to Beethoven's structural dissonance at specific points in the music,<sup>8</sup> but in this way Simpson also uses it as a means of showing the function of the circle of fifths, the basis of Beethoven's classical tonality. In the bridge-passage, for example, Beethoven moves to the secondary dominant (G) for the strikingly active cello theme. Like the *ff* at bar 19, this is delusory: the cello idea almost sounds like a fugue subject, but it grinds to a halt in four bars. Simpson replicates this fugal impression and analogises the secondary dominant's function – the overshoot of the new tonic as a means of preparation – by momentarily destroying any sense of tonal gravity, before cadencing in C. The principle of tonal distancing is the same but the method is new, teaching the listener something about classical tonality at the same time.

While the demonstrative value of all this is evident, Simpson is chiefly concerned with the evolution of his own musical ideas. The instability of his primary material mentioned above is caused by the main feature of Simpson's own tonal argument:

<sup>7</sup> Since Beethoven's opening theme constitutes a large-scale perfect cadence, the fact that the underlying progression is  $V[I_4^6-V^7]-I$ , as opposed to  $I_4^6-V^7-I$ , renders the apparent tonic harmony of the first phrase even more unstable; the initial F major is not yet tonicized.

<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, for the second subject – Beethoven's primary structural dissonance – this procedure is reversed; Simpson replicates the otherness of this theme by means of diatonic consonance.

from the very beginning he establishes D as a powerful anti-tonic to F, the two keys existing almost symbiotically throughout the piece. Although this too serves to expose something in the model, and is also an advanced form of lateral variation, Simpson's tonal scheme in this work supersedes both of these concerns.

The source of the idea is three-fold. Firstly, in the opening movement of Opus 59, No. 1, Beethoven establishes D $\flat$  major as a similar kind of anti-tonic, which is used to important structural effect in the development and recapitulation. It does not seriously challenge the tonic, but it presents a tension other than that of the traditional dominant. Secondly, the finale of Beethoven's quartet uses a 'thème russe', essentially a dorian melody, wittily harmonised in F. The ambiguity that ensues permeates the tonal substance of the finale; Simpson integrates this idea into the entire work. And thirdly, this practice of conflicting tonalities is used extensively in the music of Nielsen, although this quartet is obviously not an example of 'progressive' tonality in any Nielsenesque sense.

Simpson's harmonic instability at the start, comparable with Beethoven's  $\frac{6}{4}$ , derives from the immediate presence of D in the accompaniment. The second violin and viola play a and g, from the dominant seventh chord of D, and the cello theme itself suggests D major as early as the second bar, with the move to F $\sharp$  emphasised by the hemiola. The initial tonal dichotomy is borne out as the first violin enters with [0, 2, 5] on d'. As mentioned above, F itself is seldom focused, and often themes in this key have their second phrase in D, such as this at the start, the meandering theme at bar 30, and even the fully-harmonised version of the opening theme in bar 348 of the coda.

After the second subject at bar 73 of both movements, the texture fragments. Whereas in the Beethoven this scattered texture gathers together again in a II–V–I cadence in the dominant, Simpson at this point continues his F–D oscillation, with the passing F major of bar 80 giving way to a unison C $\sharp$ –D trill figure in bar 84:

#### Example 4

The musical score for Example 4 begins at bar 80. It consists of four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The first violin part starts with a melodic line marked 'cresc.' and includes several triplets. The other three staves (Violin II, Viola, and Cello) also feature triplet patterns, with the cello part having a 'cresc.' marking. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The notation includes various accidentals and dynamic markings, illustrating a complex rhythmic and harmonic texture.

Throughout the movement much is made of the enharmonic ambiguity of C# and Db; these equivalent pitches are not used as tonal centres, but act as a pivot between F and D, the spelling of the note depending on the direction of the voice-leading (i.e. C# to D, Db to C). In this particular example above, the pivotal note mediates between the two protagonist keys.

The development sections of these two respective works are of particular interest, especially from the modelling perspective, as here Simpson manages to balance the basic formal outline of the 'Rasumowsky', while being faithful to his own material. He does this by departing from the letter of Beethoven's tonal scheme, with his own F–D dialectic receiving a full exploration. It is worth examining certain features of these comparative sections in some detail.

Both developments begin with a mock-repeat of the exposition. Four bars are identical to those at the start of the piece, before foreign notes appear. Beethoven cadences in Bb major at bar 112, which retrospectively suggests that the development actually began in the dominant of the subdominant. Simpson here allows his own tonal narrative to command the harmonic direction, and he returns to his anti-tonic, D. The retrospective paradox exists here too, for as at the start of the movement, the pulsating accompaniment of a and g in the middle parts can imply the dominant of D. If this is heard, then the move to that key at bar 111 sounds prepared by the ambiguity inherent in this dyad. Simpson replaces the V–I logic of Beethoven's passage with this juxtaposition of twin tonalities, an equivalent aural inevitability having been prepared in the exposition by F continually giving way to D.

Beethoven's development is in two halves, with a tonic-minor 'mill pond' at its centre. The first half is comparatively ordinary harmonically, while the second moves from F minor to Db major – with twenty-four bars of strong Db tonicity – before a fugato begins in Eb minor. Simpson's development is also bipartite. Essentially, he focuses on his ubiquitous twin keys, and on the C#/Db ambiguity. The D major at bar 111 proves temporary, and once the fugato has started up in bar 125 (beginning on Ab) the harmony is closer to F than to D. The cello part, from bar 134, is full of Dbs, with the strong implication of downward-resolution heightened by the descending sequence of [0, 2, 5] figures, now inverted, in the viola and first violin. After a head-on clash of semitones at bar 149, the first violin heralds the reappearance of D, with the strong quasi-cadential e'''–c#'''–d''' figure. Now Simpson creates his own 'mill pond' texture, and by bar 170 (the bar of the first real Db cadence in Beethoven) we hear a relatively clear D major.

The second half of Simpson's development begins, as in the model, with a re-energising of the texture with a fugato; but Simpson highlights the structural divi-

sion by returning to the A $\flat$  tonality of the fugato he has already suggested, as if readdressing the same issue as before from a new stand-point. The C $\sharp$ /D $\flat$  problem is renewed, with the fugal passage this time culminating in fierce chords (comparable to Beethoven's diminished sevenths) at bar 210, underlying c $\sharp$ "-d" in the first violin.

The recapitulation follows Beethoven's harmonic structure closely, with the exception of the D $\flat$  major return of the model. This would have had no relevance in the new quartet, so Simpson uses A, also a mediant from the tonic (see bars 280–293). The real problem Simpson faces at the end of his movement is that of balancing the sonata structure with a sufficiently strong tonic. This is difficult when F has been so deliberately destabilised throughout, and Simpson has to provide a powerful dominant preparation for the final cadence, which must adequately discount D as well as C. To achieve this, he writes full-bodied dominant seventh harmony from bar 385 until the sostenuto at bar 394; the first violin ascends into the heights, as in the model, but the slower tempo calms everything, and even the gentle side-step to D in the cello (bar 397) and the A major arpeggio in the first violin (bar 398) pose no real threat to the tonal stasis.

The purpose of this strong cadencing is clear (although admittedly in terms of classical sonata form it is in an unusual place), and Simpson has to use similar harmonic emphasis elsewhere. Before the development begins, in order to recreate Beethoven's illusion of a repeat, Simpson has to prepare the return of F more strongly prior to the cadence at bar 103 than Beethoven has to, with a six-bar decorated dominant seventh. Evidently, Simpson has to exaggerate these moments to make sense of the sonata elements, and to accommodate the model's harmonic essentials as well as his own.

The result is, inevitably, a compromise. The cheerfulness of character, the intricate variation techniques and the overtly 'Rasumowskian' formal procedures notwithstanding, this movement suffers somewhat from semantic overload; such rigour in Simpson's modelling can only limit the expression of his own musical ideas. In one sense, the most successful movements in these works are those in which the model and its syntax are completely absorbed into the new piece on all levels. From another perspective, however, it may be argued that the locus of meaning in these quartets lies in this very tension between the various creative and didactic intentions underlying the endeavour; our experience is not of an *independent quartet*, but of a flexible *relationship* between one quartet and another.

On the larger scale of the entire Fourth Quartet, the full-flowering of the F–D dialectic occurs in the finale. This is the weightiest movement of the work, unlike the

Beethoven, and it lacks the Arcadian whimsicality of the model. The material is much less obviously derived from Beethoven, and the model's final *Adagio ma non troppo* is given much greater emphasis in order to focus the tonal argument, before the coda equivocally 'dismisses' the debate.

In a similar way to the finale of the Fourth Quartet, the slow movement of No. 5 keeps to the broad structural outline of its model, but uses material which is utterly different, with only tenuous surface correspondences. There is, in Simpson's *Adagio*, a feeling of contemplation which one can hear in the Beethoven slow movement, and the feeling of peace emanating from this music sets it apart from the rest of the work.

The large-scale tonal organisation of this quartet derives from Beethoven's use of the phrygian mode. The C major/E minor joke in the finale is famous, but the first movement is also full of such Neapolitan relationships; indeed it begins by making this clear, repeating the initial idea up a semitone, with the transposed version disembodied by silence.

#### Example 5a

Allegro

Simpson begins his first movement similarly:

## Example 5b

**Allegro molto**

The musical score for Example 5b is presented in two systems, each containing four staves. The first system begins with a tempo marking of 'Allegro molto'. The first two staves of the first system are marked with 'ff' (fortissimo) and feature a melodic line with a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The third and fourth staves of the first system are marked with 'pp' (pianissimo) and feature a more active, rhythmic line. The second system continues the musical material, with the first two staves marked 'pp' and the third and fourth staves also marked 'pp'. The music is written in 2/4 time and features a variety of rhythmic values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, as well as rests. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the overall texture is complex, with multiple melodic and rhythmic lines interacting.

In the post-Nielsen manner of the Fourth Quartet, he then proceeds to make E and B, together with their Neapolitan counterparts, F and C, the tonal centres of the work, and the intervals of fifths and seconds yielded by this set of pitches inform much of the material. The important difference between Simpson's use of this technique in this work and in No. 4 is that here the key centres come directly from the model in question; in the Fourth Quartet, D had been extended back from the finale, and was alien to Beethoven's immediate harmonic structure.

Part of the other-worldliness of the *Adagio* of No. 5, therefore, results from the main theme's departure from this phrygian sound-world. It begins in a clear E major, and the tonality is strengthened by the second phrase of the theme, which begins in C# major. Such harmony is foreign to both E minor and E phrygian. The modal inflections return in Simpson's transitional passages, and the codas of both his exposition and recapitulation are very much more tonally active than in the model. The closing pages re-establish the tonal ground-rules of the whole quartet, with chords of

B $\flat$  major returning from the development section, and C–B semitonal figures appearing throughout the texture. The cadence in the final bar is modal. Beethoven's harmony has elements of concealed modality, most markedly in the development section; the reinstatement of the phrygian key centres towards the end of Simpson's *Adagio*, preparing for the harmonic nature of the scherzo, is an extension of this.

The variation-orientated modelling of the kind used in the Fourth Quartet's first movement would surely have replicated the calm, rocking ostinato figure of Beethoven's bars 48–51:

### Example 6

Here this kind of surface analogy is not attempted – the model is in the background of the music only, and so the conflict of interests discussed in relation to No. 4 is not an issue.

Despite the surface differences, the slow movement of the Fifth Quartet keeps close to Beethoven's proportions. Even the bar numbers correspond approximately throughout. A profitable case-study of Simpson's departure from the spirit of the models and from their literal structures, as well as from the thematic material, is in his scherzo movements.

The scherzo of Opus 59, No. 1 is unusual; it is a combination of dance-form and sonata elements. While this is at a controlled *Allegretto vivace* tempo, Simpson writes a Presto movement. Both share the same tonal plan, with B $\flat$  as tonic, and both begin with a naked rhythm, a kind of tattoo which informs much of the movements' material.

## Example 7a (Beethoven)



## Example 7b (Simpson)



There are formal resemblances too, with the 'distribution of tensions' being essentially the same. But Simpson's music bears no similarity to the Beethoven in anything but these proportions. It is at a much faster tempo, and has a feeling of frenzy about it.

The main structural difference lies in Simpson's invention of a trio section, which has only the loosest roots in the model. Whereas Joseph Kerman has convincingly identified bars 115 to 150 in the Beethoven as a notional trio,<sup>9</sup> with its regular dance-like phrase structure, together with its return at bar 354, Simpson highlights something different in the model to become his trio material: the B major idea at bar 177. This is doubtless a very striking moment, and Simpson evokes a similar contrast, with a slower tempo and new material, making this a more self-contained section than Beethoven's (bar 340). Having done this, he needs, for the sake of symmetry, to return to this theme – as a second trio, in effect – at bar 879. Its reprise is in the tonic major:

## Example 8

*poco rit.*

877

*pp*

*p dolce*

*p dolce*

*p dolce*

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Kerman, *The Beethoven Quartets*, New York: Knopf, 1966; Norton, 1979, p. 106.

883 *poco rit.* *a tempo*

*pp* *pp* *p dolce* *p dolce* *p dolce* *p dolce*

888

893 *ravvivando* *tempo primo*

*pp* *pp* *pp* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff*

One can discern formal comparisons: both movements are double scherzos, both trios return in the tonic, and thereby both composers combine sonata and scherzo elements. But Simpson has to depart greatly from the structure of the model for his own music to work convincingly, with the required balance. The movement is none the worse for this; indeed, in such an energetic piece, the repeated slower section is a stroke of genius, proving that Simpson is composing first, modelling second. From the latter perspective, however, it is interesting that the formal departure stems from

a slightly dubious interpretation of Beethoven's movement – perhaps an example of Bloomian 'misprision'.<sup>10</sup>

The scherzo of No. 5 represents a still wider deviation from the model. Palindromes were a source of creative fascination for Simpson throughout his life, but here he extended this principle of symmetry and composed an arch-form movement.

First we hear the scherzo itself, followed by a trio with a simple tune (as in the model, though this is not specifically Russian) which is treated in two mad-cap fugal expositions, culminating in furious strettos. Then, at bar 148, the scherzo returns in a shortened version; but the energetic triplets of the close of the trio are carried over, so that this scherzo actually forms the central climax of the movement. Trio number two begins suddenly at bar 200, and this time the opposite process takes place. There is a textural diminuendo, triplets become duplets, and the final scherzo at bar 232 is a pianissimo repetition of the initial version.

This is a different kind of deviation from the Beethoven model. Again the basic formal divisions remain intact, and there are harmonic correspondences, but there the analogies end. The use of an arch form is an entirely Simpsonian idea, rooted in his own artistic predilections, and the original is held at a distance.

A still more striking departure takes place in the third movement of the Sixth Quartet. Beethoven makes a very surprising return to the Rococo minuet at this point, and this clearly raises serious questions of meaning and intent. Simpson himself described this movement in 'Rasumowsky' No. 3 as 'the one point of repose in the whole work'.<sup>11</sup> He also suggested that Beethoven, now struggling to come to terms with his deafness, is here concerned to recreate music he used to hear in his younger days.<sup>12</sup>

In 1975 a minuet would have had no meaning except as a relic, or as pastiche. Simpson avoided any such treatment; instead he took the idea of using an archaic device a stage further, and wrote a canon. The chief difference is that, despite this being a very ancient technique, canons still feature in the music of composers today, having been especially important in the music of the Second Viennese School.

Despite the *molto tranquillo* indication, Simpson's double canon is by no means a moment of intellectual 'repose'. It is strict, and intended to be heard as such. For in-

<sup>10</sup> Kevin Korsyn, 'Towards a New Poetics of Musical Influence', *Music Analysis* 10, 1991, pp. 3–72. (A discussion of Harold Bloom's literary theories applied to music).

<sup>11</sup> BBC broadcast 10<sup>th</sup> February 1980; in the present volume p. 299.

<sup>12</sup> More recent Beethoven studies have revealed that some material used in the minuet was actually sketched years earlier. This suggests a certain expediency, and indicates, along with other factors, that Op. 59 no. 3 was composed hastily. See William Kinderman, *Beethoven*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 109.

stance, the composer carefully arranges, within each pair of voices, certain features to be heard in order, such as the four ascending scales in bars 5 and 6.

There is a kind of trio section, at the *Allegro grazioso* ('grazioso' being Beethoven's marking for the actual minuet), through which the canonic procedure continues, before the opening tempo returns at bar 119. Here the whole thing is up a fifth, providing a kind of tonal variety and balance for which Beethoven has no need in his very static C major.

The 'Rasumowsky' minuet has a long coda which clouds this harmonic simplicity. Simpson writes only a three-bar coda, which contrasts texturally, being chordal, and which outlines the tonal centres of this quartet. These form a series of minor thirds: C–E $\flat$ –F $\sharp$ –A.

The differences between these two third movements could not be more pronounced. Notwithstanding the basic centrality of C in the Simpson, even harmonic analogies are hard to find, and the spirit of the music is completely different. This is the most divergent of all the movements in these three works, with the real modelling taking place in advance of the music itself. Simpson decides to write a canon after following through Beethoven's pre-compositional thought processes, as he hypothesises them to have been. It is therefore the occasion for the music – the reason for its composition – which is of prime concern, rather than the actual substance of the movement itself.

The depth of the modelling here takes on still broader implications when one considers the network of influences involved in both 'Rasumowsky' No. 3, and Simpson's Sixth Quartet as a whole. Joseph Kerman has pointed out that there is a strong reminiscence of Mozart's K465 'Dissonance' quartet in Opus 59, No. 3; not only in the tonicless introduction, but even in some of the Allegro material as well.<sup>13</sup> Alan Tyson also connects these two works.<sup>14</sup> Lionel Pike demonstrates some similarities between this Beethoven work and Haydn's quartet Opus 74, No. 1 – also in C major, with structural weight similarly given to E $\flat$  and A.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, in the recapitulation of the finale, the fugue returns with an additional subject, in minims:

<sup>13</sup> Kerman, *The Beethoven Quartets*, op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>14</sup> Alan Tyson, 'The "Rasumowsky" Quartets: Some Aspects of the Sources', *Beethoven Studies* 3, ed. Alan Tyson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp. 122–124.

<sup>15</sup> Lionel Pike. *The language of the Rasumowsky Quartets* (unpublished).

## Example 9a

This has a host of C major forbears:

## Example 9b Haydn, Opus 74, No. 1

## Example 9c Mozart, Symphony No. 41 in C major, K551, finale

And a famous one in E♭:

Example 9d Mozart, *The Magic Flute* K626, overture

Simpson acknowledges Haydn's influence on his model in some of the melodic figurations of his own work, thus adding a further dimension to the compound modelling. In addition, Lionel Pike has pointed out an oblique reference to Shostakovich in the slow movement:<sup>16</sup> a D–S–C–H motif, in the opening theme, appearing at pitch in bars 4 and 5:

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

## Example 10

**Con moto; grazioso ed intensivo**  
con sord.

The musical score for Example 10 is written for piano and cello/viola. It is in 8/8 time and consists of three systems of music. The first system shows the piano playing a melody with a *pp* dynamic and the cello/viola playing a bass line. The second system shows the piano playing a melody with *mf pp* and *f pp* dynamics, and the cello/viola playing a bass line with *pp* and *f pp* dynamics. The third system shows the piano playing a melody with *pp* dynamics and the cello/viola playing a bass line with *pp* dynamics. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

There are also striking *appassionata* solo passages for cello and viola, which may remind us of the quasi-recitative sections in the Shostakovich quartets (for example, the 'Intermezzo' and 'Funeral March' movements from No. 15). Deliberate or not, these succeed in conjuring up the Slavic gloom of Beethoven's slow movement.

As mentioned, the keys of A and E $\flat$  provide gravitational centres for Beethoven, in addition to the mandatory related fifths, tonic, dominant, subdominant etc. A minor

is unsurprisingly used as the key for the slow movement, but  $E\flat$  appears as an important anti-tonic in all movements of the quartet – even the minuet, in its coda. These keys clearly derive from the diminished harmony heard in the mysterious introduction to the first movement; indeed, Beethoven even discreetly suggests these tonalities in these opening bars.<sup>17</sup>

### Example 11a

Introduzione  
Andante con moto

10

20

<sup>17</sup> A minor at bar 5,  $E\flat$  at bar 12, C at bar 29.

Simpson extends this idea, and includes the remaining pitch of Beethoven's initial diminished seventh chord, F#, in his four-fold tonal scheme. Like Beethoven, Simpson gently hints at his various key-centres during his introduction – which is equally indistinct – and just as the model does not give any of these keys a strong root-position sonority, Simpson alludes to them only by means of comparative consonance. His introduction is not especially dissonant, but comprises harmony made of major seconds and fifths. As with Beethoven's diminished seventh, Simpson's opening chord can be resolved in a number of ways, each of which he explores here:

### Example 11b

Adagio

The musical score for Example 11b, Adagio, is presented in two systems. The first system consists of four staves. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom two are in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is common time (C). The first measure of the first system is marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic, which then transitions to pianissimo (*pp*). The second system continues the piece, with a trill (*tr*) marked in the third measure of the second system. The dynamics remain at *pp* throughout the second system.

The musical score consists of two systems of four staves each. The first system (measures 13-15) shows a series of fifths and octaves in the strings, with dynamics *mf* and *pp*. The second system (measures 16-19) shows a more complex texture with dynamics *mf* and *pp*. A trill (*tr*) is marked in the Cello/Double Bass part in measure 18.

It is at the points where he opens the texture in a string of fifths and octaves that his key-centres are suggested, those being bar 2 (C), bar 10 (F#) and bar 16 (E $\flat$ ). Simpson does not include A here, saving that for his explicitly A-minorish second movement.

So, in 'Rasumowsky' No. 3 we have a surface structure of diminished seventh harmony, and its diverse resolution, and a deep structure which breaks this harmony down into its component minor thirds and tonicizes them. The Simpson apparently presents a disparity between these two structural levels: the surface of the music consists of harmony made of seconds and fifths, while the model's tonal system is employed on the deeper level, with minor-third-related keys which have no superficial manifestation.

But Simpson solves this problem. The first movement makes the most obvious use of the seconds and fifths of the introduction, in addition to the textural arrangement of the instruments into pairs in extremes of high and low register, even reintroducing part of his Adagio material in the second subject (bars 12–15 recur at bars 148–155). In the second movement the structural minor thirds take on a thematic significance of their own: each imitative strain of the opening idea culminates in oscillating thirds, all of which are eventually heard as a piled-up vertical sonority, with the thirds sep-

arated by the ubiquitous seconds and fifths, in bars 8 and 9. Of course, minor third slow tremolos appear in much of Simpson's output – another throw-back to Nielsen – but here their use is particularly justified by the tonal architecture, and by the 'Rasumovsky' model.

The finale of No. 6 is the most successful of them all. It is bold, spontaneous-sounding, and races with conviction towards its closing bars. It significantly returns to a more faithful bar-by-bar modelling, even with some clear thematic similarities to the 'Rasumovsky' finale, than Simpson has used since the first movement of No. 4. But this finale is free from any kind of self-consciousness, and any linguistic tensions are allowed positive expression. If elsewhere Simpson strives to distance himself a little strenuously from the sonorities and procedures of his models, in this movement such a strain is not evident.

The finale of the Sixth Quartet is tonally explicit. The key-centres, C, A, F# or Eb, are always audible and strong, and the final cadence in C major is the most affirmative tonic in all three quartets – indeed, one of the most powerful in Simpsons entire output. As early as bar 345 the tonic is prepared, and the harmony travels from a very clear dominant preparation from bar 405 through a more chromatic passage which never loses sight of C. The final *sf* phrase in viola and cello combines voice-leading procedures in an A major descent (beginning with the pitches of the work's first chord) and successive transpositions at the fifth. There is also a very pronounced IV–V–I cadence in the closing three bars. Tremendous concentration is amalgamated with typical 'momentum', and direct, unencumbered harmony.

### Example 12

422



Everything comes together in this magnificent finale: close modelling, inventive surface-variation, tonal explicitness, energy equivalent to that in No. 5, but with tighter harmonic control, and an overall formal balance to the whole quartet. But while this movement is a worthy counterpart to Beethoven's in its affirmation and heroism, and is in many ways a considerable advance from the earlier movements in this set of quartets, it is not the epiphany which I believe exists in this work. The great imaginative leap occurs in the preceding canon.

This movement has attracted the most extensive critical commentary of all in these works. Bayan Northcott described it as 'an elaborate, if somewhat stiff-jointed canon';<sup>18</sup> Lionel Pike indignantly rejoined that 'it is worthy of Bach or Beethoven';<sup>19</sup> Simpson himself has taken a defensive stance over this movement. In his BBC interview with Malcolm MacDonald he said:

It cost me an enormous amount of work, this canon. I'm not ashamed of it; I think it is rather a fine canon, I think it's rather beautiful. [...] It's not canon with a pastiche flavour. I only said archaic in the sense that the canon is one of the oldest devices in music. And so I went back to that and also to the idea of absolute strictness – not the kind of strictness which is possible nowadays, in which you put down the strict intervals whether or not they make sense, but a strictness in relation to fundamental natural harmonic phenomena [...].<sup>20</sup>

This movement certainly deserves to be viewed as exceptional in these works. Whatever one's opinion of it, it is the most individual and Beethoven-less of them all, as I have demonstrated. It has its own harmonic logic, resulting from the shapely counterpoint; tonicity per se is lost; 'tonality' is a redundant term. However, it does

<sup>18</sup> Bayan Northcott. 'Recent Simpson', *Tempo* 135, December 1980, pp. 43–46.

<sup>19</sup> Lionel Pike, letter to *Tonic* 1/3, 1981, p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> BBC Radio 3 1980 interview; in the present volume p. 300.

have a strong sense of direction.<sup>21</sup> The recurrence of specific intervals and motifs, at various transpositions, gives it surface-coherence and unity, while the interpassing of themes between all four players renders it a perfectly conceived piece of quartet writing.

Although within its context this movement is problematic, being somewhat undermined by the second movement at the same tempo, it does stand out from its surroundings by being so linguistically different. I believe that this canon is the most important movement in these quartets, and the starting-point for all of Simpson's later music.

Among the next major works were the Sixth and Seventh Symphonies, both composed in 1977. Neither follows tonal principles in the way Simpson's earlier music had. Instead the methods of generating material and large-scale forms from intervals themselves, which had begun in the three Quartets, come to the forefront of the compositional process.

There are many connections between these works and the two 1977 symphonies. For example, Symphony No. 6 uses canonic devices extensively, with intricate contrapuntal use of inversions and retrogrades. No. 7 derives its material from a 'cluster' of semitones, which is then unravelled and explored in a similar way to the chord at the start of the Sixth Quartet, although with far more single-minded rigour. Furthermore, both symphonies make much use of doublings at the fifth, a sonority which Simpson first used structurally in the Sixth Quartet.

It is the intervallic and contrapuntal processes at which Simpson worked so hard in the canon of the Sixth Quartet which become central to his thinking henceforth. Nielsenesque tonal conflicts, of the kind he uses in the Fourth and Fifth Quartets, and partially in No. 6, no longer feature; indeed, in his later works it is often a single interval or pitch which becomes the central point of reference, rather than a tonality. It is these that give rise to the harmonic and thematic material, and Simpson manipulates these in ways which, as Northcott has pointed out, are surprisingly close to Schoenbergian practice,<sup>22</sup> and indeed the purely intervallic thinking of Webern and late Stravinsky.

All this suggests that the composition of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth String Quartets, as well as being a gradual refining process of diverse modelling techniques –

<sup>21</sup> The Fifth Symphony provides a significant comparison. The two canons in that work are harmonically rooted squarely to the spot. The canon in the Sixth Quartet begins to explore ways in which motivic counterpoint can acquire directionality.

<sup>22</sup> BBC broadcast, 23<sup>th</sup> May 1992, prior to the first performance of Simpson's Eleventh Symphony.

from the variation-like procedures of the Fourth Quartet, to the superb integration of the Sixth – also resulted in self-discovery. Simpson's music gains in strength and sophistication, exorcising the traumas present in the Fifth Symphony.

This epiphany was the most profound spiritual dimension that Simpson's modelling venture yielded. Paradoxically it does not owe its principal debt to Beethoven's Opus 59. As well as fulfilling the initial motivations – rehabilitation, catharsis and experiment – the whole adventurous homage had the eventual result of providing Simpson with a strong new language, taking him beyond these three works into the music he composed subsequently, and providing us, through study of the relationship between the two sets of quartets, with some insight into Simpson's internal creative dialogue.

## An Astronomical Quartet (No. 7): a lesson from Robert Simpson<sup>1</sup> Lionel Pike

Many people have reason to be profoundly grateful to Robert Simpson for his extraordinarily vivid way of communicating with them: he has an uncanny knack of talking about the complex inner processes of music in such a way as to render those processes palatable, fascinating, and understandable by the layman as well as by the mere expert. It seems strange, then, that he has had – as far as I am aware – no composition pupils, especially as so many people have learned, from discussions with him as well as from his lectures and talks, so much about the inner workings of the composer's mind. Such talks have not been solely about his own music, and many have derived a deep understanding of the compositional processes used by the composers he champions. Nevertheless, I shall take one of his own compositions as an illustration of the manner in which he talks about music, using his Seventh String Quartet (1977) as an exemplar.<sup>2</sup> To listen to him talking about this work is to visit the composer's workshop, and to be introduced to the inner workings of the creative mind in a way that makes one feel deeply privileged. Such a lesson from Robert Simpson will teach one far more than many sessions from a lesser teacher.

In 1977 Lady Susi Jeans organised a concert at Cleveland Lodge, her Dorking home: this concert was held in memory of her late husband, Sir James Jeans, in order to commemorate his centenary. Lady Jeans engaged the Gabrieli String Quartet for the occasion, and – with only three months notice – she asked Robert Simpson to write something for the occasion. Though he could have chosen other media – Lady Jeans herself, as an internationally revered organ recitalist with her own house organ, could have been the chosen performer – it was for the Gabrieli String Quartet that he

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in *Tonic* 4/2, 1992, pp. 2–17. The title 'An Astronomical Quartet' was given by Dr Robert Simpson to a talk he gave on his Seventh String Quartet during a seminar at his home in Killelton, Eire, in July 1989.

<sup>2</sup> The score is published by Alfred Lengnick and Co. Ltd (1979): it will help the reader if he or she follows the discussion with the score at hand. The work has been recorded by the Delmé String Quartet on the Hyperion label.

decided to write. Perhaps this was hardly surprising, for he has said that if he were condemned to write for a single medium he would choose the string quartet; and his previous six quartets had shown ample evidence of the profound quality of his invention and thought processes. They are, indeed, symphonies for string quartet: yet he knew that the Seventh Quartet would have to be short, for there was not much time in which to write it, and – once written – not much time for the Gabrieli String Quartet to learn it. Simpson himself said about this:

You can give an orchestra a piece the night before the first performance and they'll sight-read it. In fact, if it comes to that, you can give the orchestral players the music six months in advance, but even so the best you'll ever get is a piece of sight-reading. A quartet is a different kettle of fish. Quartet players are intelligent and highly musical: they like to practise a piece and not play it in public until they've lived with it for a while.<sup>3</sup>

It is also much to the point in this present work to notice that Simpson has very decided views on writing for the quartet medium. He insists that a composer must not forget that he is writing for four solo instruments, each with four strings tuned in fifths. The relevance of tuning will be readily evident in the following discussion: as to the fact that solo strings are used, he remarks that many composers deny the fundamental nature of the string quartet by writing for the medium in the same way as they would for string orchestra.

Simpson's initial idea was to write a work consisting largely of long notes – an *Adagio*, in fact: the Gabrieli String Quartet would therefore be able to work this up in a very short time. His first musical idea was that of the line that remains stationary while a second line moves upwards to join it from below: the ascending line then passes through the stationary one. One idea, then, was basically static, the other more mobile. Nevertheless the idea, intended at first for a relatively small *Adagio*, required a much more expansive movement for its adequate treatment. The composer remarks that musical material presupposes a certain scale: 'And very soon,' he said, 'the bloody thing took over.'

Simpson does not sketch a work out before beginning to write the full score. Edmund Rubbra, on being asked how he composed, said that he started at the beginning and went on until he had reached the end: since Simpson does the same, it is quite possible for material to 'take over' in this way. He writes straight into the score in pen-

<sup>3</sup> All the quotations used in this article are taken from a talk on the Seventh String Quartet given by Robert Simpson at a seminar held in his home at Killelton, Eire, in July 1989, and at a lecture given prior to this at Royal Holloway College (University of London).

cil, and rubs out a lot: in fact, he maintains that he rubs out more than he writes (if such a thing is possible). On starting a new work he will have no idea of the scale of the finished piece.

After a while, indeed, the Seventh Quartet ceases to be an Adagio and moves into a Vivace. This Vivace turns out to be a middle section: the work is cast in an arch form (A–B–A), a form of which the composer admits to being very fond. About this central scherzo he says that he woke up one morning feeling rather good, so he thought he'd put that into the quartet. He has always been interested in the way classical composers handled rhythm, and he observes that few contemporary composers show any skill in this area ('they are mostly so bad at movement – so many are spastic, hopping backwards and forwards from one foot to the other'). The middle section continues the basic pulse of the opening, but the note-values are much quicker: it is an idea Robert Simpson had already used elsewhere and was to use again, and it has fascinated him for most of his composing life.

There is very considerable energy in this middle section ('energy', indeed, is a word Robert Simpson often uses): the scherzo, he says, has an energy like that pent-up in the Universe, from which we all derive. 'Just think,' he says, 'of the energy in your little finger – it is all part of the immense pent-up energy in the Universe.'<sup>4</sup> He is very pleased with the climax in this middle section. To produce a satisfactory climax in a string quartet needs great technical command and careful handling: if the tensions and the balances are not quite right in a symphony, the composer can always resort to applying some bangy percussion. This cannot be the case in a quartet, for there the composer has of necessity to get the tensions absolutely right.

Only after writing the Seventh String Quartet did Simpson realise that the idea of solar energy (or the energy in the Universe), along with the apparent contemplation of the vast immensities of space in the slow outer sections, was very appropriate to the occasion for which he had composed the work. Sir James Jeans was a world-famous astronomer, and the composer is himself a keen amateur astronomer and a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society.<sup>5</sup> The work, indeed, presents parallels to the Universe – quiet and mysterious, yet pulsating with energy.

<sup>4</sup> He has additionally said that the central section suggests the concentration of energy within the atom, while the outer sections show the vastness of space. He points out that it has been observed that, in size, man is half-way between the largest and smallest objects in the universe.

<sup>5</sup> The *Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society* carried the only notice of the first performance: it went by without the world taking much notice of it.

## Section A

Although some analysts despise the narrative, chronological, blow-by-blow manner of discussing music, Robert Simpson himself used this procedure in dealing with the Seventh String Quartet. The present discussion follows the composer's approach. His observations were rarely about tonality or themes, and were largely not even about rhythm: instead he was deeply concerned about building tensions and relieving them, about not letting the development of ideas run ahead too quickly so that the pace gets out of control, about occasionally 'applying the brakes' and about various means of indicating milestones, sign-posts and points of reference for the ear. It is difficult to see how these elements can adequately be discussed other than in the order in which they occur, and so this discussion starts with the first note.

Pedals and decorated pedals have a large part to play in this quartet, and the very first sound introduces them. The opening D on the first violin changes from a stopped note to an open string of the same pitch so as to give the long note some change of colour and interest. But since the use of an open string provides a sign-post for the ear, the change from a stopped note to an open string does another thing of great significance for the structure of the work as a whole: the open strings are used to govern the tonal development of this piece, as will later become clear. As far as I am aware, this is the first time any composer has used the peculiar scoring of the quartet – that is, the use of the colour of the open strings – to govern the formal organisation of a work.<sup>6</sup> The opening is shown in Example 1a:

Example 1a

**Tranquillo** (♩ = c.56)

The musical score for Example 1a shows the opening of the first movement, 'Tranquillo', in 3/4 time. The tempo is marked as 'Tranquillo' with a quarter note equal to approximately 56 beats per minute. The dynamics are marked 'pp' (pianissimo). The score is for Violin I and Violin II. Violin I starts with a half note D4 (open string) and a half note E4 (stopped), then continues with a series of eighth notes. Violin II starts with a half note D4 (open string) and a half note E4 (stopped), then continues with a series of eighth notes. The score is written in treble clef for both parts.

<sup>6</sup> This is foreshadowed in the third movement of Simpson's Fifth String Quartet; and the interval of a fifth is much in evidence throughout the Sixth Quartet.

The second violin approaches the pedal from below; the opening chromatic C–C#–D (I shall refer to this figure as *z*) indicates in miniature at the very outset the general drift of the music towards the final D. The first violin part in bar 5 derives from this, but in so doing it reiterates a semitone rise and fall (which I shall refer to as figure *b*). In reality this is a decorated pedal – a device that is destined to play a very large part later on. The first violin in bars 6–8 has two upward leaps (each immediately repeated) against the pedal D: these two leaps regard the static D from different perspectives, and so they make the listener reinterpret the pedal. The D may not move; but it has different implications depending on the listener's point of view. The G#–B–E arpeggio placed against the D in bars 6–7 implies the dominant seventh sound in the key of A: thus the ear expects D to move down a semitone (or, maybe, a whole tone) as the expected tonic chord arrives. On the other hand, the Bb–F leaps against the D in bars 7 and 8 could represent the dominant chord of Eb if the D were next to move up a semitone. Two tonal centres a tritone apart are thus suggested: if the pedal D were to fall a semitone (or tone) the passage would cadence onto A; but if the same D were to rise a semitone that passage would cadence on Eb. The opposition of these particular keys – A and Eb – is one that Simpson has often explored in earlier works. I shall call the opening theme *AI*.

There is one other observation to make about the first violin part of bars 6–9: the perfect fifth leap Bb–F (to which attention is drawn by means of repetition) is a version of the fifths separating the open strings of each instrument, though here the interval is pitched a semitone above the A–E which would be provided by the open strings (and, indeed, towards which the previous dominant seventh sound has apparently pointed). I shall refer to the fifth leap as figure *y*; it is simply an inversion of the B–E–B–E fourth leaps which precede it. The interval of a fifth is one that Robert Simpson says that he particularly loves; and he specially likes the sound of open fifths. Before the next statement of the opening theme one other development occurs: this is a figure consisting of a rising and falling minor third (E–G–E–G–E, in bars 9 and 10). It is evolved logically from the opening D, for it too is a decorated pedal: it is part of a steady evolution whose second stage was the D–Eb–D–Eb figure in bar 5, itself decorated by alternating the stopped and open strings.

In bar 10 the opening theme returns, but D is now the lower voice rather than the upper one, so the initial material is repeated sequentially a tone higher. The interval of transposition is in fact not a tone but a ninth: the reason for using the higher pitch is to make it possible for the upper part (the pedal) to be shared between stopped and open strings at the same pitch (the E string of the first violin), just as it was on the

D string at the first appearance. D and E, when one considers only the open strings of the violin, are a ninth apart rather than a tone. The tonal area chosen has been governed by the necessity to set the pedal on a pitch for which there is an open string. Talking about the music so far the composer says,

All this time the poor viola and cello are sitting doing nothing. It's an awful waste of money to engage a string quartet and then not use the two lower instruments. Clearly it is time to give them something to do. But equally clearly the whole scale of the piece is going to be bigger than I'd originally thought.

The viola and cello entries at bar 17 are a fifth (= *y*) below the initial entries in the violins: the pitch of the new entries is again governed by the need to have the pedal alternate between a stopped and an open string of the same pitch. The violins simultaneously introduce descending lines which balance the rising ones on which the music has so far concentrated. The impression created by the music of the opening is akin to Renaissance string consort fantasias, though set in a twentieth-century idiom: if Simpson were to continue in the same manner as at the opening, he would follow the entry of the viola and cello with a statement of the initial theme a ninth higher, building it around a pedal A. Although this is basically what happens at bar 25, there are some changes. The pedal, for example, is this time given to the second violin rather than the cello (if the opening had been shadowed precisely, the viola and cello would have shared this statement). The violin's open A string has so far been avoided, and it now becomes the pedal, while (as before) G becomes the lower part so that the processes of bar 16ff. are repeated a tone – or rather, again, a ninth – higher. But there is also some new counterpoint this time: I shall call this new version of the material (in the cello, at bars 24ff.) figure A2 (see Example 1b).

### Example 1b

The musical score for Example 1b begins at bar 24. It is written for a string quartet, with staves for Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Cello. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The music features a complex interplay of lines with various dynamics including *pp* and *sempre pp*. The score shows a series of measures with intricate melodic and harmonic developments, including some chromaticism and a focus on the lower register in the viola and cello parts.

Like the old theme, this new one has lines which start dissonantly and then coalesce. Simpson says of it:

Obviously I'd now have to do something else with this material – you can't go on repeating it all the time. So I made it into a short rising scale, and to give it some character and memorability I added a rhythmic kick at the top.

Meanwhile the former material is still present in the second violin and viola: the outer instruments, though, begin to use the new *A2* theme in imitations of a stretto character. This new development is soon cut short by the lowest note of the cello – the open C string – sounding alone for a whole bar, though it also extends as a pedal on either side of that bar. Robert Simpson says that the development was beginning to move on too fast for the sake of the music and its ideas so far, and at this point the progress needed to be held back: the arrival of this bottom C in the cello keeps everything in check. The composer is, in any case, very fond of the lowest note of the cello, which he points out is a readily identifiable sound. 'Any listener will immediately recall it, even if he doesn't know it's a C', he says. 'This bottom note of the cello is a glorious sound; I could listen to it for ever.' So far all the pedals have been set on notes to which the strings of the instruments are tuned – the notes the audience hears when the players are tuning up. Because in this work they act rather like the old 'circle of fifths' I shall refer to this series of notes – the open strings of the four instruments – as the 'charmed circle' of tuning pitches. This circle provides a force which one might compare to gravitation, controlling the movement of stars in space: the music may seem to move slowly in various directions, but it always remains under this tonal-gravitational control. The 'charmed circle' of tuning fifths has different effects depending on the way we seem to be facing.

There are other things to notice about the cello's bottom C: it is, for example, the first bottom note of any of the instruments to be used in this quartet. Moreover, so far we have heard pedals on D and E (tuning pitches which are two fifths apart) and then pedals on G and A (tuning pitches which are likewise two fifths apart): the G and A pair of pedals is a fifth lower than the later D and E pair. Logically, then, the next pedal should be another fifth lower, starting with C: in fact, Simpson goes down a twelfth rather than a fifth. Before bar 31 all the open string notes except C have been heard: like the cello, the viola has not used its open C string, but it is the peculiar colour of the cello's bottom note which causes that instrument to be chosen rather than the viola. Despite the fact that its arrival sounds surprising, then, C has been extremely well prepared.

After the braking effect of bar 33, which contains only the cello's bottom C, the music starts to move on again by introducing B $\flat$  in the second violin against that low pedal. The relationship is the same as that between the D pedal and C lower voice at the very beginning of the quartet, though in bar 34 the pedal is below rather than above the more active part: obviously, Simpson could not put a B $\flat$  below the cello C, since none of the instruments extends downwards that far. The B $\flat$  in the second violin also reflects that in bars 7–8, and the result is that there is a feeling of E $\flat$  in bars 34–36. E $\flat$  is one of the two key areas which were suggested in bars 7–8: the other tonal pole, A major, is reached soon afterwards (in bars 40–41). That very tritone between E $\flat$  and A is also twice presented melodically in the viola between bars 38 and 41. As I have already pointed out, the tritones in this quartet ultimately derive from the music in bars 7 and 8.

The upshot of these tritones is that the next pedal to appear jumps out of the 'charmed circle' of tuning fifths: it is, in fact, a tritone away, rather than a perfect fifth, and occurs on F $\sharp$  in bar 43. This, then, is the first pedal not on one of the notes of the 'charmed circle': indeed, it is a semitone short of the G pedal that the listener might reasonably expect. This provides a nice balance to the fifth in bars 7–8, where B $\flat$ –F is a semitone above the open notes that might well have been expected at that point, given the preceding dominant seventh chord. As if to make the point even clearer, the perfect fifth leap D $\sharp$ –A $\sharp$  in bar 45 is immediately transposed down a semitone to D $\flat$ –A $\natural$  (though that particular fifth is in fact sounded an octave above the open strings tuned to those pitches).

The semitone deflection out of the orbit of the 'charmed circle' forestalls the next shift, in that at bar 49 a new pedal appears, on G, the lowest open string but one of the cello. The accompanying part has again to be above the pedal, since no other instrument can go down to the F below it. At the entry of this pedal Simpson has moved back to the key of E $\flat$ ; but soon A major is yet again approached. One of the factors governing this move is that the pedal G is weaker – less persistent – here than 'open string' pedals have so far been, possibly because of the recent appearance of a pedal built on a note outside the 'charmed circle' of tuning pitches. Be that as it may, in bar 50 the pedal G moves away from its 'open string' note onto B, providing another indication that the orbit of the 'charmed circle' is losing its grip on the tonality, and that other pitches are beginning to exert a more powerful influence. As had previously happened, the A-majorishness which results in bar 52ff. gives rise to another pedal that is a tritone away from its predecessor, and thus a semitone away from the pitch provided by one of the open

strings. This note – the pedal C# in bar 53 – is also logical in that it is a perfect fifth away from F# (though by inversion, as it sounds in a lower octave), the only previous pedal outside the orbit of the open strings (see bar 43). This bottom C# is the lowest note so far used by the viola; it is, of course, just a semitone above the lowest open string of that instrument. The avoidance of the viola's open C string here is a positive advantage for Simpson, since it does not confuse the listener by providing a sound that is relatively close to that of the bottom note of the cello (albeit an octave above).

The viola's C# pedal is not left unchallenged for long, for a second pedal joins it in bars 54ff., this time quite high up: it is another tritone away, on G. Simpson's accompanying material is used simultaneously against both pedals, providing a nice working-out of the tritone distance between them. Other pedals are added; the texture thickens; smaller note-values proliferate; and the tonality moves back to E $\flat$  only to return to A yet again. Then, as the composer says, 'its all moving on too fast again, so I realised that I had to recall that low cello note in order to hold it in check.' This note arrives at bar 62, and stops the music abruptly so that bar 63 is empty except for the cello's bottom C.

At bar 64 the material of bar 34 returns: this is the same material as had been used after the previous cello C interruption, though it is somewhat revised. The cello, for example, does not this time use the chromatic figure *z* in its original form, as it had in bar 37; instead the viola has it at bars 66 and 67 and the cello makes up for its alteration by using an exact *z* in bar 76 – both on the precise original notes C–C#–D. There is a tendency for the higher of the two dissonant notes to shy away upwards from the dissonance rather than to wait for the lower part to coalesce with it: Simpson makes considerable use of this idea later. As before, there is an E $\flat$  tendency; but it is a tendency that is soon – yet again – changed to A major as the opening theme once more appears beneath a pedal E in the first violin. This entry, though, is subtly different from the one in bars 10ff. (also below an E) in that in bar 69ff. the revised counterpoint of theme *A2*, with its rhythmic snatch at the top, is used against the pedal. Moreover, as has happened once before, the 'open note' pedal very soon shifts away from its original pitch, up a semitone to F: this shift of a semitone reflects the earlier one in which the fifth leap of bars 7–8 was a semitone higher than expected. The accents are also shifted, for the top notes of the theme (bar 73) are now placed on the weak quavers rather than on strong beats.

The next pedal to occur is on D (in bar 80): Simpson has, then, returned to the pedal with which he opened the work, but here it is the *A2* material, rather than the

material used against the original pedal, that accompanies it. Yet again there is a contrapuntal build; here the two lines which derive from the opening theme make dissonances with each other, but the upper voice shies away upwards from the lower (see bars 88–89, an idea previously used in bar 66). Again Simpson halts this build with a pedal C on the lowest note of the cello: yet again the cello's open C string has been well prepared, the E pedal of bar 69ff. being followed by one on D a ninth lower (bar 85ff.). Clearly the next step in the chain is a C pedal, though the one that is actually sounded in bar 91 is not a ninth below the preceding D but a further octave down. But there is a notable difference here in that the pedal C does not remain for long, once it has momentarily interrupted the processes of development, for the flow of the evolving logic has now become strong enough to carry right through the 'end-stopping' nature of the cello's pedal: indeed, it is strong enough to affect the pedal itself with development. Like two previous pedals, it shifts away from an open note and the use of the theme *z*, and instead gradually shifts upwards through the texture, so that it ceases to act as a pedal. This new treatment (involving C# and D in bars 92 and 93) suggests that the material which follows the pedal should now be in A major rather than (as previously) in the opposite pole of E $\flat$ .

From here to the end of section A a series of 'open string' notes is built up in multiple pedals: the only one which uses the alternation of stopped and open strings is the viola G pedal in bars 98–102 and 111–113; but other notes of the 'charmed circle' of tuning pitches are used at different octaves. The result of this is that the 'charmed circle' of fifths re-establishes its influence before the section ends: meanwhile E $\flat$  and A coexist (for example, in bars 102–104), and the section ends with a clear descent around the circle of tuning fifths, from the violin E in bar 116, to A, then D (bar 117–118): G is not included since it has only just been left (in the viola at bars 111–113). The bottom C $\sharp$  at the end of the section is thus quite logical, even though it is only briefly touched upon.

The use of the 'charmed circle' of string tuning fifths in section A, and of the moves away from that circle, can be traced by listing the pedals used (see Example 2). These pedals largely govern the main tonal movement: what Example 2 does not show is that there are smaller-scale alternations between other tonal centres (E $\flat$  and A in particular).

## Example 2

Bar Number

1: 12: 17: 25: 31: 43: 49: 53: 56: 57: 62: 69: 80: 91: 98: 103: 104: 111: 116:

The musical score for Example 2 consists of a piano (treble clef) and bass (bass clef) staff. The piano staff features a series of notes with slurs and a tritone interval marked between measures 31 and 43. The bass staff also contains notes with slurs and tritone intervals marked between measures 31 and 43, and between measures 56 and 62. The score is annotated with bar numbers at the top: 1: 12: 17: 25: 31: 43: 49: 53: 56: 57: 62: 69: 80: 91: 98: 103: 104: 111: 116:.

## Section B

The central section consists of a scherzo that Simpson found was essential to the overall balance of the piece that he had at first intended to be only a relatively small Adagio. There is a rhythmic relationship between the slow and fast sections, the crotchet of the new tempo being equal to the semiquaver of the old one. The change is not imperceptible, as it is in Sibelius' Fifth Symphony, for it is quite clear where the Vivace begins: but nevertheless the old pulse remains in the mind, even though it is synco-pated across the bar-lines. The old pulse would have coincided precisely with the new bar-lines only if the new time-signature had been 4/4: if that had been the case, one crotchet beat of the old tempo would have become one bar of the new. But with the change to 3/4 one three-beat bar of the opening slow tempo is equivalent to four bars of the scherzo. Nevertheless, the viola and first violin of the first two bars of this central section help to make a smooth join by fitting in with the crotchet beat of the previous section (see Example 3).

## Example 3

The musical score for Example 3 shows three staves: Violin I, Viola, and Previous Tempo. The Violin I staff has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a half note in the second measure, and a half note in the third measure. The Viola staff has a half note in the first measure, a half note in the second measure, and a half note in the third measure. The Previous Tempo staff has a half note in the first measure, a half note in the second measure, and a half note in the third measure. The staves are connected by a brace on the right side.

The first three notes used by the viola in the central section are the figure *z*, which the cello part had short-circuited at the end of section A (see Example 4).

## Example 4

118 **Vivace** (♩ = ♩ del prec.)

The musical score for Example 4 begins at measure 118. It is marked 'Vivace' with a tempo indication '(♩ = ♩ del prec.)'. The score is written for four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including triplets marked with a '3'. Dynamic markings include 'pp' (pianissimo). The notation includes many slurs and ties, indicating a continuous, flowing texture. The first violin part has a prominent melodic line with slurs and ties. The other parts provide harmonic support with various rhythmic figures.

Moreover the opening phrases which the violins play in this section sound the notes of the two first pedals of section A – that is, D and the E a ninth above it: the opening sound of the scherzo is thus a spaced-out version of the opening dissonance of the quartet. The wider spacing does much to create the brightness and verve of the middle section, and it also gives Simpson the opportunity to suggest two separate tonal planes. The alternating with  $E^b$  in a decorated pedal indicates a pull towards the key of  $E^b$ : the idea is an expansion of that in bar 5. The other plane is suggested by the alternation of E and  $C^\sharp$  in a thematic tag that is much used in the central section (it derives from bar 9); this indicates a pull towards the other tonal pole, A major.

These two parts, unlike those at the opening of the Quartet, do not coalesce, and the failure to do so results in a much more dynamic feeling here. The decorated pedal D is a varied version of the opening D pedal that had alternated between stopped and open strings, whereas the first-violin theme derives from the one that has accompanied the opening pedal of section A, and especially Simpson's re-writing of it at bar 25 (the scales derive from theme *A1*, but the overall shape is derived from *A2*). The decorated pedal – either with alternations of a step or of a minor third – and the scale passages derived from *A1* and *A2* provide the material of this central scherzo. The simplicity of the clearly-identifiable pedals of the opening section is thus somewhat clouded in the scherzo by the use of pedals which alternate with notes a step or a third away: this, too, fires the dynamic character of the middle section.

At bar 152 Simpson gives a variant of bars 6ff. This is a procedure that he expanded upon in his Eighth Quartet, in which the finale is a variation of the first movement: it is an idea which, he says, he does not think any other composer has ever used. He insists that, when writing a big work, it is important to be able to make one thing become something else, and still remain recognisable. This variant is based around D at first (the pitch used at the opening of the quartet), and is also immediately repeated

on B. After more use of the decorated pedals and scalic material, this passage returns, but starting in E $\flat$ , at bar 177. But, as Robert Simpson himself says, ‘It’s building up to a climax too soon; so I put a rest in to cool it off a bit and keep it under control. Damping the music down occasionally is necessary to avoid getting to the climax too soon.’ This rest is in bar 199.

As in the opening section, the interruption is followed by music for the lower instruments. Here a new theme appears, though one compounded of elements already heard. This theme involves the ‘horn-style’ writing (the kind of passage which composers have written for pairs of natural horns for centuries) in the second violin at bars 203–207: although sounding new, the theme develops elements already heard (see Example 5).

#### Example 5

The upper part of the second-violin part in bars 204 and 205 is a pedal decorated by stepwise movement up and back (indeed, D $\flat$  and E $\flat$  alternate in all the first five chords), and the lower part is a decorated pedal moving a third away and back (A $\flat$  alternates with F, in fact, in each of the first six chords); moreover the part moves to and from an open fifth (=  $\gamma$ ). The idea can be traced back to bar 110, as well as to elements in the opening section of the work. At bars 229ff. the idea is used in diminution in the two violin parts as an accompaniment to theme A2: indeed from here on the ‘horn-writing’ plays quite a prominent part, and by its use in diminution greatly raises the temperature of the music.

Yet again – as if to keep the music in check – the bottom C of the cello occurs. Certainly the temperature drops slightly at bar 242: but the build is not much held back since the forward rush has become so dynamic, and from bar 252 onwards the cello’s bottom note has no effect at all on the progress of the music. The continual reiterations

of this open C can only be followed by upward movement, since this is the lowest note possible in the string quartet medium: and following the lead of theme *AI*, the bottom C turns gradually into an upward scale, starting from bar 270. The initial cello run starts on C and moves up to the D a ninth above (using the chromatic figure *z* on the way): this ninth encompasses the two fifths that make up the ‘charmed circle’ of tuning fifths for the bottom three strings of the cello, as well as being the initial harmonic idea of the quartet. Almost immediately the viola attempts to build upon the idea, but its progress is halted by an interruption from the second violin. This new statement begins in bar 281 with the second violin’s bottom note: the use of the open G string makes the start of the new scale immediately identifiable as being related to that of the cello. The scale begins a fifth (or rather a twelfth) above the one in the cello, and it also covers a ninth (that is, two fifths), so maintaining the span of the ‘charmed circle’ of tuning fifths. In bar 291 a scale shared between the first violin and the viola spans a fifth only, G up to D: since the G is the bottom note of the first violin, and the D is marked as an open string on the viola, the listener must also hear this as part of the same ‘charmed circle’.

This use of scales to span the fifths of the ‘charmed circle’ is an amplification of the use of pedals to draw attention to those same tuning pitches in the opening section. Just as in that earlier section Simpson moved the pedals away from that orbit at times, so in the scherzo the upward scales now begin to revolve around other pitches. The long scale in octaves beginning on G# in bar 306 is an example of this: meanwhile the tension has been increasing as the texture fills with very fast scurrying up and down simultaneously. It is with all this, plus the decorated pedals that alternate up and down a minor third, that Simpson builds the enormous climax of this section. ‘I’m pretty pleased with this climax’, he says: ‘very powerful for a string quartet’.

The music retreats from this climax into quite a foreign world: it comes to rest outside the tuning orbit, more or less on a G# (a tritone away from the home tonic of D). In a rather quiet fashion (but without a change of basic tempo) the music proceeds to explore aspects of the relationship between E♭ and A: G#, for example, might well be the subdominant note of E♭ (spelled enharmonically), as well as being the leading-note of A. Indeed, flat and sharp keys co-exist relatively amicably for some time, the searing decorated pedals in triplet quavers and powerful upward-thrusting scales being forgotten for the moment. For some time there is polyphony that sounds as if it has fugal elements in it (the passage from bar 402, for example), though in fact the counterpoint is free. The composer observes that it is important in a passage like this – a quiet passage following a climax – to create enough momentum to carry something quieter that will float on this momentum.

In bar 375 the cello enters on low D $\flat$ . At one of Robert Simpson's talks on this quartet, a member of the audience asked why he had not always returned to the cello's bottom C, but had instead used D $\flat$ . Either the composer did not know, or else he did not want to say; perhaps he thought he would be giving away too much information if he explained further. Simpson's comment was, 'There was just one place where I used D $\flat$  instead of C in the cello; I thought it would give some relief, and not be quite so obvious.' Despite this disclaimer, there are additional clear reasons for the use of D $\flat$  here. One of these is concerned with the way that fifths work – and fifths play an undeniably large part in the quartet. Talking of Beethoven's processes, Tovey remarked that if you prolong any note sufficiently it acts as a dominant: in this section of Simpson's Seventh the prolonged reiteration of G $\sharp$  has led to it being thought of as A $\flat$  and taken as the dominant of D $\flat$ . Such an overt dominant usage builds up the impression of dominant seventh effect created as early as bars 6-7. Another passage in the opening section of the work prepares for this dominant-tonic feel: the unexpected F $\sharp$  pedal ('unexpected' because it lies outside the orbit of the 'charmed circle') of bar 43ff. has forced the pedal of bar 49 away from its original pitch and up to B: G is therefore the first pedal in the 'charmed circle' to be shifted out of its course, and F $\sharp$  has acted like a dominant in order to introduce B as its answering tonic. Shortly after this, at bar 53, a C $\sharp$  pedal has arrived in the viola, providing a further precursor of the D $\flat$  of bar 375.

But there is another reason for using the D $\flat$  rather than C in bar 376. The overall tendency of the work is summed up in figure z, with its chromatic motion on the notes C–C $\sharp$ –D. Much use of the low C has already been made: now the use of C $\sharp$  (=D $\flat$ ), foreshadowed by the powerful scales that start on C $\sharp$  in bar 346, is an indication that the overall direction is shifting upwards towards that final D, on the very largest scale as well as on the smallest.

After a while the cello shows its impatience with this, and at bar 460 begins to insist more firmly upon the quaver-triplets figure of decorated pedals leaping up and down a minor third which had occasionally been heard during the preceding quiet passage. Simpson builds up to a second climax. It is as if we have been traversing a high plateau between two mountain ranges, and are now beginning to climb the range on the far side of that plateau. At bar 464 theme *A1* returns, based around a pedal G $\sharp$ ; but instead of the parts coalescing on the pedal, G $\sharp$  this time moves upwards to A $\natural$  at the last minute (as had happened at bar 88ff.). In bar 472 this is developed when the viola begins on its bottom note and proceeds to use figure z: but the cello simultaneously inverts figure z rather than provide a stationary pedal.

The ‘horn-style’ theme returns (at bar 496) and helps to build the pressure again; and at bar 505 theme *AI* reappears, though the upper voice keeps moving away from the lower (as has already happened several times earlier in the quartet), so that the two do not coalesce. This idea is explored thoroughly from bar 526 onwards, where the melodic material very clearly derives from bar 6: at the same time decorated pedals (up and down a minor third in triplet quavers) and quick scales again help the sense of growing energy and excitement.

Shining – or perhaps searing – through all this tumultuous music come the open strings drawing attention to the ‘charmed circle’: they are C in the viola and cello (bar 547), A in the viola (bars 556 and 557), E and G in the violins (bars 561–565), and G in the second violin and viola (bars 571–574). This leads to a dramatic *sff* series of cello bottom Cs that form the retransition – the preparation for the recapitulation. Though the listener cannot yet know it, the opening music is shortly to return, albeit in an enhanced form: the influence of sonata form is clear, even if the exact ground plan of that form is not used. The open strings, then, have served to recall the music to the basic tonality in preparation for the reprise. Always the most dramatic moment in classical sonata form, Simpson makes it so in this quartet also. The large leaps in the build-up, the slowing-down of the decorated pedals to crotchets that grind outwards in both directions by a semitone before returning, the double-stopping, the cross-accentuation – all these features make for a climax of quite staggering intensity. Simpson might well be proud of it: but it needs to be held in check if the motion characteristic of the opening section is to be regained – and Simpson does intend to return to that slower type of music, creating an overall A–B–A arch shape. The pedal on the cello’s open C string was used to slow the progress of the music in the opening slow section, and that function is now recalled. But such is the energy of the music during this climax that the pedal C has at first little effect on the music: nevertheless, by persisting it helps to begin stemming the flood of notes. It has, then, a dual function: it recalls the effect of the pedal Cs in ‘applying the brakes’ during section A, and it prepares for the recapitulation of the opening theme, the lower of whose parts began on C.

Before leaving this central section it will be useful to look at the tonal scheme (see Example 6).



than the manner of scoring, that makes for this power. Despite the attempts of the cello's C pedal, the immense energy built up in the middle section has not yet been dissipated, but remains a powerful force free-wheeling onwards in the listener's mind. The effect of the re-introduction of the slow material at section A is thus akin to moving up into over-drive: so powerful is the climax that it will be some time before the energy is dissipated and the wheels stop spinning. The basic pulse may be the same as at the opening, but the overall feeling is utterly different. As Simpson himself commented, 'The theme is not the same as before: how could it be after all the things that have happened to it?' This re-writing might well have suggested to Simpson the idea (in the Eighth Quartet) of using a whole movement as a variation of another: moreover, the idea of using the interval of a fifth which breaks down into two minor thirds with a semitone between them – a feature of the Eighth Quartet – also shows up in this Seventh Quartet (in bars 279 and 280, for example: it is an idea that had also appeared in the Sixth Quartet).

One of the new counterpoints placed against the Recapitulation of *A1* is a great series of descending fifths. This starts on D, very high in the second violin in bar 608, and comes tumbling down through the whole texture like a shooting star; there is one sixth and one fourth in bars 610–611; this is difficult to account for, and it would appear that A♭ is a mistake for B♭; if this were so, all would be fifths, with an octave break-back in the cello.

At the change of time-signature back to 3/4 (and Tempo primo, ♩ = ♩ del prec.) in bar 625 the music reverts to the key of A, built around the pedal E, as it had been in bar 11. The bottom note of the cello reappears in bar 633, and again does not succeed in interrupting the flow of the music – there is still too much ongoing groundswell of energy for it to do so: at this point theme *A1* appears in the outside parts, though in double counterpoint as compared with the opening. Nevertheless, the flow does stop at bars 640–641, even though the cello seems here to be groping for the low note that had played such an important part earlier on. Indeed, the cello finds D♭ before C – a feature foreshadowed in bar 376. Gradually the free counterpoint floats higher and higher (theme *A1* appears at bars 648 and 653): eventually the cello's low C does arrive quite clearly, as if to anchor the counterpoint. At this point (bar 656) the part-writing clearly foreshadows that in the final cadence, though the listener cannot yet know this. The simultaneous approach to D from a semitone above and below neatly draws together the E♭ tonality and the A opposite pole (as represented by C#: see Example 7). The fact that this progression occurs at the very point where a new stylistic idea begins neatly prepares the ear for the final cadence.

## Example 7

The musical score for Example 7 consists of two systems. The first system, starting at bar 649, shows four staves with complex melodic lines featuring many slurs and ties. The second system, starting at bar 656, continues the melodic lines in the upper staves and introduces a cello part in the lower staff with rapid sixteenth-note runs. Dynamics include *pp* (pianissimo) and *sempre pp* (always pianissimo).

At bar 656 a series of upward scales – a derivation from bars 3–6 – begins. Simpson says,

I haven't used straight scales until now – but I have used something like them. There is something very tranquil about a scale. I didn't see why I shouldn't use them here – after all, Beethoven made a pretty good job of them at the opening of the Seventh Symphony.

Each scale is played against a high chord, and each migrates between the instruments (as do the chords). Every scale spans a fifth (=  $\gamma$ ) between each crotchet beat; moreover each new scale begins a fifth above the previous one (or, with an octave displacement, a fourth down in bar 665). At this point the music becomes very cold, with all passion spent: the intense heat – the solar energy – of the central section is here replaced by stellar coldness.

The continual versions of figure *z* around bottom C, C# and D in the cello from bars 671 to the end foreshadow the ultimate shift onto D. Bottom D – a retarding element in the work, if not quite a disruptive one – is eventually drawn to a resolution

on the pedal D with which it had initially clashed. Bar 680 has a final version of the opening theme, though continually held back and interrupted by rests so that – like the end of the second movement in Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony – the music disintegrates. By dismembering the material in this fashion Simpson separates out the G $\sharp$ –B–E phrase (which implies sharp-side keys, and particularly A major) from the B $\flat$ –F phrase that implies flat-side keys (and particularly E $\flat$ ). This separating-out of the rival areas leads to the simultaneous statement of E $\flat$  and C $\sharp$  (standing for A major) within the final cadence (see Example 8).

### Example 8

The musical score for Example 8 spans five measures, labeled 687 to 691. It is written for four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). Above the first staff, the tempo marking *poco ritardando* is written. The first two staves (Violin I and II) begin with a *ppp* dynamic marking. The first four measures are connected by a long slur. In the final measure (691), the music concludes with a cadence. The Cello/Double Bass staff shows a simultaneous statement of E $\flat$  and C $\sharp$  in the final measure, which is highlighted by a bracket and a *ppp* dynamic marking.

Moreover E $\flat$  and C $\sharp$  were the first two chromatic notes heard in the quartet, so the final cadence is ultimately the result of bars 4 and 5, and it resolves those chromatic pitches. The approach to D from E $\flat$  and C $\sharp$  (figure *b* in each case) simultaneously looks back to bars 547ff., 556ff. and 656: and it is clear also that the cello in this cadence concentrates on fourth leaps on the sharp side (reflecting the G $\sharp$ –B–E in bar 682) while the viola concentrates on fifth leaps around the flat side (reflecting the B $\flat$ –F in bars 685–6). The slowly climbing viola fifths balance the tumbling ones at the start of the Recapitulation (bars 608ff.). The tonal outlines of this Recapitulation are shown in Example 9: nevertheless, this is the first piece by Simpson to be based on a pitch rather than a key – keys are not really important to it.

## Example 9

Bar Number  
 580: 602: 625: 632: 656: 660: 665: 669: 674: 676: etc. 680: 687: 691:

upward scale passages not really established

Simpson has often said that he writes a theme first, and then examines it to see what is of interest in it, and what he can do with it. In this quartet he thought first of a stationary line which is approached by another line starting below it and moving up through it. What, then, has come out of this idea? And what has our lesson with him taught us? There seem to be basically seven points, though they are clearly interconnected.

Firstly, the piece makes great play of all kinds of pedals and decorated pedals. The fundamental conflict between the static and the motile is one of the bases for handling of tension throughout the work. Complex structures, then, can be built quite logically from simple material. A pedal, moreover, can have different implications depending on the material that sounds against it: such a simple idea, too, can have far-reaching tonal implications.

Secondly, the fact that the first pedal is decorated by moving to and from an open string suggests the use of the 'charmed circle' of string tuning notes as the quartet's tonal norm. The work, then, takes the fundamental character of the four instruments – with strings tuned in fifths – as its basis, and builds from that basis. The colour of the open strings is used for tonal purposes and as a mental sign-post. Transcription for another medium – a wind quartet, for example – would be out of the question in such a piece as this. Mental sign-posts have been shown to be important – as are mental milestones – if the listener is to follow the evolution of the logic. For the same reason, memorability of thematic material is vital.

Thirdly, the open strings themselves suggest fifths – one of Simpson's favourite intervals either as a chord or a leap. The theme itself contains a fifth leap, and its inversion (a fourth). The 'charmed circle' works like a version of the old 'circle of fifths': Simpson's view of tonality as a fundamental fact of Western music leads him to insist that certain intervals and combinations of sounds create a certain expectation, however hard some may try to deny it. He is not ashamed to continue to use so old-

fashioned and generally despised a device as the dominant seventh for his own purposes: he is quite content to accept the age-old lore that certain sounds are expected to move logically onto other sounds, and he does not iconoclastically try to deny the fundamental nature of the harmonic series and its implications.

Fourthly, the leaps suggest keys a tritone apart – E $\flat$  and A; and these are explored, offering a dynamic contrast to the ‘charmed circle’ with its implication of much closer relationships. The two areas are in conflict throughout, and are eventually resolved onto D in the final cadence.

Fifthly, the thematic material (fifths, the two semitones *z*, the rising and falling semitone and the rising and falling minor third, the repeated-note figure of bar 6) is all abundantly used. A good composer does not waste any of his material; and Simpson has used all the available figures suggested in his initial idea. The logical growth from the little particle at the beginning to the great galaxy later on is easily apprehended by the listener. Moreover, the material has itself overridden the composer’s initial intention, and has indicated its own manner of proceeding and its own scale. The memorability of the themes, and the way in which their features help the listener to identify them, is also important to the composer.

Sixthly, the Retransition – the preparation for the Recapitulation – and the Recapitulation itself are quite staggering. The intense power is the result of many things; but one from which we can learn much is the handling of motion. In this quartet the slow music which sounded quite calm at the opening (because it was played ‘from cold’, with no music preceding it) is provided with an intensely raised temperature – despite the use of the same basic pulse – at the Recapitulation. The lesson is that themes can never be quite the same after they have been subjected to development: and that the very context of a theme can alter its effect. Furthermore, tension and climax are not simply the result of adding dynamics to music that otherwise changes little: the structure of the music itself makes just as much of a contribution – or more – to the intensity. We have, moreover, seen how a composer of genius gives thought to the pacing of such growths of tension, taking care not to let it grow too quickly.

Lastly, it is foolish for a composer to decide on the scale and direction of a piece before investigating the material. Forms are not empty vessels to be filled up, but living organisms that grow in a manner suggested by the thematic material.

At a talk he gave on this quartet, Simpson said, ‘There’s been a lot of ballyhoo and praise recently about the Ninth Quartet – which is nice. But I think the Seventh is not bad really ....’ That surely must rank as one of the understatements of the century.

## The Eighth Quartet. Robert Simpson's 'new way'<sup>1</sup>

Lionel Pike

The 1985 recording of Robert Simpson's Eighth String Quartet has given us an opportunity to examine a change in that composer's approach to large-scale form. He himself mentioned the 'new way' – without using such a Beethovenian expression – in a BBC Radio 3 discussion with Michael Oliver, on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1982:

In earlier times I was interested in large-scale tonality, large areas of tonality, but now I'm trying to find what intervals themselves can generate, using the resonances inherent in simple intervals like the fifth, the fourth or the third, and I try to generate something from that by feeling it in a novel way, by approaching the interval of a fifth as if I had never heard it before, and trying to find what can happen, or using intervals against each other. Take two intervals, the second and the fifth; then you have a combination of intervals and you can use them in different ways against each other.<sup>2</sup>

The discussion arose from the first performance of Robert Simpson's Eighth Symphony; but this work is not yet available as either a published score or as a commercial recording. It therefore seems sensible to examine a work for which both are available, in order to understand the new procedures mentioned by the composer.

The Eighth String Quartet was written in 1979, and is dedicated to the entomologist, Professor David Gillett, and his wife Irena. It is in four movements, two of very large scale framing a central pair of miniatures. The first movement is a big fugue, on a subject that gradually develops as the piece progresses.<sup>3</sup> One feature that remains more or less constant is a figure that rocks back and forth over a minor third. Most other elements – leaps of a fifth and octave leaps – are subjected to evolution in one way or another; yet the listener has no difficulty in following the logical progression from one entry to the next.

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in *Tempo* 153, 1985, pp. 20–29 (reprinted in *Tonic* 3/3, 1989, pp. 15–29). Reproduced with Acknowledgement to Cambridge University Press, the current publishers of *Tempo*.

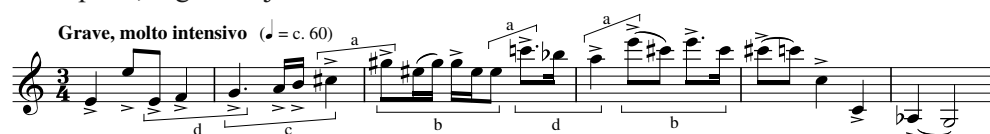
<sup>2</sup> Published in *Tonic* 2/1, 1984, p. 13, in this volume p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> An idea followed up by Robert Simpson again in the Finale of the Ninth Quartet.

The subject itself is conceived so as to use all the strings of each of the instruments in turn; and it makes a feature of upward leaps of a fifth.<sup>4</sup>

In Example 1 they are marked *a*: particular attention is drawn to these leaps because each is unexpected. That is, the particular tonal area implied by each leap of a fifth is unprepared by the context in which it occurs. The first of these leaps, C#–G#, is immediately filled in with an E# to form a 'triad': this initial 'triad', melodically stated, is the first indication of the tonic of the movement, even though the listener cannot be aware of it at this stage. There are also octave leaps in this theme; but though the octave is (because of its size) potentially a more striking interval, it does not here command the same attention as the fifth because it sounds more 'inevitable'. Indeed, it would be true to say that the octave leaps at the beginning help to draw attention to the fifths: by providing three E#s on the first two beats, they lead the ear to hear the first F# as if it were a down-beat: the resulting 'hemiola feel' (as compared with the notated 3/4 time) will make the upper note of each fifth an accented beat – at least mentally. One result of this is that the fifth leaps seem to fall over one another because of their rhythmical positioning. The fact that the F# is heard as a downbeat after the octave leaps is significant in another way, and its importance only fully emerges later in the work; the semitone rise E–F# is emphasized by this (mental) accentuation, and semitones are used again, in inverted form, several times before the fugue subject is finished.

#### Example 1, fugue subject



This subject, just six bars in length, contains the seeds of all the other elements that the composer will use during the work – some 30 minutes of music. The 'rocking back and forth of a minor third' (*b*) is one that is almost immediately developed (I shall also use *b* when single minor thirds are used): a pendant to it is the minor third filled in by step (*d*). This does not by any means exhaust the possibilities of the theme: the composer often uses the head (the first four crotchet beats of the subject) melodically later on, and the tritone (*c*) has enormous significance which only emerges later in the work. For the moment it is enough to realise that the tritone symbolises the

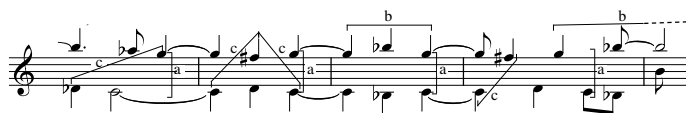
<sup>4</sup> The Seventh Quartet had also dealt with the possibilities of the perfect fifth, but in an entirely different way from that discussed here.

distance of tonal travel in the work from the initial E to the final A# of the Finale – indeed, the two will be heard together immediately before the end of the work.

Such a complex distillation of ideas as is presented by this theme needs to be repeatedly insisted upon in order to implant itself in the listener's mind, so that the full significance of the material can be appreciated. There could be no better form for this purpose than fugue, particularly since entries at the fifth (*a*) are such a normal feature of it.

Fugue, however, is not 'dynamic' in the same way that sonata form is – it does not normally have ongoing development combined with tonal argument and duality of texture and material. Nevertheless, sonata dualism is a concept near to Robert Simpson's heart; and perhaps for this reason he has appropriated it in this fugue by, among other things, developing the subject. Thus the answer in bar 6 enters on a third beat (rather than a first) and doubles the number of octave leaps at the opening, further unsettling the underlying rhythmic pulse: the top of the melody is also changed. The 'dynamic' fugal style is then contrasted with a more reserved type of writing which does not treat the fugue subject directly, though its handling of intervals is derived from that theme. These contrasted areas – episodes, technically – behave like the contrasting second subject areas of a sonata structure. The first episode, which is very short, makes two significant points: it sounds the first vertical octave of the work, and this B $\flat$  is the ultimate tonal goal of the quartet (written as A# at that point) – though of course the listener cannot be aware of it at this stage:

#### Example 2, fugue episodes

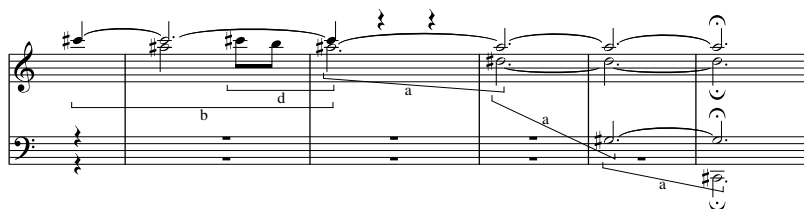




the tritone gaining more power than the fifth: that is, the fifth has become ‘squashed’ into a tritone by the descending semitones. Thus the use of the tritone tonally at this point is quite logical: indeed, the interval, which has already appeared melodically and harmonically, is now also used tonally.

Such a treatment is extended to the perfect fifth, the most prominent of all the intervals in the quartet. We have already seen how the fugue subject treats it melodically, and the episodes (as well as such passages as that quoted in Example 3) treat it harmonically. The overall tonal plan of the work is governed by rising fifths in that the tonal centre of each movement is a fifth higher than that of its predecessor – they end respectively on C#, G#, D#, and A#. The end of the fugue foresees this by using these very notes as its final chord:

#### Example 4



This presentation of the four finals in reverse order reflects the fact that strings of descending fifths have been used at times during the movement. The first violin in bars 126–128 presents eight in a row (though with two ‘octave break-backs’), while in bars 114–116 the second violin and viola share another series of eight descending fifths. The use of descending fifths (with some prominence at times) acts as a counter to the steadily rising fifths of the overall tonal scheme of the work. The quartet thus begins with a movement based on C#, and ends with one on A#: the shortfall of a minor third is expressed in the quartet’s melodic material by two important features (*b* and *d*). (Incidentally, the tonal distance from the E opening of the fugue to the C# ending is likewise a minor third.) The cadence quoted in Example 4 clearly shows how this tonal shortfall and its melodic expression are interconnected: this, of course, is yet another way in which the fifth and minor third act on each other (one has been demonstrated in Example 3, and another is that two minor thirds placed exactly above one another form a tritone).

The final chord of the movement, indeed, has some relevance to the tritone. The ‘chiming’ passage in A major at the climax of the movement had, it will be remembered, been succeeded by music in E $\flat$ . Both areas are suggested in the final

chord, in that the viola and cello have notes closely related to A major, whereas the two violins have E $\flat$  stated enharmonically.

Example 4 contains one further point of relevance. The semitone – which plays some part melodically in the fugue subject, and is the result of placing two minor thirds within a fifth (either squashing it to a tritone, or alternatively making a major–minor third interval as in Example 3) – is much used in the first movement. At many places the descending semitone is used like a suspension (or *appoggiatura*) onto a consonance: these uses are summed up in the final B $\flat$ –A $\sharp$  at the last cadence of the first movement. It will later emerge that the approach to A $\sharp$  from a semitone above has considerable importance to an understanding of the end of the Finale. Moreover, it is certainly not without significance that the last real melodic move in the fugue (a semitone fall) balances its first real melodic move (a semitone rise) – a ‘mirror’ on the minutest scale which will have repercussions in the following movement.

This is a tiny scherzo depicting the mosquito *Eretmapodites gilletti*, named after its discoverer, the co-dedicatée of this Quartet. The semitone flick (D $\sharp$ –E) on the viola at the start is a very fast version of the semitone rise at the opening of the fugue; and in the remaining two movements the first activity is also a semitone (falling in the third movement, rising in the Finale). Moreover, if we ignore the D $\sharp$  (which is on the briefest of upbeats), the E at the start of bar one – however short – will be heard as starting the Scherzo with the same note as had started the fugue (but an octave higher). The tonal centre of the movement is, however, G $\sharp$ : perhaps one might feel that this has been prepared as early as bar 3 of the work (see Example 1), though at that earlier point the note merely acts as the dominant of C $\sharp$  rather than as a tonic in its own right. The first theme of the Scherzo incorporates many upward semitone ‘flicks’ like the opening one: they are applied first of all to a series of rising fourths, which amounts to the same thing as a flatwards moving circle of fifths. One might argue, therefore, that the four last bars of Example 4 are translated into the fast opening theme of the Scherzo, but with the addition of a ‘subsemitonum’ on each note. Semitones play a very considerable part in this Scherzo – indeed, it is the semitone *appoggiatura* as much as anything that gives the movement its character. Soon after the start the two violins snap at D $\sharp$ , approaching it by semitones from either direction (E–D $\sharp$  and D $\flat$ –D $\sharp$  simultaneously): this tiny figure prepares the cadence passage quoted in Example 5, as well as indicating the direction to be taken for the following movement’s tonic.<sup>5</sup> The next pitch (D $\sharp$ ) is also

<sup>5</sup> Though it is true that the passage is based on E, not D $\sharp$  at the repeat of the Scherzo. This transposition upward by a semitone is not without significance, as will be clear later.

suggested at a false start of the repeat of the Scherzo towards the end of the Trio (in bar 84), where the second violin uses the opening ‘flick’ on the notes D–E $\flat$ . It is a nice point that the E $\flat$  is common to this false recapitulation and to the opening, where it is given enharmonically in the D $\sharp$ –E figure.

The central Trio is much concerned with an argument between fifths and tritones, after which the repeat of the Scherzo begins at a new pitch: the G $\sharp$ -centered opening is recapitulated in A $\sharp$  before moving back towards G $\sharp$  (the relevance of A $\sharp$  is that it is the tonal goal of the whole work). All the elements so far discussed are incorporated into this movement: it is hardly necessary to say that, despite its illustrative properties, it fits in with the logical processes which govern the whole quartet.

Indeed, these processes are taken further in this Scherzo. There are clear references to the episode material of the opening fugue, though at times the perfect fifths of that material become tritones in the Scherzo. In the little coda to the movement the tritone begins to dominate melodically as well as harmonically (see Example 5). The final G $\sharp$  pedal is approached by semitone steps simultaneously from above and below (though the cello G $\sharp$  in fact moves to a G $\sharp$  that is a fifteenth lower than the expected resolution). This is a minute ‘mirror’ shape: the idea has been foreshadowed at the end of the ‘Trio’, in bars 89–91 of the second movement, as well as in bar 21. Mirror shapes predominate to the end of the movement, as Example 5 shows.

#### Example 5

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece, labeled 'Example 5'. It consists of two systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system shows a melodic line in the treble staff with notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and a bass line with notes G, F, E, D, C, B, A, G. The second system shows a more complex melodic line in the treble staff with notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and a bass line with notes G, F, E, D, C, B, A, G. There are various musical notations including slurs, ties, and dynamic markings like 'loco'. There are also some letters 'a', 'b', 'c', 'd' placed above or below notes, possibly indicating specific intervals or techniques.

The cello freely inverts the violin’s phrase, and then the two approach the final unison G $\sharp$  simultaneously from the two extremes of the quartet’s compass. What was the

minutest kind of mirror in the opening fugue has become very large here – and moreover makes evident use of fifths, minor thirds and tritones. The last bar but one has the clearest indication yet that the result of piling two minor thirds one above another (F–G#, G#–Bb) is a tritone. Clearly, the tritone has become of more significance than the fifth at this stage of the argument: and this has happened despite an evident attempt to introduce major thirds (as opposed to minor thirds) during the movement.

The third movement, in which all the instruments are muted throughout, is the most relaxed of all; and its tonal centre (D#) has been well prepared. Firstly, the relaxed end of the fugue begins in that key (though partly notated as Eb). Secondly, a tendency towards Eb in a set of strettis at bars 48–56 of the first movement is followed by an episode of a more relaxed kind beginning in D# (bar 65ff.). In both these instances Eb or D# is a key associated with music of an introspective kind – the type of music used in the third movement. Thirdly, the ‘misleading Recapitulation’ at bar 84 of the Scherzo was on the notes D–Eb, with D on a weak pulse and Eb on a stronger one (this had been preceded by a fairly strong use of Eb/D#’s in the Trio section). Fourthly, the tonal scheme of rising fifths presupposes another shift upwards by that interval: as part of this scheme, the upper notes of the final chord of the first movement (see Example 4) indicate this key. Lastly, the snapping at D# from both directions just after the start of the Scherzo (noted above) helps to prepare the following stage of the tonal argument. The third movement is cast in a miniature sonata form, but without any strong feeling of tonal-dynamic conflict – that idea having been transferred to the opening fugue; nevertheless, one nice tonal point is made. The second-subject area occurs in the same key in both exposition and recapitulation: instead it is the first subject that is in the ‘wrong’ key in the exposition and resolved into the ‘correct’ key (a minor third lower, on Eb) in the recapitulation. This unconventional reorganization of the normal sonata procedure is possible because the preceding movements have already set up the tonal norm for this particular work – there is no need, therefore, for the first subject to establish the tonic. Nevertheless, the pedal F# on the cello at the end of the development might be thought of as preparing a first subject at its original pitch (Gb): the difference of a minor third between this and the eventual entry on Eb is no other than the minor third which, as I have painted out, is the distance of shortfall between the tonic of the fugue and that of the Finale. This minor third difference is recalled immediately prior to the end of the third movement when, just before the last D#, the first subject material is brought back at its original pitch (but now written enharmonically).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> It is preceded by an octave G#, which perhaps recalls the key of the Scherzo.

The first subject's opening material neatly symbolizes what is going on in the work. It consists of a quiet rocking backwards and forwards of a semitone. An equal amount of time is given to upper and lower notes of this interval, so that one is in doubt as to whether the 'semitone up' or the 'semitone down' is uppermost as an active agent. In the first movement the 'semitone down' figure was very prominent, and was heard as the last melodic activity; but in the Scherzo rising and falling semitones balance each other out in such a way as to produce 'mirror images' around a note. Inverting the first movement's falling semitone could, of course, be one way of helping to overcome the tritone – by expanding it back to a perfect fifth.

The little semitone figure of the third movement occasionally has its position in the bar changed so that the upper note is not always felt as rhythmically the stronger; and at one point the figure is simultaneously used in recto and inversion. This tiny semitone figure permeates the whole movement; but throughout it the upward and downward versions are held in balance. One other figure appears very commonly in the third movement, and it likewise symbolizes the dichotomy between the tritone and the perfect fifth. This figure (see Example 6) contains a tritone between its first and last notes, yet overall it spans a perfect fifth. Perhaps the shifting of G up to A $\flat$  used here gives us the first indication that tritones will eventually be succeeded by perfect fifths.

#### Example 6



But, one may ask, is the tritone so very incompatible with the perfect fifth? If you go on adding perfect fifth above perfect fifth, continuing the process started by the tonal centre of each of the movements of the quartet, you will eventually arrive a tritone away from the point of departure. The third movement suggests this position in bar 92 (see Example 7), where there is a chord of piled-up fifths which nevertheless includes the tritone A–E $\flat$  (the E $\flat$  and its repetitions recall the tonic of the movement, but spell it enharmonically).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The process had been foreshadowed in bar 38 of the movement.

## Example 7



Rising fifths and falling fourths, used melodically, then take over the whole texture, so that the lines continually wheel around circles of fifths, so including various tritones. This passage, just before the recapitulation, forms the climax of the movement. Nevertheless, the descending semitones recur six bars before the recapitulation, and act as an elegant means of reintroducing the first subject's semitone rocking figure. The final pedal D# of this movement is approached from a semitone below; this is something of a barometer, indicating the progress of the musical argument.

The fugue had ended with a falling semitone: the second movement also ended in this way, but with a rising semitone played against it in a simultaneous inversion. The rising semitone which closes the third movement constitutes another stage in the overall tonal argument. Robert Simpson has himself commented that the Finale is, for much of its length, a variation of the first movement, but without the fugal texture. If this is literally so, how can the logical argument be furthered and the problems it raises be resolved? Clearly there must be some resolution of the tensions already set up – particularly those between the tritone and the perfect fifth.

One of the most basic ways in which this Finale is a variation of the fugue is its overall plan, in which sections of a contrasting type alternate. In the Finale, the material that corresponds to the fugue's subject is re-written in a non-fugal way, and is less close to its model than in the contrasting material based on the first movement's episodes. Whereas it is the introspective episode type of music that is uppermost at the end of the fugue, in the Finale it is the tumultuous material which corresponds to the fugue subject that is eventually triumphant. This latter material certainly develops and extends that presented in the fugue subject. The filling-in of a fifth from both ends by the distance of a minor third, so that a semitone (major/minor) clash results, is forcibly stated harmonically; and in bars 2 and 3 two statements are placed a fifth apart, so further emphasizing the fifth. In turn this, of course, means that the two resulting semitone clashes (F#–G, and C#–D) are placed a fifth apart:

## Example 8

**Risoluto e concentrato**

The second violin's first *arco* chords in Example 8 constitute a neat summary of the stage which the argument has reached by the beginning of the Finale. The new tonic – here written as B $\flat$  – is sounded with its fifth: the resulting F $\sharp$  would be the next in the logical sequence of tonics if there were to be yet another movement to follow. The sounding of F $\sharp$  helps the ear to hear the tonality of the Finale – at least for some of the time – as a flat one rather than a sharp one; and this helps the aural sense of tonal balance. (It is, after all, at about this point in the circle of fifths that the ear would normally switch over from sharps to flats: one is unlikely to think of E $\sharp$ .) The tonal over-reaching of the circle of fifths – that is, the setting up of F as the possible next tonic in the series – is also emphasized, in the detached octaves used towards the end of the movement. At bars 211ff. a pedal C $\sharp$  in three octaves is followed by four detached octave G $\sharp$ s (these notes recall respectively the first and second movements); the D $\sharp$ s in the

cello are sounded almost simultaneously with the decorated pedal A $\sharp$  in bars 218f. (these notes recall the third movement and emphasize the Finale's tonic). The six detached octave F $\sharp$ s in bars 220 and 221 are, logically, the next step.<sup>8</sup> Yet this continuation of the sharpward circle of fifths beyond the final tonic is balanced by the use of a flatwards circle in such places as bar 3 (see Example 8); here the viola imitates the second violin a fifth lower (recalling the A $\flat$  of the third movement). The chord in bar 5, though, could either be construed as the flatwards circle C–F–B $\flat$ –E $\flat$ –A $\flat$  – the ear probably hears the chord as a flat one rather than a sharp one; or it could be construed as a sharpwards circle reaching yet farther beyond F (G $\sharp$ –D $\sharp$ –A $\sharp$  (i.e. B $\flat$ )–F–C).

At bar 5, the minor third B $\flat$ –G, melodically stated, is expanded to a major third before contracting again. This has been foreshadowed by the A $\sharp$ –C $\sharp$ –D $\sharp$  of the first two bars – notes which are amplified by runs on the first violin, while being stated plainly on the other three instruments. (The B $\flat$ –C $\sharp$ –D $\sharp$  is then stated *vertically* in bar 3.) The resulting B $\flat$ –G–B $\sharp$ –B $\flat$ –G line is the start of an attempt to counteract the minor thirds which have so often made the perfect fifth into a diminished one; one of the thirds must be major and the other minor if they are to fill in the perfect fifth without recourse to the semitone which so easily acts against it in this work. Thus the semitone, which was the shortfall when the two minor thirds were used within the fifth and which decreased that interval to a tritone, must be used to increase one of the minor thirds to a major one. Nevertheless, the harmony of bars 5 and 6 – besides being built up of interlocking fifths, as mentioned above – consists of two minor thirds, though it is true that there is a major third between the higher note of one set and the lower note of the other.

Example 8 also illustrates another important feature. It will be recalled that the end of the opening fugue had made it clear that the distance between the tonic of that movement (C $\sharp$ ) and the Finale's tonic (even though one cannot know it at that stage) is a minor third. This 'shortfall' was stated in descending form during the closing bars of the first movement (see Example 4). Just as the falling semitone has at times been inverted – indeed, the opening 'flick' of the first violin of the Finale is an obvious example – so this 'shortfall' is also inverted. Indeed the B $\flat$ –D $\flat$  interval (or A $\sharp$ –C $\sharp$ ) is used most prominently as a melodic feature throughout the Finale. Because of its prominence earlier in the fugue, C $\sharp$  is bound to have considerable importance in the Finale: only with the greatest force can this minor third be countered by the major third, D $\sharp$ . This explains the unison halt on D in all four instruments in bar 102, as well as many other powerful statements of that note (sometimes clashed simultaneously with C $\sharp$ ).

<sup>8</sup> The passage recurs, with some changes from bar 258 to bar 265.

The new tonal centre is, of course, also a development in a sense. A# (or Bb) has been prepared throughout the Quartet. It will be recalled that the first octave harmony to be heard (see Example 2) was on Bb; movement from C# to A# (see Example 4) is the last melodic activity of the opening fugue; and in the Scherzo the repeat of the opening is based around A# rather than G# used at its first statement. But perhaps primarily the opening A#–C# of the Finale, inverting the end of the fugue, provides the most powerful link between the two outer movements.

This recollection of the opening fugue's tonality might prompt us to look for evidence of the other movement's tonal centres in the Finale. The D# of the third movement is often invoked during the passages in the Finale that are variations on the 'episode' material from the fugue – though the pitch is enharmonically spelled as Eb. This tonal area is particularly relevant, for the third movement is the most relaxed in the Quartet, and that tonal centre is now applied to the most relaxed music of the Finale – the 'episode' material. The influence of Eb at times occurs elsewhere, and is in fact carried on until the very last bars of the work.<sup>9</sup>

The loud and prominent tritone A#–E, which begins at bar 355 and symbolizes the first and last notes of the Quartet, is changed to A#–D at bar 366.<sup>10</sup> The D of this interval is the major third from the movement's tonic (A#) – another indication that major thirds are attaining prominence at the end. D, however, soon scurries up in a series of runs to reach G#, a tritone above (a ploy repeated several times); the combination of A# (i.e. Bb) – for the pedal on that note is persistent and prominent – with D and G# (i.e. Ab) is the chord we know as the dominant seventh in the key of Eb (see Example 9).

### Example 9



<sup>9</sup> I am grateful to Bernard Jacobson for pointing out that Eb is also a fifth down from A#, just as F (in the context of a hypothetical extra movement suggested earlier in this article) is a fifth up from it. This is yet another case of intervals being mirrored in upwards and downwards directions in this quartet.

<sup>10</sup> This may recall bars 189–194 of the third movement.

This key, belonging to the third movement (though spelled enharmonically), is not, however, attained at the end – here it is not the introspective mood that triumphs, but the tumultuous energy of the material based more directly on the fugue subject. Instead of resolving onto  $E\flat$ ,  $G\sharp$  moves on up to  $A\sharp$  (the pedal  $A\sharp$  remains throughout, like a beacon beckoning the music home) in a very powerful statement of the semitone  $A-B\flat$  (written as  $G\sharp-A\sharp$ ).

The upward semitone is stated with the utmost strength, so countering the downward semitones that had made the perfect fifth into a tritone; moreover, the rising semitone that had started the movement in a 'throw-away' manner that might easily be overlooked, returns in the most dramatic and unmistakable form to end it. The first and last real melodic moves in the Quartet as a whole are both rising semitones, whereas the last melodic motion of the opening fugue had been a semitone downwards onto  $A\sharp$ .

If the  $B\flat-D\flat$  third symbolized the distance travelled since the opening fugue and  $E\flat$  recalls the third movement, what reference can be found in the Finale to the  $G\sharp$  tonality of the Scherzo? Naturally the strong  $G\sharp$  in Example 9 (and used repeatedly in the preceding bars) is one; but it is also used as  $A\flat$  in bars 301ff. Other developments and resolutions of the foregoing material are to be found in the closing pages: among these are the G-major scales which are played against the long-held tritone  $E-A\sharp$ .

This passage juxtaposes the major and minor third, so often in conflict in the Finale, since the  $A\sharp$  is heard as  $B\flat$  in the context of the G-major scales. Moreover, the G-major scales force the mind to reinterpret  $A\sharp$  enharmonically: and this, along with the  $E\flat$  feeling mentioned above, is a splendid counter to the sharpward tendency which is a feature of the Quartet as a whole.

The essential organic unity of thought in the Quartet is obvious from this splendid closing passage: but, naturally, it has been present throughout the work. In summary, one might perhaps express the overall logic in this way. The Quartet is very much concerned with the perfect fifth, and the way in which other intervals can affect it. The four movements are set so that their ultimate tonics rise a fifth above the preceding one –  $C\sharp$ ,  $G\sharp$ ,  $D\sharp$ ,  $A\sharp$ . The distance of travel in the work as a whole is a minor third (as is the distance of travel,  $E-C\sharp$ , in the opening fugue); so that interval plays an important part in the Quartet. Applying this minor third to the fifth, moving inwards from both upper and lower notes, does not bisect the interval, but leaves a semitone – the major and minor third in opposition. Just as there is a shortfall of a minor third in the overall tonal scheme, so there is a shortfall of a semitone within the fifth itself. The Finale debates the semitone opposi-



I, personally, have not the slightest doubt that this Quartet is real music – of a most attractive, powerful, and gripping kind – that will take its place among the great string quartets. Indeed, it would not be too much to predict that Robert Simpson's quartets will find a place in the second half of the twentieth century to correspond with that enjoyed by Bartók's in the first.

## Knowing it backwards: Robert Simpson's Ninth String Quartet Lionel Pike

Robert Simpson once commented that people had made a lot of fuss of his Ninth Symphony, but had unfairly neglected his Ninth Quartet, *32 Variations and Fugue on a theme of Haydn*, of 1982.<sup>1</sup> He himself, then, clearly had a high opinion of this quartet, and the present chapter seeks to redress the balance. Simpson's comprehensive programme note, placed at the head of the score of the quartet, forms a useful starting-point:

This work was commissioned by the Delmé String Quartet for a double celebration – their own 20th anniversary and the 250th of Haydn's birth. It is a second exploration of a palindromic minuet by Haydn, which he himself used twice, in Symphony No. 47 in G and in the Piano Sonata No. 26 in A. I first tried my hand at variations on it in 1948, for the piano, and it was looking at these that prompted enough shame to provoke the present attempt, alas on a much larger scale, with a fugue to boot. The variations are all palindromic (i.e. the same backwards as forwards) with occasional deliberate deviations such as switching of parts and shifting of beats in XXIV, where the reverse part of the palindrome actually overlaps with its original. There are also various canonic devices of more or less complex kinds, but the music as such must be expected to stand on its own feet.

There is an overall tonal plan, as follows: the theme is in G, and so are the first fourteen variations. XV to XIX descend in pitch by tones – F, E flat, D flat, B, A – and this brings back G for XX to XXII. From XXIII onwards the keys rise by tones from the semitone above G – Ab, Bb, C, D, E, F# – until G is regained with XXIX. By this means all twelve tonalities are traversed. The last three variations form a large slow movement, which gives way without pause to the Fugue, beginning contemplatively. It is a big fugue, and as it goes on it gains energy and speed. As a result of this the subject itself is constantly changing into something else; by the end it is completely different, though still evolved from Haydn's theme, and at the end the note G acts like a vortex, drawing everything into itself.

<sup>1</sup> In a private conversation with the author. He also maintained that he wished that some of the attention given to his symphonies had been given to the quartets instead. John Pickard writes: 'All the palindromes in RS's music appear in the context of variations (and that includes the 9th Symphony) and both procedures are manifestations of the composer's "problem-solving" approach to composition, whereby music is the area for working out specific self-imposed technical challenges. These challenges can be rigorous, operating at the detailed level of how one note follows the last, resulting in all those canons and fugues that continually crop up in his music (John Pickard, 'Nicht Hippodrome, Palindrome! (Gerard Hoffnung – *Punkt Contrapunkt*)', *Leading Notes* 49, December 1998, p. 3).

I have discussed the *Variations and finale on a theme of Haydn* (1948), for piano, elsewhere:<sup>2</sup> as I said in the conclusion to that article,

This early work not only tells us much about the further variations that occur in the Quartet No. 9, but it is the initial stimulus for an interest in palindromes that has remained throughout Simpson's composing life. The variations in the second movement of the Quartet No. 1 (1951-2) and the second movement of the Symphony No. 2 (1956) owe their character to this interest. Even more far-reaching, though, is the indication given in the 1948 variations that Robert Simpson has begun to explore the miracle by which music is made to convey a sense of muscular movement that is much more dynamic than simply running on the spot or hopping from one foot to the other. It was an interest that was to remain with him for the rest of his composing life.<sup>3</sup>

Though not so intended, the piano variations act as an introduction to the procedures used in the quartet: indeed, variations I, II and VIII of the piano set become variations I, III and II respectively in the quartet. The Ninth String Quartet, first performed at the Wigmore Hall in London on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1982, is a very large piece, taking almost an hour to play: dedicated to the Delmé String Quartet 'In affection and admiration', its performance requires enormous technical virtuosity, great stamina, and immense interpretative power.

One might well ask why a tonal composer should bother to write palindromes. For Robert Simpson there is a very obvious answer. One of them has been alluded to above: he had always been interested in the kind of muscular motion that was a hallmark of the Viennese classical composers, and which he considered to be absent from much music that followed. Most contemporary composers are, he said, 'so bad at movement – so many are spastic, hopping backwards and forwards from one foot to the other'.<sup>4</sup> He much admired composers of a later period than the Viennese classics who demonstrated skill in handling motion – Nielsen and Sibelius are among them – and he himself tried to recapture the ability to write in that way. His Fourth, Fifth and Sixth String Quartets, closely modelled on Beethoven's 'Rasumowsky' Quartets, and the first movement of his Third Symphony (at least in part modelled on the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony) are examples of his use of Viennese classics as a way of teaching himself to handle this elusive type of motion. Tonal music, since it is directed towards a particular goal, travels firmly in a certain direction: one can go far towards understanding musical motion if one finds out what features of tonal

<sup>2</sup> Lionel Pike, 'Towards a Study of Musical Motion: Robert Simpson's Variations and finale on a theme of Haydn (1948)', *The Music Review* 54/2, 1993, pp. 137–148; in this volume pp. 443–458.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148, in this volume pp. 457f.

<sup>4</sup> See Lionel Pike, 'An Astronomical Quartet (No. 7): a lesson from Robert Simpson', *Tonic* 4/2, 1992, p. 3; in this volume p. 332.

language are end-directed – which point in only a forward direction – and which, by contrast, can be made to work in either forward or reverse directions. To write music that works in both forward and reverse directions is to take two quite separate views of one's material: indeed, Simpson commented that retracing one's steps in a palindrome is like making a journey in outward and return directions: on the return journey one's view of the landscape is quite different from that on the outward leg.<sup>5</sup>

Simpson's variations are concerned with far more than just the melodic material of Haydn's theme; indeed, as we will see, he explores every possible facet of the minuet. Donald Tovey said that there were two types of composers of variations: 'those who show that they know their theme and those who show that they do not'.<sup>6</sup> Not only is it abundantly clear that Simpson knew and understood Haydn's theme thoroughly: it will also help others to understand the variations if they know the Haydn theme too. It will therefore be worth spending some time investigating the minuet on which this string quartet is modelled: Robert Simpson's own view about composition was, in any case, that one took a theme and then asked what it had in it – what intervals, harmonies, textures, colours – and then 'improvised on paper' with these elements in mind.<sup>7</sup> We can retrace Simpson's steps, up to a point, by examining Haydn's minuet in detail. In doing so we need to isolate various elements: melodic material; overall harmonic shape; retrogradable and non-retrogradable rhythms (non-retrogradable in Messiaen's sense,<sup>8</sup> meaning that a passage reads the same in both forward and reverse motion); the inclusion of inversions and reversions within the first half of the theme before the 'official' palindrome begins; phrase lengths; and dissonance and resolution.

<sup>5</sup> In a private conversation with the author. We need not take seriously Simpson's comment that it is easy to write palindromes – 'you just write the first half and then copy it out backwards'. Asked to give a lecture on palindromes at Royal Holloway College, University of London, Simpson wrote 'OK: palindromes: I'll walk in backwards'. Simpson repeated some of these comments in his conversations with Mark Doran: see below.

The humour that Simpson found in this situation is illustrated also in a BBC Third Programme talk on Haydn's symphonies (18<sup>th</sup> January 1952). The illustrations were played by the London Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Anthony Bernard. The relevant passage of the talk runs: 'But the best joke [in Symphony No. 47] is the minuet. In both minuet and trio the repeats are *al roverso*; that is, in plain English, backwards. When the unfortunate players reach the double bar, they are expected to play straight back to the beginning, reading from right to left; although no one would think so to look at him, Mr Bernard is, with infinite skill and intellectual adroitness, actually conducting backwards.'

<sup>6</sup> Donald Tovey, *Beethoven*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944, p. 124. See also the comments in Donald Tovey, *A Musician Talks: I: The Integrity of Music*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941, pp. 91–92.

<sup>7</sup> Comment made during a lecture at a conference at the composer's home in Killelton, Eire, July 1989.

<sup>8</sup> The concept is explained in the 'Préface' to the miniature score of Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*.

In the following discussion I will give large Roman numbers for the variations, and large Roman numbers *in italics* for chords. The thematic material (*x*, etc) will be indicated by *small italics*. I shall use the Helmholtz system (in which the open strings of the violin are *g*, *d'*, *a'* and *e''*) for indicating pitches.

### Haydn's theme and the use of palindromes

Palindromes, common enough in atonal music (where, as Simpson put it, they make as little sense in reverse as they did in forward direction<sup>9</sup>), pose special problems for tonal composers: indeed, tonal examples of the form are rare. During an extended set of conversations with Mark Doran, Simpson talked at length about the composition of palindromes, their audibility, and the reasons for writing them. In doing so he used many of the ideas and images that he had used in previous talks, but it is nevertheless valuable to reproduce the passage at length.

MD Mention of palindromes raises the question of their 'abstractness'. Their audibility, for a start, has been questioned by Tovey among others ...

RS Yes. He didn't believe it was possible to hear them. So far as I remember it was *cancrizans* he was particularly referring to. I find a good palindrome fascinatingly audible.

MD ... But I feel that the idea of 'audibility' is a complex one. Do you intend them to be spontaneously recognisable, or detectable only with 'prior warning' as it were – or even, like the sub-thematic manipulations we've already discussed, nothing to do with the listener's conscious awareness at all?

RS I would say the last, if you're referring to first hearing. A palindrome, being different from other phenomena, will undoubtedly have an *effect* different from other phenomena, whether or not we're able to analyze at first what's happening. If someone smiles at you, you know instantly what sort of smile it is – friendly, humorous, sarcastic, sneering...downright evil. But not even the most learned of neurologists has been able to analyze the fantastically complex processes that produce a smile. The listener normally reacts to musical expression in the way we react to human expression. We may not know that a palindrome is going on, but we get from it a definite impression – of circling, perhaps – whether we can define it or not. When we discover the palindrome, or maybe have it pointed out to us, our original impression should be sharpened by the kind of confirmation everyone needs.<sup>10</sup> A palindrome could also be compared with an outward and a return journey – we see the same things, but the other way round. The composer's job is to hear everything both ways. Incidentally, Lionel Pike, in quoting my joke that a palindrome was easy [to write] because all you had to do was get half way, then copy it out backwards, pointed out that if you play Haydn's 'Emperor's Hymn' backwards you get [what sounds like] a very bad Victorian hymn tune. Palindromes, of course, are no problem to composers who don't really know or care what they sound like.

<sup>9</sup> In a lecture given at the conference in Killelton mentioned above.

<sup>10</sup> Simpson remarked that no-one noticed that the second movement of his Second Symphony was a palindrome until some time after the first performance.

- MD Your evident fondness for palindromes goes back at least as far as your Haydn Variations for piano of 1947. The Ninth Quartet is a set of palindromic variations on the same theme – the ‘Minuetto al Roverso’ from the Symphony No. 47 in G...
- RS ...but it reappears in the Piano Sonata in A, Hob. 26, and that A major version is the one I used in the piano work ...
- MD ... and there are also palindromic sections in the Ninth Symphony.
- RS Yes. This work is based on a wedge-like formation of intervals, first opening outwards and then later – quite separately – reversing itself and folding inwards. This naturally led to the idea of putting the two together and making a rather mysterious palindrome, then subject it to variation treatment to build up the final climax.
- MD Do you know Alban Berg’s predilection for palindromic reversal – of entire movements or large-scale sections in some cases?
- RS Yes – Hindemith also wrote a palindromic opera called *Hin und Zurück*, and Myaskovsky’s Thirteenth Symphony is a palindrome too.<sup>11</sup>

As I have said above, tonal music is goal-directed; a conventional cadence formula such as *IV–V–I* makes a convincing close. It does this because a chord on the flat side of the tonic (*IV*) is balanced by a chord on its sharp side (*V*), making the tonic an inevitable ‘centre of gravity’: the tritone that helps to emphasize a key (*IV–VII*) – this interval is one of the most active ingredients in defining any tonality, especially when part of the dominant-seventh chord – is included in the progression between *IV* and *V*. The reverse progression *I–V–IV* does not have the same goal-directedness, and the shift from *V* to *IV* presumably seemed uncomfortably modal to classical composers: the melodic tritone *VII–IV* sounds more exposed when played in this way, and the feeling is rather lydian. Indeed, the progression *V–IV* is largely avoided by the Viennese classical composers. It follows that palindromes can tell us much about the nature of tonal musical motion, and in particular about the end-directedness of harmonic progressions. It is for this reason that Haydn avoids the conventional *IV–V–I* progression in the palindromic minuet, and also avoids the normal classical *IV*<sup>6</sup>–*V*<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup>–*V*<sub>3</sub><sup>5</sup>–*I* cadence: he does, however, place *IV*<sup>6</sup> on the first beat of bar 19 as an approach to the final cadence, a progression that has arisen from a *recto* version (end of bar 2) in which the chord sounds like a dominant chord with a passing-note seventh in the cello (on the last, weakest, beat of bar 2). The ‘meaning’ of that chord, then, is different in *recto* and palindrome versions. Haydn’s theme is shown in Example 1a.

<sup>11</sup> The conversations are so far unpublished, and I am grateful to Mark Doran for letting me see a copy of the transcript.

## Example 1a

## THEMA

Tempo di minuetto (♩ = c.120)

The musical score for the Theme of Haydn's Minuet, Example 1a, is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 1 through 8, and the second system contains measures 9 through 11. The score is written for four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Cello, and Double Bass. The key signature is G major (one sharp, F#). The time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Tempo di minuetto' with a quarter note equal to approximately 120 beats per minute. The dynamics are marked with 'f' (forte) and 'p' (piano). The first system shows measures 1-8, and the second system shows measures 9-11. The score is a palindrome, meaning it can be played forwards or backwards with the same rhythmic pattern.

The tritone  $f\sharp-c$  that so clearly helps to define the tonality of G occurs several times in Haydn's minuet; by repeating it at the identical pitches (in bars 4, 8 and 9) he draws particular attention to it, though its occurrence in bars 8 and 9 on the second crotchet is preceded on the first beat by a wider spacing of the dominant seventh of which that tritone forms a part. The *f* markings in bars 4, 8 and 9 also help to draw attention to the dominant seventh, and to the fact that the resolution can take place equally satisfactorily on the third beat of the bar (in the *recto* version) or on the first beat (in the palindrome): the latter resolution, since it occurs on a strong beat, provides an increased sense of finality that is of particular relevance to the backwards version of the theme.

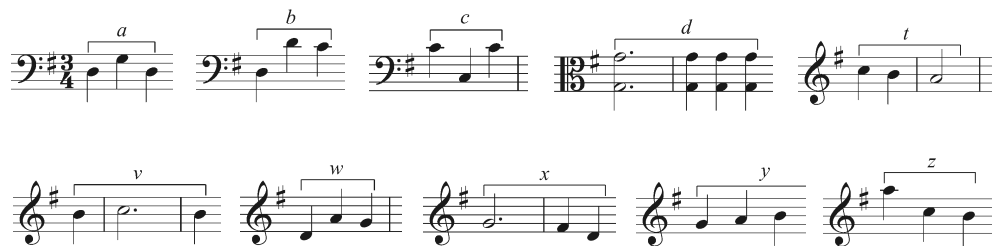
Rhythms can be either retrogradable or non-retrogradable. Retrogradable rhythms produce a different pattern when heard in palindromic form: thus the first four bars of the second violin in Haydn's minuet (two dotted-minims, three crotchets, dotted-minim) do not produce the same rhythmic pattern when played backwards. On the

other hand, the first four bars of the first violin (dotted-minim, six crotchets, dotted-minim) are non-retrogradable: that is, the rhythmic shape is identical whether the notes are read from left to right or right to left. Since Haydn's 'walking bass' is entirely in crotchets it is non-retrogradable, and it provides a sense of stability for the whole minuet, palindrome as well as *recto*: this example is followed by Simpson in IV.

In writing palindromes, an element placed in a weak rhythmic position in the *recto* version will occur in a strong rhythmic position in the reversion: Haydn's cadence formula, discussed above, illustrates this. It follows that a dotted rhythm (as is found in bar 43 at the start of II) will turn into a Scottish snap (see bar 64) when reversed (the whole of variation II is quoted later in this chapter, at Example 3). There is a dynamic sharpness about the Scottish snap that is unlike the effect of the ordinary dotted rhythm. This is perhaps why Haydn avoided dotted rhythms in his palindromic minuet: and in Simpson's XXV the Scottish snaps of the first half become the more relaxed dotted rhythms of the second half, creating a satisfying sense of tension moving to relaxation.

Palindromes produce an imaginary vertical mirror at the point where the *recto* version ceases and the backwards version begins. The first two notes of Haydn's tune (g'-f#') thus become f#'-g' when the mirror is applied; yet this relationship of the two pitches might also be said to result from simple inversion, without the use of palindrome. The same is true of any two-note element: such elements can be found in the alternation of two notes a step apart (I shall call this *v*) and the octave leap, both of which are found in the theme and are much used in the variations. (Figure *v*, used by Simpson as a 'trill' at various speeds, can of course be extended indefinitely without affecting the listener's ability to recognize it: it can also be extended as to melodic interval; and the three-note phrase used by the cello in bars 1-2, d-g-d, which I shall call *a*, could be heard as one of the extensions of *v*. The various melodic elements isolated in the present discussion are listed in Example 1b.)

Example 1b.



But, in addition, ascending scales can be made to descend either by playing them backwards or upside-down: the result is the same either way. 'Inversion' in this sense presupposes that an imaginary horizontal mirror is held against the *recto* form, while the palindrome presupposes that it will be held vertically. Haydn makes full use of these contrasting but linked possibilities: in the first violin part of bars 3–4 and 5–6, and in the cello in bars 2–4 and 5–6, there are scales. The cello at first plays an inversion of the first violin's music, so the idea of inversion is already present within the first half of the minuet. Haydn, in other words, has provided both a vertical and (much more sparsely) a horizontal mirror in his piece. Simpson, as we shall see, emphasizes this point by making 'inversion' a variant of 'reversion'.

But there are two further meanings of 'inversion' to investigate before proceeding. One, known as either 'invertible counterpoint' or 'double counterpoint', is found very often in fugue: it describes the relationship of a number of contrapuntal voices in which each of the parts can be a good tune or a good bass to the others. Simpson makes much use of this procedure in the quartet. More simple – and of use in writing 'invertible counterpoint' – is the inversion of intervals: thus a fifth (c'–g') becomes a fourth if one of the notes is shifted by an octave so as to move to the opposite side of its companion (c'–g'): by this means a minor sixth (e'–c'') becomes a major third (e'–c'), and a major sixth (c'–a') becomes a minor third (c''–a'). Haydn demonstrates this relationship in the outside parts on the first and third beats of bar 3.

The provision of a 'vertical' mirror in Haydn's minuet results, obviously, in a second half that is a palindrome of the first half. Yet the first half itself already contains some little palindromes: it is important to include such devices in palindromic writing, for they make the reverse version seem logical and give it cohesion when heard alongside the *recto*. The rising scale (which I shall call *y*) of the first violin and falling scale of the cello (bars 3–4, 2–4 respectively) are an example that has already been mentioned: indeed, the scale is a useful element to include, since the ear can easily identify it. A further instance occurs when the viola in bar 3 gives an inverted reversion (though the octave leap becomes a seventh) of the cello of bar 2.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the first violin in bar 7 and the cello in bars 8 and 9 give a reversion of the opening three notes of the tune (g' f# d', which I shall call *x*), so positing the ideas of both reversion and (since the 'tune' has now gone into the bass) polyphonic inversion within the first half. The second violin has an inverted reversion of *x* in bars 8 and 9. The thematic tag *x* is very common in Western music: its 2 + 3 shape makes it

<sup>12</sup> This is a feature that results from Simpson's arrangement of Haydn's orchestral version of the minuet, but it is nevertheless part of the 'theme' on which the string quartet is based: see below.

readily identifiable whether played in reversion, inversion, or reverted inversion; when it recurs in the final fugue I shall refer to it as the ‘knight’s move’ shape.

It is clear from all this that the ideas of reversion, inversion and inverted reversion are closely interlinked: the clues are all given in Haydn’s minuet, and Simpson expands upon them in his variations and fugue. But there are yet other elements to note. The parallel tenths between the outside parts in bars 5–7 affect the sound of some of Simpson’s variations, for example. The central octave Gs in the viola in bars 6 and 7 attain great – even over-riding – prominence at the end of Simpson’s quartet: as played in the theme they must contain an open string, a fact recalled by Simpson in the variations. The open strings of the theme do not, however, occur in Haydn’s version; Simpson has adapted some of the part-writing to compensate for omitting the pairs of oboes and horns that appear in the symphony: nevertheless, it is the quartet version printed at the head of Simpson’s score, rather than the symphony version, that is the model, and some of the elements of the variations refer to the quartet version rather than the full orchestra version. Haydn gives one tiny touch of canon at the octave, between the violins in bars 3–4 and the cello in bars 5–6: this leads to a widespread use of canon in the variations, and these canons in turn suggest the polyphonic density of the final fugue.

The dynamics marked by Haydn are, like the other elements, palindromic, and the *f* markings help to draw attention to the unusual form. Haydn’s audience would have expected the piece to have a regular minuet phrasing: basically this consists of two four-bar phrases followed by a double bar and repeat marks, then two contrasting four-bar phrases with a repeat of the opening two phrases to conclude, the second half also being repeated – i.e. A–A, repeat marks, B–BA–A, repeat marks. Instead of this he provides two ten-bar sections divided into 4 + 2 + 4 in the violins, whereas the cello could possibly be construed as 3 + 2 + 2 + 3, a set of phrase-lengths governed by the dynamics: in each half of the tune, therefore, the rhythmic layout of the phrases is the same whether read forwards or backwards.

Before leaving the theme it is worth noting the use of the three-note figure a”–c”–b’ in bars 8 and 9 (a figure I shall refer to as *z*); the three stepwise descending notes (c”–b’–a’) in bars 9 and 10, which I shall call *t*; the three-note figure d–d’–c’ in the cello in bar 2, which I shall call *b*; and the three-note figure b’–c”–b’ in the first violin in bars 3–5, which I shall call *v*: all of them are used in the variations.

## Robert Simpson's Variations

The quartet provides a compendium of variation devices, and – as I have already said – one by no means confined, as are so many sets by other composers, to variations on the melody, harmony and rhythm of the theme. Simpson was a great admirer of Beethoven's variations, and the choice of 32 variations for this quartet was probably suggested by Beethoven's *32 Variations in C minor*. But Simpson was also a great admirer of Beethoven's sonata-form procedures, and the sonata background of the quartet is also important: as the composer's note says, the overall structure is broadly divisible into opening movement, scherzo, slow movement and fugal finale (though in fact the piece is divisible into more subsections than these, a point to which I shall return later), with an appropriately varied and logical tonal structure. Some of the variations are linked together, creating the impression of movements transcending the individual variations.

### The variations: harmonic structure

In the palindromic variations it is useful to present an identifiable central point so that the listener can get his or her bearings. Most of the variations follow the theme in having a central double bar with repeat marks, so that the *recto* version has two performances before the two playings of the palindrome are heard.<sup>13</sup> This helps the listener to identify the elements treated in a palindromic variation. Just as the theme has a dominant chord at the central point, so do many of the variations: or, in the absence of the dominant, something of similar effect is used at the mid-point. In XXV the dominant at the middle is pressed home particularly strongly, with open strings much in evidence: since that particular variation is in C, the stop on the local dominant (G) brings the music to a halt on the tonic of the entire work, and Simpson therefore emphasizes it.

Parallel thirds and tenths, deriving from bars 5–7 of the theme, are found in I and II, and those variations have a mellifluous quality as a result: X and XI also use tenths,

<sup>13</sup> A few of the variations do not have repeats marks. John Pickard writes: 'He often tries to help the listener along in two ways: sometimes he signals the moment of reversal, the mirror, by a change of instrumental colour or dynamic (listen to the palindromes in Symphony No. 9 where the mid-point is often punctuated by the introduction of strings into a woodwind texture); sometimes he offers clearly audible markers on the way (think of the pounding minor third motif – itself a mini palindrome – in the brass and timpani in Variations 3 and 11 of the 2nd Symphony's slow movement (John Pickard, 'Nicht Hippodrome, Palindrome! (Gerard Hoffnung – Punkt Contrapunkt)', *Leading Notes* 49, December 1998, p. 3).

but intermingle dissonances with them. XII has the first violin and viola in parallel at the minor sixth, and the second violin and cello also in parallel at the minor sixth; this is clearly a rethinking of the parallel tenths of the theme, since the tenth is only the third with an octave displacement, and the sixth is the inversion of the third.

III and IV follow the basic first-half harmonic pattern of *I-V-I-V-I-IV-I-V-I-V-I-V* that is found in the theme: XXVIII and XXIX follow a similar harmonic pattern. The tritone of bars 8 and 9 of the theme (*f#-c''*, resolving to *g-b'*) is explored in XXI: this tritone occurs both as a harmonic interval and between adjacent chords (see Example 2, where the tritones are marked *tr* in the first half of the variation). The basic shape of the first half is of a gradual stepwise rise, since the tune of the minuet is divided between the viola and first violin, each instrument having a pair of notes at a time.

### Example 2

471 XXI Adagio (♩ = c.60)

The musical score for Example 2, Variation XXI, Adagio, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 471-481) features a gradual stepwise rise in the first violin and viola parts, with tritones marked *tr* and dynamics *pp sempre*. The second system (measures 482-492) continues the piece with similar dynamics and tritone markings.

The following variation, XXII, also moves upwards by step, through G, A, B, C, D, F# and A, so there is a shift of a rather similar kind to that in XXI, with each step being emphasized in a fugato whose subject is a rocket-like ascending arpeggio: these firmly triadic entries do much to resolve the tensions created by the tritones that had permeated XXI. The first few notes of the second violin and viola in XXX are a harmonic version of *x*.

The variations: rhythm

During palindromic writing a dotted rhythm of the *recto* version turns into a 'Scottish snap' (and is thus 'retrogradable'), whereas the rhythm quaver-crotchet-quaver is 'non-retrogradable' – i.e. it is the same forwards as backwards. Some variations (III, VII and XIV, for example) are entirely non-retrogradable as far as rhythm is concerned: and IV, XII, X and XI are virtually non-retrogradable. In most variations, however, the two types are used in combination. Robert Simpson said that you must include little reversible shapes when writing palindromes: thus II includes some non-retrogradable rhythms (see also VIII and IX: and see Example 3, in which each of the first three bars of the first violin is non-retrogradable, as are various other bars).

### Example 3

43 II *Meno mosso, poco espress.* (♩ = c.72)

The musical score for Example 3 shows measures 43 through 48 of Variation II. The notation is for four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The time signature is 6/8. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The first three measures (43-45) are marked *pp* (pianissimo). The music features a mix of non-retrogradable and retrogradable rhythms as described in the text.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a quartet, likely for strings. Each system consists of four staves (treble and bass clefs). The first system (measures 49-58) shows a complex melodic line in the first staff with many accidentals and a dotted rhythm. The second system (measures 54-58) continues the melodic development with more complex rhythms and accidentals. The third system (measures 59-63) shows a more rhythmic and melodic pattern. The notation includes various accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and rhythmic values (dotted rhythms, quavers, crotchets).

At times this adds to the ‘symphonic’ tension: thus V has little non-retrogradable figures placed among retrogradable ones. Moreover, the pattern varies: II has a mixture of the two types, III is entirely retrogradable, IV is entirely non-retrogradable, and V is another mixture.

Almost Simpson’s first step in the quartet is to introduce dotted rhythms, which had been avoided by Haydn. II starts out with such a rhythm, and most bars in the first half of that variation include a dotted crotchet followed by a quaver. It is as if Simpson is almost immediately drawing attention to a feature of palindromes to which Haydn did

not face up. Example 3 shows that at the leisurely pace used the retrograde version (i.e. the quaver-dotted crotchet shape) does not greatly affect the underlying mellifluousness of the music, even though it introduces a more unusual rocking effect than in the *recto* passage.

IX explores the matter more thoroughly, offering dotted rhythms not only at different speeds, but used in hemiola fashion as well. The 'non-reversible' dotted rhythms occur at two different speeds (dotted quavers as well as the dotted crotchets that give rise to hemiolas), and are interspersed with 'reversible' rhythmic figures of a rise and fall of a minor third. The result is the arrival of a rhythm alongside its augmentation, announced in its most obvious and stark form in the first bar of the variation (which happens additionally to be an expansion of the first bar of VIII). The palindrome version is much more dramatic than is the *recto*, lacking the 'French Overture' feel of the dotted rhythms in the first half of the variation, and lacking its quite conventional hemiola effect; the result is that the palindrome sounds more unsettling than the *recto* statement. The idea is picked up again in XX, though there the dotted rhythms are non-reversible, so the effect is similar in both halves of the variation. The reversal of dotted rhythms and Scottish snaps in XXV has been mentioned above.

The variations: use of inversion within the first half

The contrapuntal type of inversion – 'invertible counterpoint' or 'double counterpoint' – is found in Simpson's variations. III provides a demonstration, since bars 65 and 66 are given in invertible counterpoint in bars 67 and 68, and bar 69 is given in invertible counterpoint at bar 71 (see Example 4).

#### Example 4

III Poco più mosso (♩ = c.88)

The musical score for Example 4, Variation III, measures 65-71, is presented for four staves. The tempo is 'Poco più mosso' with a quarter note equal to approximately 88 beats per minute. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score features complex contrapuntal textures with frequent pizzicato (pizz.) and arco markings, and dynamic changes between piano (p) and forte (f). The first staff (Violin I) begins with a pizzicato figure in measure 65, followed by arco passages. The second staff (Violin II) also features pizzicato and arco patterns. The third staff (Viola/Cello) and fourth staff (Bass) provide harmonic support with pizzicato and arco figures. The measures are numbered 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, and 71.

68

pizz. arco pizz. arco

f p

f

71

f p f p

pizz. arco pizz. arco

p f p

74

mf mf mf mf

(arco) (arco) (arco) (arco)

p p p p

This musical score is for Robert Simpson's Ninth String Quartet, specifically measures 77 through 86. It is written for a string quartet, with four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into three systems, each containing two measures.

**Measure 77:** The Violin I staff begins with a rest, followed by a half note G4 and a quarter note A4. The Violin II staff has a half note G4 and a quarter note A4. The Viola staff has a half note G4 and a quarter note A4. The Cello/Double Bass staff has a half note G4 and a quarter note A4. Dynamics include *f* (forte) and *p* (piano). Bowing techniques include *arco* (arco) and *pizz.* (pizzicato).

**Measure 80:** The Violin I staff has a half note G4 and a quarter note A4. The Violin II staff has a half note G4 and a quarter note A4. The Viola staff has a half note G4 and a quarter note A4. The Cello/Double Bass staff has a half note G4 and a quarter note A4. Dynamics include *f* (forte) and *p* (piano). Bowing techniques include *arco* (arco) and *pizz.* (pizzicato).

**Measure 83:** The Violin I staff has a half note G4 and a quarter note A4. The Violin II staff has a half note G4 and a quarter note A4. The Viola staff has a half note G4 and a quarter note A4. The Cello/Double Bass staff has a half note G4 and a quarter note A4. Dynamics include *f* (forte) and *p* (piano). Bowing techniques include *arco* (arco) and *pizz.* (pizzicato).

This happens over whole variations: thus X is given in (free) inversion as XI, and XV is given as (transposed) invertible counterpoint as XVI. The same thing applies to XVII and XVIII, and a third arrangement of these contrapuntal strands is found in XIX.

There is another form of ‘inversion’ in the shifting of the theme itself within the variations. The viola has the theme in XXVI, but it starts with the end of the first half of Haydn’s minuet, the beginning of the theme coming only in the last three bars of the first half: meanwhile the cello has a somewhat similar (but less strict) idea, with the start of Haydn’s tune coming only in the final bar of the first half.

In XXXI the cello plays the theme backwards in the first half (though the theme is not quoted exactly): this means that the second half of the variation (the ‘palindromic’ half) has the theme in *recto* form, so that the first and second halves of the variation have themselves been inverted (or, at least, exchanged).

#### The variations: use of canon

Haydn’s brief suggestion of canon leads to a full use of the device in the variations: that is hardly surprising, as Simpson greatly admired Bach, who wrote many canons in the *Goldberg Variations* and set the *Vom Himmel hoch* variations entirely in canon. Indeed, there is quite a firm similarity between the spreading of canons of various types through Simpson’s variations and the spreading of canons at various intervals through Bach’s *Goldberg* set. The final fugue of the Ninth Quartet is the ultimate outcome of the contrapuntal virtuosity of the variations. The canons are as follows:<sup>14</sup>

- VI and VII canon 4 in 1, entries on g”–d”–a’–E: a gradually sharpening circle of fifths at the start is balanced by a flattening circle of fifths in the palindrome.
- VIII canon 4 in 2, entries at the tritone.
- XVII canon 4 in 2 at the major third below, but with an upbeat added to the *comes*: the interval of the major third derives from the theme.
- XVIII canon 4 in 2, as above, but in invertible counterpoint (the third again refers to the theme)
- XIX canon 4 in 2, as above, but with stretto entries.
- XX canon 4 in 2, at the major third below.

<sup>14</sup> In canon *dux* (‘leader’) refers to the initial model for imitation, *comes* (‘companion’) the part that imitates that model. Canon 4 in 1 means that four parts are derived from a single *dux*, canon 4 in 2 means that 4 parts are derived from a *dux* of two parts (i.e. the *dux* is a piece of two-part counterpoint).

- XXIII canon 4 in 2 at the fifth, but with the parts exchanged in the palindromic version (there is no double bar at the centre of this variation).
- XXIV canon 4 in 2, at the fourth; the parts are exchanged in the palindromic version, as is the relationship of the strands to the bar-lines. There is a complex interaction of forward- and reverse-direction lines at the point where the palindrome starts, and thus there is no central double bar.
- XXV canon 4 in 2, at the minor sixth above, for the first six bars.
- XXVII canon by inversion between the first violin and viola, the cello stating the theme (the end preceding the beginning): the first violin has a portion of the tune, omitting the start.
- XXIX begins as a canon 4 in 2 at the minor third below.
- XXXII is not a strict canon, but each line is a version of the theme either *recto* or inverted, with rhythmic changes so as to make the various versions fit harmonically. One might compare this to Bach's *Vor deinen Thron*: both are infused with their melodic material and treat it in a complex polyphonic web: this is an ideal precursor of the final fugue.

It would be impossible to examine all these in detail: Example 5 shows the beginning of a canon 4 in 2 in which the melodic material of the cello (and second violin) is derived from *x* and that of the viola (and first violin) is derived from *v*.

### Example 5

552 XXXV Allegro molto vivace (♩ = c.80)

The musical score consists of two systems, each with four staves. The first system (measures 556-559) is in a key with one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The second system (measure 560) is in a key with one sharp (F# major or C# minor). The notation includes sixteenth-note runs, rests, and dynamic markings of *sf* (sforzando) indicating accents. The staves are arranged in a grand staff format with treble and bass clefs.

### The variations: sonata structure

A work of this length needs variety of tonal structure: one way of gaining this variety is to make many of the canons work at the major third (or minor sixth), an interval governed by the parallel motion in Haydn's theme, so that what happens initially at one pitch will be repeated a third or sixth away. As mentioned above, that is one strategy that Simpson uses. During the quartet all twelve pitches are used as tonics, as the composer himself mentions in his programme note quoted at the head of this chapter: the process, in fact, cuts across the division of the work into 'movements' that correspond to those of a more regular quartet. Variations are grouped into pairs or larger units: this, of course, avoids the bitterness that might have resulted if every single variation had been quite different from those on either side of it; yet while using this grouping Simpson certainly does not destroy the feeling of 'variations' entirely. Examples of pairs (or larger units) in what one might call the 'opening movement' are:

- VI is itself varied in VII, with imitative entries occurring earlier in the bar with each successive contrapuntal strand.
- VIII is rhythmically varied as IX.
- X is given in invertible counterpoint in XI and then in a further arrangement in XII, and with fresh inner parts in XIII.
- XIV then furthers this idea by borrowing the new inner voices of XIII, turning them into a canon, and omitting the original semiquavers. X–XIV act like a development section.
- XV is given in invertible counterpoint (and transposed) in XVI: these two have an introverted and relaxed style, the one with viola solo, the other with violin solo, marking the central point of the set of variations. XV–XVI end the opening ‘movement’ with a pair of variations that are almost a slow movement prefiguring the one that later introduces the fugue.

Then comes a 6/8 scherzo, of which XVII–XIX buzz continuously like a swarm of insects on a summer day:

- XVII is given in invertible counterpoint as XVIII, and then in a further arrangement as XIX, the three-fold form following up that of X, XI and XII.
- XXIII runs directly into XXIV without bar lines, continuing the same ideas, and XXV (which is faster) picks up the ‘Scottish snap’ idea that ends XXIV.

‘XXIII and XXIV are musical Siamese twins, overlapping each other and sharing internal organs, at the same time being completely canonic’.<sup>15</sup>

- XXVI reorganizes the events of the theme, as does XXVII.

Variations XXX–XXXII make up a slow movement, as if contemplating the vast stillness of space: none of these variations has repeat marks; this ensures that this section does not take up an inordinate amount of time as compared with the other, faster, variations. XXXI builds on the material of XXX, and the ‘canons’ of XXXII lead without a break into the start of the fugue, which forms the finale.

The variations: phrase lengths

II has both violins and cello in four-bar phrases, but the viola begins in three-bar phrases: the contrapuntal inversions in II suggest two-bar segments (see Example 3),

<sup>15</sup> Lionel Pike, liner note to *Simpson, String Quartet No 9*, Hyperion CDA66127, 1989.

and XXVIII and XXX are in two-bar fragments (XXX is shown below, in Example 8). The canonic variations are impossible to break up into phrases, since *dux* and *comes* have beginnings and ends of phrases at different points. Many other variations do not demonstrate a clear-cut phrase structure.

#### The variations: dissonance and resolution

Dissonance and resolution are of primary concern in the writing of tonal music, since a dissonance needs to be resolved by the sound that follows it. The difficulties for palindromic writing raised by this fundamental fact of tonality have already been touched on above; clearly the notions about what sounds are dissonant (and thus in need of resolution) have changed radically over the centuries, and Simpson's music cannot be expected to adhere to the same principles as those of Haydn's. If fewer sounds are felt to be dissonant by a listener, there is less obvious muscular power in the music to move forward towards resolution: if nothing at all is felt to require resolution, one aspect of forward motion – the idea that discords must be resolved – is entirely removed. Yet it remains true that the ear expects 'dissonant' tonal music to move forward to a resolution: this presupposes movement in one direction only. For the present purpose we must be aware which elements in Simpson's music need to move forward to a resolution: this section, then, will form the crux of the investigation as to how and why music is goal-oriented, and how such music can be made to sound logical if it is reversed.

The first seven variations start and end simply with G, except that in II it is harmonized as a G-major chord (see Example 3). Clearly there can be no more obvious resolution than a single (or octave) G or a G-major chord, given the tonality of the theme. It is with VIII that the matter of motion to and from dissonance is first addressed head-on in this quartet.

The first bar of VIII starts with an extreme dissonance, which is relaxed somewhat on the second beat of a 3/4 bar, and then resolved on the third beat. (The central point of the variation is also dissonant.) In the retrograde version, clearly, the level of dissonance increases in the final bar; this ends with an extreme dissonance, so leading inevitably to the feeling that this variation must continue on into IX, which is a variant of VIII (see Example 6).

Example 6

169 **VIII Allegro molto** (♩ = ♩ del prec.)

174

179

*ff*

*ff subito*

*ff*

*ff*

That, too, must lead onwards after its retrograde, so X starts with the dissonance that ended IX (the upper parts of X are discussed below). The nature of the harmony thus helps to make that series of variations into a unit.

The processes in VIII are logical, though they present a surprise after the relative relaxation of the beginnings and ends of I–VII. VIII is a canon at the tritone, the dissonant interval that so clearly operates to emphasize tonality in classical music – but that is not its function here, for VIII does not sound at all tonal. Here Simpson grasps the dissonant quality of the tritone (and of the semitone too, as we shall see), and expresses that instead. The opening of each instrument's part uses *x* either in *recto* or inversion, as if Simpson was providing a horizontal as well as a vertical mirror; and the parts that start simultaneously do so at the distance of a semitone, an interval suggested by the first two pitches of *x*. It is as if, in VIII, Simpson has dramatically thrown down the gauntlet in order to begin discussing horizontal mirrors, the nature of dissonance and resolution, and the place of the semitone and tritone within it. The more relaxed variations that have led up to this point naturally throw this dramatic outburst into relief: indeed, the effect is of consonance (or relative consonance, expressed in a number of variations) being followed by dissonance (expressed, as we shall see, in a number of linked variations) – itself an inversion of the natural process by which dissonance comes first and resolution follows it, relaxing the tension.

IX is a direct variation of VIII; and in X (a further variant) the two violins are in syncopation, but running parallel to each other: in the first half of the variation seconds resolve onto thirds (or octaves) as long as there is stepwise motion. There is a sense of dissonance and resolution, but it is not uniform, and resolutions are very short except in the middle and at the end of the first half. The retrograde version starts, therefore, with consonance, and then moves towards dissonance (though it is actually

very mild at the end). This progression from consonances towards dissonances helps the feeling that X needs to progress on to XI, an idea repeated in XI so that the need is felt that it in turn must move on to XII (see Example 7).

## Example 7

**X L'istesso tempo**

211

*pp*

*pp*

*pp subito*

*pp subito*

215

*sempre pp*

*sempre pp*

*sempre pp*

*conno nn*

219

Dissonance and resolution, then, are explored in a series of linked variations – VIII–XIII. The dissonances with which these variations end are the starting-points for XVII–XIX, so making them seem like a continuation of the dissonance-resolution idea. To break out of the circle Simpson returns to the fundamental *g*, the bottom open string of the first violin, in XX, and states *G* in four separate octaves before introducing any other material. The *b* and *a* that close XIX – the last in the whole series of final dissonances – are therefore resolved onto the overall tonic, *G*. Indeed, the ferocious statement of *G* at four octaves (‘*Feroce*’ is the composer’s marking) is necessary to counter the dissonances of the preceding variations, and it splendidly resolves the tensions created in them.

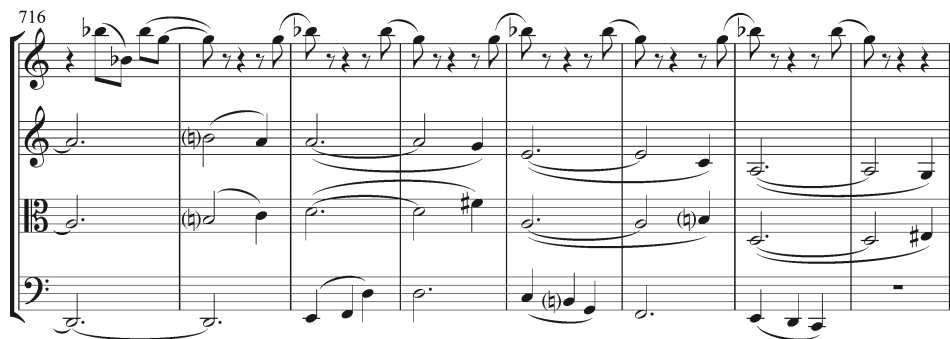
XXI builds on the tritone of bars 4, 8 and 9 of the theme (*f* $\sharp$ –*c*’): this dissonance resolves onto *g*–*b*’ in the theme (see Example 2). XXI begins with *c* $\sharp$ –*g* resolving onto *d* $\sharp$ –*f* $\sharp$ , and the tritone colours the entire variation (as mentioned above, the viola and first violin share the tune of the minuet between them): in the retrograde the tritone sounds last: as mentioned earlier, the arpeggios of XXII do much to resolve this tritone which so dominates XXI. Dissonance and resolution are in this instance spread over two variations. One could take this matter further: the violent dissonances of VIII lead on to a whole series of variations that expand the idea; but these are followed by the quiet, slowly meditative XV and XVI which resolve those dissonant variations on the large scale.

XXX returns to an idea heard earlier: the initial dissonance is the first two notes of the theme (*g*’–*f* $\sharp$ ’) heard simultaneously as a dyad; the third and fourth notes of the theme (*d*’ *a*’) are also used simultaneously as a dyad, so the first beat of the variation ‘resolves’ onto the second; the rest of the tune is given in the cello, but the first two-strand harmony invades the remainder of the variation (see Example 8).

### Example 8

708 XXX Largo (♩ = c.52)

The musical score for Example 8, Variation XXX, is presented in four staves. The first staff (Violin I) and second staff (Violin II) both begin with a *pp* dynamic marking. The third staff (Viola) also begins with a *pp* dynamic marking. The fourth staff (Cello/Double Bass) begins with a *pp* dynamic marking. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a tempo of Largo (♩ = c.52). The score shows a series of notes and rests, with some notes marked with a *b* (flat) and some with a  $\sharp$  (sharp). The first two staves (Violin I and II) play a melody that resolves onto a second dyad, while the lower strings provide harmonic support.



In the retrograde the last bar proceeds from consonance to dissonance, so suggesting that the music moves on seamlessly to XXXI, which starts with a rather similar idea: so the end of XXXI suggests a similar seamless progression onwards to XXXII. As in XX, where the lowest open string of the violin resolves preceding tensions, so the same note – now *pp* and played by the second violin – starts the fugue by earthing the tensions of the preceding variations.

One of the ways, then, in which Simpson has treated the dissonance-resolution complex when it is reverted is to use it to suggest continuation, and to make it a factor in binding a series of variations together into a larger unit.

#### The variations: use of melodic material

The ordinary listener may not be able to trace the workings of dissonance and resolution in the *recto* and palindrome, but (s)he will nevertheless be subconsciously aware of them. Following the evolution of the melodic material is quite another matter: it is eminently accessible to all, since it depends on the use of a number of short and simple melodic fragments – shown in Example 1b – taken from Haydn's minuet. The first three notes of the tune (x) are the most obvious motif to use in the variations; naturally it is ubiquitous in its *recto* and inverted forms, both of which occur in the first half of the theme: so this means that, after the double bar, reversion and inverted reversion are found as well. All four versions are easy to identify aurally, so there is much to be said for using the shape prominently. In a sense the occurrences of this three-note shape in its various forms is like looking at a constellation from different angles or at different times: the analogy is particularly appropriate for Simpson, who had such a lively interest in astronomy that he kept his own astronomical telescope. Planets are said to use 'retrograde motion' because they sometimes appear to move

backwards; this is an exact parallel to the progressions found in this quartet: and there are ‘ascendant’ and ‘descendant’ astrological signs, just as there are ascending and descending scales and other figures in the quartet, deriving from inversions.<sup>16</sup>

The three notes of *x* are also used in other ways:

- V            *bb'-f'-ab'* in bar 106
- VIII        has simultaneous *recto* and inversion, so prefiguring the final fugue (see Example 6)
- X and XI   have a harmonic version, the *x* shape being made into a chord (an interesting variant, easily missed, for most of hearers are more likely to be aware of the ‘tune’ than any other element: see Example 7, and *cf* also Example 8).

The scale (*y*) is simpler, so, as I have already pointed out, it is also easy to identify, and the inversion and reversion are identical: if *x* is like the constellation Equuleus (Colt) with its three stars in ‘knight’s move’ shape, *y* is like the constellation Sculptor with its three stars in a straight line. Figure *y* is used chromatically in I, and in both chromatic and massively extended form in XX, which is almost entirely built from chromatic scales which cover the complete range of the quartet (see Example 9).

#### Example 9

439    XX Feroce (♩ = c.138)

<sup>16</sup> See Lionel Pike, ‘An Astronomical Quartet (No. 7): a lesson from Robert Simpson’, *Tonic* 4/2, 1992, pp. 2–17; in this volume pp. 330–351.

443

447

451

*ff sf*

*gliss.*

*sff pizz.*

*arco*

*spicc.*

*sf*

*sff*

*sf*

*sf*

*sf*

*sff*

[illegible]

The  $a''-c''-b'$  phrase in Haydn's minuet (bars 8 and 9) is something like an extension of  $x$ . Some of the leaps in IV derive from the major sixth of this phrase, and the minor thirds in the first violin of XXX (see Example 8) could be thought of either as an inversion of that interval or as an extension of  $v$ .

The alternation of two notes in what amounts to a trill (which may happen at various speeds) might be said either to derive from the first two notes of the theme or from the  $b'-c''-b'-c''$  in bars 3–5: as mentioned above, it is related to  $a$ , the figure  $g-d-g$  in the cello of bars 1–2. This element ( $v$ ) occurs throughout V, and appears less frequently in VI–VIII: it is then the basis of the 'scherzo' set XVII–XIX, and one can trace its appearance quite often in later variations and in the fugue (see Example 10).

### Example 10

338

Measures 338-342. The score is in 3/4 time. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The melody in the upper staff features eighth and sixteenth notes, with a trill in measure 342. The piano accompaniment consists of eighth and sixteenth notes in both hands.

343

Measures 343-347. The score continues in 3/4 time with the same key signature. The melody in the upper staff includes a trill in measure 347. The piano accompaniment continues with eighth and sixteenth notes.

348

Measures 348-352. The score continues in 3/4 time. A repeat sign is present at the end of measure 350. The instruction *sempre pp* (pianissimo) is written below the piano part in measures 351 and 352.

The image displays a musical score for a string quartet, specifically measures 353 through 364. The score is written for four staves, each representing a different string instrument. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals, indicating the pitch and rhythm of the music. The key signature and time signature are not explicitly shown, but the notation suggests a complex harmonic structure. The measures are numbered 353, 359, and 364, indicating the progression of the piece. The score shows a variety of melodic and rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests, which are typical of a string quartet setting.

These melodic elements are simple, and of great value to the composer in that they are all easy to identify whether heard in *recto* form or any of the inverted or reverted versions. If more complex lines had been used the reversion and inversion would be more radically different from each other, and the derivations would have been harder to identify aurally.

Material from Haydn's accompaniment is also subject to variation: some of this accompaniment material derives from the tune, but some is independent of it. The easiest to identify is the octave leap up and back or down and back (cello, bars 6 and 10). The octave doubling that occurs throughout IV is derived from this, as are the octave leaps that occur in that variation; those octaves give the clue for the start of V, making a link between the material of the early piano variations and the new material written freshly for the string quartet. VI continues the idea by prefixing *x* with an octave leap, and VII varies it by making the octave into semiquavers (see Example 11).

Example 11.

147 VII (♩ = ♩ del prec.)

152

*pp molto leggiero*

155

*pp molto leggiero*

*p*

157

*p*

*pp molto leggiero*

159

*pp*

*p*

*pp*

The image displays a musical score for measures 161 through 165. The score is written on four staves. The first staff (treble clef) begins at measure 161 with a melodic line. The second staff (treble clef) features a complex, rapid passage marked with a 'p' (piano) dynamic. The third staff (alto clef) also has a melodic line marked with a 'p' dynamic. The fourth staff (bass clef) contains a melodic line marked with a 'p' dynamic. The score concludes at measure 165 with a double bar line and repeat dots.

In XX the octaves are expanded to double octaves, and they become ferocious (see Example 9); but by XXVII they have reverted to being rising and falling single octaves, and are much more relaxed. In XXIX the octaves are detached double-stops, which may also derive from the viola of bars 6–7 and 14–15 of Haydn’s minuet; certainly the end of the fugue must derive from this viola passage.

Simpson uses figure *b* (the cello’s d–d’–c’ of bar 2) in V, and (along with the octave leap) makes it the basis of the start of VI and VII (see above). IX extends it, and XIV, which shares the tune among the instruments, turns the opening into this shape, g and g’ (played simultaneously) being followed by f#’ (see Example 12).

## Example 12

259 XIV (L'istesso tempo)

271

282

The end of XVI has an extension of *b*; and the octaves of XV and XXVII also use the *b* shape: the harmony of bar 724 (XXXI) could also be this shape.

A slow trill (the shape *v*) is chromaticised in III, becomes leaps of a minor third in V (an idea recalled in the first violin of XXX, see Example 5), is applied to rising scales (*y*) in VI, ends the first half of IX at two different speeds, is ubiquitous in the

semiquaver figures of X–XIII, and is found (in the major) in XXIII and XXIV (which has minor thirds as well). The figure is applied to *x* in XXV, so prolonging the variation complex XXIII–XXIV by a further variation.

One motif remains to be discussed: the leap of a fifth at the start of the cello in Haydn's theme (this could be considered part of an octave leap or part of *a*, both of which have been dealt with above). This leap had already been reversed within Haydn's first part, and it is also found in the tune (in bar 2): in the variations it occurs most obviously at the central point of V and XIX, but the G–d–g arpeggio of which it is a part also suggests the arpeggios of XXII and the many fifths between the second violin and the cello in XXX (see Example 8).

The overall rise of the first part of the theme is often copied in the variations: thus the first halves of I and II rise, as do V, VII, VIII and others. VI, by contrast, starts with the viola and cello above the violins, and there is an initial fall before the overall tessitura of the music rises towards the central point of the variation.

## The fugue

The feeling of enclosed circularity that is created by the palindromic variations needs to be relieved and countered in the finale. How is it possible, after the composition of such a complex set of variations, to write a finale that will keep the temperature at a similar level, or even increase it? Simpson's solution is to write a fugue; naturally there is no necessity to continue writing palindromes in this section, but the fugue is of such power and individuality that it splendidly 'caps' what has gone before. It grows naturally out of the variations, being particularly well prepared by the freely canonic XXXII. It is an enormous fugue (bars 772–1427, lasting nearly 13 minutes in the initial recording) and it gradually increases in speed from a slow start to a very fast ending that provides the same kind of feeling as would a finale in a sonata-form work (though the opening of the fugue continues the slow-movement feel of XXX–XXXII). It is the kind of movement found in the finale of the Third Symphony (among other places), and is partially the result of Simpson's interest in motion. The subject gradually undergoes metamorphosis as the speed increases, as the composer's own programme note points out; the ear can easily follow the stages of this evolution, though it would be difficult to hear the relationship between the early and late forms of the theme if one had not heard all the intervening stages of the argument.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Simpson's liking for fugue made me suspect that he would one day write his own *Grosse Fuge*: I once mentioned this to him and his reply was simply 'Humph'. Alas, he died before writing his own *Grosse Fuge* – and yet the finale of the Ninth Quartet might itself claim that title.

The subject is a melodic inversion of the theme (though with octave break-back because Simpson wished to start on the violin's lowest note, and cannot therefore descend below it), and so it provides a minor-key (G phrygian, perhaps) quality that is the exact opposite of the G major of the minuet: the rhythm is also varied. The initial note of the fugue, it will be remembered, was the note on which cumulated dissonances were previously resolved. By using a subject whose answer is given in inversion Simpson provides a 'horizontal' mirror to complement the 'vertical' mirrors that come at the mid-point of each of the variations. In addition the rising version of *x* used by the first entry offers a modal colour that is countered by the descending *x* that starts the second entry in a much more straightforward tonal manner (see Example 13).

### Example 13

772 Fuga (♩ = c.92)

779

The answer begins on  $b\flat$  (rather than on the dominant) so as to maintain the minor-key colouring of the subject: this use of the minor key is much emphasized by the counter-subject material that insists on phrase *t* (the counter-subject, however, is not regular). At the opening the rising form of *x* beginning on *g* uses the modal  $a\flat$ , a pitch countered by the second note of the  $b\flat$  answer (an  $a\sharp$ ), for this uses the de-

scending form of *x*. (The countering of the minor second above the tonic by the major second is another reason for starting the answer on the minor third.) The entries on *f* $\sharp$  and *a*' in bars 808 and 814 similarly alternate *g* $\natural$  and *g* $\sharp$ '. Thus the semitone above each tonic is countered by the tone above it when the 'answer' begins a minor third above the 'subject': by this means the 'modal' minor second and tonal major second are held in balance. The contrast between the subject and answer is evident throughout the fugue, and neither is paramount at the end.<sup>18</sup> Entries of the cello (on *G*) and first violin (on a high *b* $\flat$ '') continue the first exposition, expanding the opening in a fan-like – or even wedge-like – fashion, as if the 'mirror' were still being held horizontally.

A second set of entries uses the instruments in the same order but with the subject and answer reversed, the entries being on *b*', *f* $\sharp$ , *a*' and *d* $\sharp$ ': the second and third entries of this set have been mentioned above, but it is additionally worth notice that the outer pair of entries, which are a major third apart (on *b*' and *d* $\sharp$ '), enclose an inner pair a minor third apart (on *f* $\sharp$  and *a*'): it is as if the *G* phrygian (or *G* minor) versus *G* major of the opening entries is being applied to affect the actual pitches of entry. This second set of four entries offers a wider range of implied tonalities than did the initial set, and there is considerable use of rising scalic material that helps to draw the tonality away from the somewhat gloomy realms of *G* phrygian.

A third set of entries (two only) is accompanied by faster-moving material that uses the minor-third motif *t* widely: these entries begin to open like a fan in which the upper notes in each strand extend the interval of the leap against more stationary lower notes. The entries of the subject now start with the original version, but the cello initiates the exposition this time, beginning with its bottom note (and thus sounding like *C* phrygian), to be followed at the other extreme by the first violin on *f*'' (bar 839); but still the counterpoint is minor in tonality, with use of *t*.

So far the entries of the subject have been perfectly plain; but from bar 846 onwards the subject is itself gradually transformed. I shall give names to each of the versions of the subject in an effort to characterize them: in a sense, then, these 'characteristic' versions of the subject are themselves further variations on Haydn's theme, though they are not numbered among the official 32.

The first variation on the original fugue subject occurs at bar 845: this is a 'wedge' subject, a shape prefigured in the viola at bars 832–834. It begins on the

<sup>18</sup> The concentration on a pure open *g* string (apart from the cello, which uses its open *G* string only in the final double-stop) at the end of the fugue means that neither is in the ascendancy: both *A* $\natural$ s and *A* $\flat$ s are used in the bars leading up to that final *G*.

second violin on c''', and includes *x* (in forward and reverse directions), *c* (the octave leaps down and up from the cello of bar 6) and *z* (the a''–c''–b' figure of bars 8 and 9): see Example 14.

### Example 14

‘wedge subject’  
♩ = ♩ del prec.

The musical score for Example 14 consists of two systems of four staves each. The first system covers measures 845 to 848, and the second system covers measures 849 to 852. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The first system is labeled 'wedge subject' and '♩ = ♩ del prec.'. The dynamics are marked *sf* (sforzando) and *pp* (pianissimo). The second system continues the piece with a *pp* dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

The ‘wedge’ shape reflects the fact that Haydn’s theme had – in essence if not absolutely literally – opened out from a close spacing and moved the outside voices by contrary motion to a wider spacing, again as if a horizontal mirror had been held in the middle of the texture.

*Stretti* based on *x*, *y* and *z* follow these wedge entries, and they lead to a further development of the original fugue subject, which I shall call the ‘fifths’ subject (see

Example 15). The emphasis on fifths is a strong reminder that the instruments of the quartet are tuned in fifths – an idea that leads eventually to the powerful conclusion of the piece: it is relevant also to note that open fifths were used in the viola at bars 4 and 17 of the theme, that figures *x* and *y* contain fourths (which are inversions of the fifth), that *w* contains a fifth, and also that the fifth is the inversion of the fourth of figure *a*.

#### Example 15, ‘fifths’ subject

This moves the music into 2/4, and it begins (just before the change of time signature) in the viola in bar 878: this is a subject that starts by striding down two fifths before scuttling more rapidly upwards: the material used is *a*, *x* and *t*, and the countersubject material (though not regular) uses *v*. The entries are on d', g, c''' f''' and b<sup>b</sup>, themselves all a fifth apart, and apparently moving flatwards, though it is only the initial few notes that give such an impression, since the remainder of the material counters this impression by moving sharpwards. During the ‘fifths’ subject little notes proliferate, leading to a *stretto* on the rising part of the theme (cello and viola, in bars 894–900) in order to introduce the next variation in the subject, which I shall call ‘knight’s move’, since it embodies the ‘second plus third’ shape in the same direction that is derived from *x*.

The ‘knight’s move’ subject begins high on the first violin on e''' (in bar 903) in quiet but fast triplets which begin to prepare the ultimate shift to fast triple time that lasts until the final unisons space the rhythms out into duple-time bars. The subject combines a version of *x* (with the semitone form of *v* applied) with the alternation of fourths (i.e. fifths inverted) that derives from *a* (see Example 16).

### Example 16 ‘knight’s move’ subject

[illegible]

908

908

909

910

911

912

913

914

sempre *pp*

sempre *pp*

leggero

*pp*

For a little while the ‘fourths’ part of the theme is used in inverted imitation. The fourths from the second half of the ‘knight’s move’ subject become a theme in their own right – they are, after all, only an inversion of the fifths just mentioned – and they are combined with a much slower recollection of the original fugue subject (bar 943) given in the viola on  $b\flat$  and second violin on  $c\sharp$ , with the answer in the first violin on  $a$  and the cello on  $a\flat$ . All are announced in *stretto* entries, and have the end of the theme altered rhythmically as compared with the original subject.

The combination of slower and quicker themes calls to mind the tradition of juxtaposing fugue and sonata form in the finales of symphonies and string quartets: Mozart’s String Quartet in G, K387, the finale of his *Jupiter* Symphony and the finale of Beethoven’s ‘Rasumowsky’ Quartet Op. 59, No. 3 in C all have this in common, but in each instance the ‘fugue’ tends to act as the first subject, the second subject being contrasting material of a more regularly ‘symphonic’ kind. In the present quartet, however, Simpson writes a finale that has sonata-form contrast and growth in plenty, and yet is entirely fugal.

At bar 961 the original subject with its quicker ending and countersubject material is used in *stretto*, then the answer form (the shape that is nearer to the start of Haydn’s theme) enters in the cello on  $b\flat$  and the viola (on  $a$ ). The ‘knight’s move’ theme is recalled in its own *stretto* (beginning in bar 988), and in even closer entries in bars 1019–1024.

In order to increase the tension yet further the entries of the head of the answer (i.e.  $x$  in *recto* form) are now combined with great striding wedge shapes derived from the ‘wedge subject’ (see Example 17).

### Example 17

1041

*sff molto intensivo*

*sff molto intensivo*

[illegible]

1068

A series of long pedals (prefiguring the final idea) joins in, as does the ‘knight’s move’ subject (the latter has upbeats added at a close *stretto* in bars 1121–1126). Much use of *z* leads to a new development.

At bar 1249 the original subject is given again, starting on the open G string of the first violin (in G phrygian), but in diminution: the viola has a second entry (not this time the answer) on *c*♯ (a semitone above its lowest sounding note), with the cello entering on its open bottom string (bar 1260) and the second violin on *b*. The concentration on open strings looks back to XXIX (where they are much used as part of double-stopped octaves), and to the double-stopped fifth in the viola of Haydn’s theme: it is all a preparation for the final Gs of the work. At this point the music is in 9/8, but 6/8 returns at bar 1288, and the compound duple feel is used in alternation with 3/4 accentuation so as to increase the excitement. Versions of *x*, *a* and the wedge shape are presented, and fast versions of *x* begin to swamp the texture while slower versions are used as if in an attempt to start Haydn’s tune again. Bit by bit the violins’ open *g* string begins to be sounded, echoing figure *d* from the theme: and one by one all the instruments are drawn into this G, so that the final idea is not one derived from Haydn’s tune at all, nor from his bass; it comes from the double-stopped octaves in the viola part (bars 6 and 7) that Simpson used to replace the horn parts of Haydn’s original.

The use of open strings had in fact been growing for some time. As mentioned above, there are places at which the violins’ open *g* string resolved the tensions of sets of variations that end dissonantly. In XXV the central point is a double-stopped *g* *d*’ (the two lowest open strings) on both the violins, with the same double-stopped dyad on the viola, and with the cello doubling at the octave below (both instruments will also play on open strings to match the sound of the violins). At the mid-point of XXIX there are double-stopped octave *a*’ *a*’ and *g* *g*’ in the first violin, *c* *c*’ in the

viola, G g and d d' in the cello, and the viola's bottom open string is used as a long-held pedal. The second violin starts both XXX and XXXII with its open bottom string (so preparing the opening of the fugue, which begins in a similar fashion), and the first bar of XXXI has a double-stopped a' a'' in the second violin. The number of soundings of open strings increases dramatically towards the end of the fugue (the idea may well have come from the scherzo of Beethoven's First 'Rasumowsky' String Quartet, Op. 59, No. 1).<sup>19</sup> At bar 863 of Simpson's quartet the first violin has a dramatic double-stopped fifteenth a' a''' while the viola and cello both play their bottom open strings, and bars 867–868 include an open string C pedal on the cello. Robert Simpson said the 'bottom note of the cello is a glorious sound: I could listen to it for ever'.<sup>20</sup> The 'fifths theme' of bars 878ff. recalls the fact that the strings are tuned in fifths (Simpson said that a composer writing for quartet must not forget that he is using four solo instruments, each with four strings tuned in fifths<sup>21</sup>); and from bar 1048 onwards various open strings are used (sometimes it is the lowest note of an instrument, starting with the cello's open C string, but sometimes it is a 'double-stop' that requires one of the notes to be an open string<sup>22</sup>).

The final bars are a vibrant celebration of the open G string: here we have a much more powerful statement of the idea with which the fugue had begun. This is an astonishing climax to an astonishing fugue, and an astonishing quartet: virtuosity is required from the players; virtuosity was certainly required in large measure from the composer. It is an extraordinary *tour-de-force*. 'Monothematic' would scarcely be the correct description of the quartet as a whole: but there is not a single element of Haydn's theme that is not explored in Simpson's variations and fugue built upon it.

<sup>19</sup> See William Drabkin, 'Beethoven and the Open String', *Music Analysis* 4, 1985, pp. 15–28.

<sup>20</sup> See Lionel Pike, 'An Astronomical Quartet: a lesson from Robert Simpson', *Tonic* 4/2, 1992, p. 6; in this volume p. 336.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2; in this volume p. 331.

<sup>22</sup> I am grateful to Dr Barra Boydell for his observation that the second violin in bars 1060–1064 cannot play the upper note of the double-stopped E on the open e'' string, for the lower note will have to be played on the d' string and the player cannot cross the string for this double stop. Yet it seems that Simpson wrote the double-stop with the intention that the open e'' string would cut through the texture, as do so many other open strings towards the end of the fugue.



Simpson and beyond



## Robert Simpson on music: writings and lectures

### Lionel Pike

This great and humane composer never shirked what seemed to him to be the truth, in thought or feeling. His profound human qualities were matched by a first-rate intellectual mastery of his ideas; and this means that there is in his music an altogether unusually wide and deep range. In his work we can find almost everything; from humour to tragedy – sometimes a blend of both; he can exult, or he can search darkly, and he knows simple human delight as well as complex inner conflict. The expression, where necessary, is enormously intense, yet it's always quite free from inflation, exaggeration, self-dramatisation; always true, pure, objective. Music can impersonate human feelings; it can deceive the listener, and even its composer; but only a genius of a very high order is able to make music that *is* human – naturally, maturely, *actually* human, so that the intensest of feelings is expressed as a matter – of what? fact, not fiction. It's in this that Nielsen's greatness lies; he's influenced me deeply as a composer; but what's more important, he's taught me about life, and living.<sup>1</sup>

These remarks, made by Robert Simpson about Carl Nielsen, apply in equal measure to himself: and they give an accurate picture of Nielsen in prose from which it would be almost impossible to extract a single word without affecting the sense. This is writing of a high order.

Robert Simpson's writing and lecturing on music, like his composing, was spread across his whole life: the volume of work in this field is so vast that one marvels that he had time for any other activity. It ranges from full-scale books and chapters in books to articles, reviews, conversations, short footnotes, comments on music in his letters, reminiscences and obituaries, and tiny remarks made against reviews of his music. For much of his life he kept copies of his writings, reviews of his work, and articles about him; there are two large scrapbooks, as well as a large amount of literature that survives in loose form, in the Robert Simpson Archive.<sup>2</sup> There was much material in An-

<sup>1</sup> The beginning of Simpson's introductory talk issued with the records of the complete Nielsen symphonies, played by the London Symphony Orchestra (the conductor was Ole Schmidt and issued on Unicorn RHS 324-330).

<sup>2</sup> The Robert Simpson Society Archive, formerly held at Royal Holloway (University of London), Egham, Surrey, but recently transferred to the Bodleian Library, Oxford, contains two large scrap-books (both with 'News Cuttings' stamped on the front cover) in which are pasted articles by Simpson himself, articles about him, reviews, letters, programmes and much else besides. He was collecting such material for a third scrap-book, but did not complete the task, and the material survives in loose form. The books do

gela Simpson's house in Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire: throughout there is an admirably forthright Simpson style, and a very striking habit of starting each piece of writing with some gripping or startling observation, as if to gather the eyes and minds.

It is clear that Robert Simpson, on purchasing an Amstrad word-processor in 1983 (or perhaps 1984), began to compile copies of his programme notes. He was continually being asked to provide such notes, so it is hardly surprising that he eventually found it advantageous to store copies of them on floppy discs. The programme notes could then be readily down-loaded, obviating the necessity of re-typing – or even re-composing – his work (for on some occasions he wrote a fresh note for a piece even when he had already treated the same work in a different way). A hard copy of these programme notes is in the care of Angela Simpson, though it is, of course, difficult to date the work. One cannot tell whether they were freshly written when the Amstrad was acquired, or whether Simpson made use of pre-existing material. Very few of the notes are dated.

Many programme notes were written for The Henry Wood Promenade Concerts while Simpson worked at the BBC: this was not part of his remit as an employee, and he was paid an additional fee for providing them; indeed, Angela Simpson remembers that he only agreed to write on works which appealed to him. The programme notes are perfect models: there is always some gripping opening, and the note will invariably throw light on the work discussed, and make the reader think and listen deeply. For an Edinburgh Festival Concert performance of Schubert's Ninth Symphony on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1963 he wrote, '[this is] arguably the greatest symphony not composed by Beethoven'. For a Henry Wood Promenade Concert performance of Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements* in 1954 he wrote, 'Stravinsky the *enfant terrible* has always ousted Stravinsky the cool precision worker from the public eye. Yet it is the latter who is always in command...'

Books and articles include the seminal studies of Beethoven, Bruckner, Nielsen,<sup>3</sup> and

not give anything like a complete picture, and there is much more material formerly in the care of Angela Simpson, which has now been merged with the Robert Simpson Society Archive to form the Robert Simpson Archive at the Bodleian Library. I have had much help from Angela Simpson, Martin Anderson, Mark Doran, Richard Edwards and Jürgen Schaarwächter in compiling this chapter, and I offer them my grateful thanks for their kindness to me. The smallest entry in the scrap-books is a set of double exclamation marks in the margin of two separate reviews, by A.K.Holland in the Liverpool Post of 17<sup>th</sup> July 1957, and Dyneley Hussey in The Listener of 25<sup>th</sup> July 1957, both reviewing the first performance of the Second Symphony. Both refer to Simpson as one of the 'angry young men': Simpson underlined that comment in both reviews, which are stuck side-by-side into the book, and he placed '!!' beside each.

<sup>3</sup> Simpson's book on Nielsen was written in 9 weeks because of pressure to have it ready for a Nielsen festival (conversation between Simpson and Mark Doran in 1991, kindly made available by Mark Doran: see Mark Doran's transcript of the conversations, hereinafter called 'Simpson-Doran').

Sibelius – composers who influenced him greatly and affected his own musical thought throughout his life. In some instances (Bruckner, Havergal Brian and Nielsen) it was through his efforts that the composers became well (or in Brian's case, better) known. In 1956 he was presented with the Carl Nielsen Gold Medal at the Danish Embassy in London; it was awarded by the Carl Nielsen Society in Denmark in recognition of his championship of the eponymous composer, then virtually unknown outside his native country. It was for his writings on Bruckner – writings that helped introduce the music of this once-neglected composer to the musical world at large – that Simpson was awarded the Kilenyi-Bruckner Medal of Honor of the Bruckner Society of America: this was in 1962, a year before it was awarded to Paul Hindemith.<sup>4</sup> He was always a champion of the unjustly neglected: though he wrote much about his favourite composers, he also wrote about many others. One of his last pieces of writing (November 1990) concerned Nielsen, and it was typical of him that in it he vents much spleen about the state of the world in the twentieth century. He gives cogent reasons for his own vegetarian, pacifist and 'green' political stance, as well as relating them to the conditions found in Nielsen's music. The very opening of the article might well refer to Simpson himself, though it actually describes Nielsen:

He could use words with something like the accuracy of his musical imagination, and they show not only his intense interest in living creatures as phenomena, but also his sympathy for human persons.... Nielsen's life-work as a composer was a coherent process, growing consistently in emotional and intellectual subtlety.... Nielsen himself observed in his inimitable way that what the composer wanted was less important than what the music wanted.<sup>5</sup>

Simpson's great honesty shines through this late piece of writing: it is very characteristic of him to have offered it 'in an attempt to atone for the rubbish written about this masterpiece (Nielsen's Sixth Symphony) in the first edition'.<sup>6</sup> He finds in Carl Nielsen a kindred spirit: never a great lover of the Second Viennese school, he remarks that Nielsen

<sup>4</sup> See *Chord and Discord: A Journal of Modern Musical Progress*, published by the Bruckner Society of America, ed. Charles L. Elbe, 2/10, 1963, p. 56. This journal contains an up-dated version of the article (*The Seventh Symphony of Bruckner*) that turned out to be a pilot study for Simpson's book on the composer.

<sup>5</sup> 'Carl Nielsen Now: A Personal View', in *The Nielsen Companion*, ed. Mina Miller, London: Faber and Faber, 1994, pp. 78–79. Even later came a series of television broadcasts to accompany performances of Nielsen's symphonies conducted by Simon Rattle.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83. The remarks refer to Simpson's treatment of the Sixth Symphony in his *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist*, London: J.M. Dent, 1952. He had, in fact, never heard the symphony when he wrote the chapter on it, having worked from the full score only.

Showed a positive, non-abolitionist route to the expansion of musical expression and that he composed against fabricated theories and prefabricated music aiming at the self-consciously 'new'.<sup>7</sup>

In this late chapter he finds a precursor for his own interest in the potentialities latent in intervals;<sup>8</sup> and he even refers to his own twisting of a piece of the Christian liturgy, changing the medieval text 'In the midst of life we are in death' to his own life-affirming 'In the midst of death we are in life'.<sup>9</sup> It is touching to see this coming from his pen so near the end of his life.

This late study of Nielsen is separated from Simpson's early writings by over 40 years (he wrote some reviews for *The Music Review* and *Music Survey* in the late 1940s, and his *Bruckner and the Symphony* dates from 1946). His regular contributions to *The Music Review* date from 1947 to 1950, at a time before he was known as a composer, or even as a lecturer and broadcaster. Even at this early stage they are full of wit, aural perception, handling of words, clarity of thought, deep knowledge, and a tendency to say exactly what he thinks without mincing words and without caring what the effect will be of telling the truth as he sees it. This last facet is probably the reason for him ceasing to be a correspondent for *The Music Review*. His account of Schoenberg's *Theme and Variations*, Op. 43a, elicited a response from three eminent musicians, one of whom later became a great friend of Simpson's and an admirer of his music.

Sir, - Obviously Mr. Robert Simpson's review of Schönberg's *Theme and Variations*, Op. 43a (MR, XI/1/50, p. 67) is "the result of [his] failure to grasp [Schönberg's] artistic aims". What to Mr Simpson's ears are "arbitrary note-patterns" is music to ours. The proposition that Schönberg's methods "defy the acoustic relationships of sound" is strictly and provably meaningless. We fail to understand how one of this country's most capable writers on music, and indeed, one of our own most valued contributors, can consider himself competent to review music which, on his own admission, he does not understand, and how you, Sir, could see your way clear to print the outcome of his bewilderment.

Yours faithfully,

DONALD MITCHELL,

HANS KELLER,

*Editors.*

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 86–87. In the programme note for the first performance of his *Variations on a Theme of Carl Nielsen* (1983) (Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society, 26<sup>th</sup> November 1986) Simpson wrote 'An uncanny sensation in the beginning was in writing Nielsen's theme with his own pencil – the one he composed it with, in fact, as well as everything else after his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, when he got it as a present. On his centenary in 1964 it was given to me by his daughter Irmelin: naturally it's been a treasured possession, and I've composed with it ever since in the fond hope that it will write some decent music for me'.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>9</sup> *Media vita in morte sumus*, the antiphon at Compline on the eve of the Fourth Sunday in Lent, and in the Sarum rite the Nunc Dimittis antiphon at Compline for the third and fourth weeks in Lent, becomes *Media morte in vita sumus* in Simpson's 1975 piece for chorus, wind and timpani.

ROBERT DONINGTON,

*Editorial Board.*<sup>10</sup>

Already, then, it is clear that Simpson had made a great mark as a writer: but such antagonism towards him did not prevent him from fearlessly expounding his own views, and he continued to do so throughout his life: and his writings became his own personal Credo. 'Against Lipsius' (originally broadcast as *The Ferociously Anti-Pessimist Composer*),<sup>11</sup> for example, was written as a counterblast to a BBC Radio talk in which Peter Maxwell Davies advocated avant-garde and specifically atonal music. Simpson had himself never seriously belonged to the faction that maintained that atonal music was the only respectable type, and he expounds his own position in the article. Indeed, he was fond of telling stories against the consciously avant-garde.<sup>12</sup>

The failure to ask Simpson to write for any future editions of *The Music Review* is a cause for regret, the loss to literature on music immense. Within his remaining writings for that journal his wit is to be found everywhere, and each reader will have his or her own favourites. For many it will be the mischievous juxtaposition in a single review of a Rossini aria with Britten's *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* (the author's claim that it was accidental only serves to focus attention on it), or the review of Eileen Joyce's recording of Mozart's Sonata in C major, K309:

This arch, bloodless insipidity is not Mozart. Miss Joyce is said to vary her costumery according to the particular composer with whom she happens to be dealing. This chameleon-like habit must be entertaining, and leaves one at liberty to wonder if this schoolgirlish tinkling were accomplished in a gym-slip. The performance is devoid of character, contrast, and rhythmic grip, though the notes are negotiated with demure care. Finally, the recording is indifferent and at 78 revs per minute plays nearly a semitone sharp: how came it to be issued?<sup>13</sup>

Equally forthright is the final paragraph of a review of Artur Schnabel's Symphony:

<sup>10</sup> The Music Review 11, 1950, p. 168. Either the 'editorial board' had not seen Simpson's contribution, or the members did not wish to apply censorship.

<sup>11</sup> The Listener, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1971, pp. 826–827.

<sup>12</sup> He was fond of telling the story of the young composer at one of the London conservatoires who wrote a piece during which eggs were to be thrown at a blackboard: all went well at the rehearsal, but the effect was ruined when some-one hard-boiled the eggs during the interval before the performance. He also commented, 'I admit I did once offer to write William Glock a piece for one of his Thursday Invitation Concerts – *Irritation Concerts*, some of us used to call them – in which the performers ate each other...' (Simpson-Doran).

<sup>13</sup> The Music Review 9, 1948, pp. 323–324.

The work was condemned out of hand (on principle) by the critic of *The Times*, who evidently leans heavily upon the programme-notes, allowing the music to pass over his serene head while he studies the remarks and snippets of music-type on his knee. His condemnation was purely on the theoretical ground that the work was atonal, since it was thus described in the programme. His pretentious pontifications about the need for a “centre of gravity” exposed him to two possible suspicions: (a) that he paid no attention to the music, (b) that he may not be able to recognize his much-desired centre of gravity when it is provided. Even when Schnabel himself pointed out that the work was not at all atonal, the critic could only complete the debacle by referring once more to the programme-note. *The Times* is indeed wise in maintaining the anonymity of its critics. It was, of course, inevitable that a great executant who produces a large piece of creative work should receive the usual platitudinous discouragements; there have been many such instances from J. S. Bach to Busoni and Mahler. Therefore one waited with horrid fascination to see precisely which critic would have the effrontery to instruct the cobbler to stick to his last; the prize for this remark must go to Mr Stanley Bayliss of *The Daily Mail*.<sup>14</sup>

The review of Tippett’s Second String Quartet<sup>15</sup> is a touching tribute to a composer who, in later years, was often regarded as the great rival to Simpson. The remarks on the performance of Monteverdi pre-date the thinking of the early music lobby by many years.<sup>16</sup>

It was Simpson’s interest in spreading the gospel of music that first brought him to the attention of the BBC. His *Exploratory Concerts Society* came to the notice of Sir Steuart Wilson, the corporation’s musical director, and he asked Simpson to join the staff as a producer for what used to be called the ‘Third programme’, but which is now Radio 3. At this time composition was necessarily a spare-time activity for him, and he was consequently better known as a writer on music and a broadcaster about it. The staff in the Music Department of the BBC at this time was particularly outstanding, and great benefit was gained from the interaction between the brilliant, inventive, and knowledgeable minds of Robert Simpson, Hans Keller, Robert Layton and Deryck Cooke.<sup>17</sup> Simpson’s radio talks had a way of cutting through difficulties, of making music accessible to the non-specialist: no printed version can give the reader an impression of his tone of voice, of the peculiarly convincing vocal modulations, of the pacing of his delivery.<sup>18</sup> But, as Eric Roseberry quite rightly said:

Robert Simpson is surely one of the best talkers on music the BBC can boast. In that no-nonsense, down-to-earth voice of his he gives eloquent expression both to his creative prejudices (like atonality, the in-

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191f. At this period all reviews in *The Times* were anonymous.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323f.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189f.

<sup>17</sup> In Simpson-Doran Simpson also mentions Gerald Abraham, Peter Crossley-Holland, Leonard Isaacs, Basil Lam, and Edward Lockspeiser.

<sup>18</sup> Simpson’s voice can be heard on Unicorn 330, in the set of recordings referred to in note 1, and in the Hyperion recording of his own Ninth Symphony (CDA66299).

organic Stravinsky, and Webern) and his creative beliefs (like tonality, Beethoven and Nielsen). In a talk entitled 'The Ferociously Anti-Pessimist Composer' put out between a performance of his own Symphony No. 3 and Beethoven's Seventh one lunch hour, Simpson spoke with stimulating vigour. It made a good transition from his own work to Beethoven [...].<sup>19</sup>

Angela Simpson has told me that her husband managed to write so much about music largely because he dictated reviews to her (while she was his secretary at the BBC), and rarely made changes once these were typed up. But the surviving copies of lectures, talks and workshop sessions show that Simpson prepared his scripts with great care: he was keen to keep the language direct and simple (in *Haydn and the symphony* II '...Haydn stringently increases the severity of his discipline' becomes '...Haydn disciplines himself more severely', for instance), and he sometimes adds marks as a guide while reading in front of the microphone (a forward-pointing arrow and a pause in *Carl Nielsen's chamber music*, and 'rit' in *Haydn and the symphony* II). Evocative passages make one marvel at Simpson's command of language, and at his ability to enthuse his listeners:

This is not to say that in Bruckner there aren't any startling or amazing passages; but it means that the slow momentum Bruckner creates can reach a point when nothing more than the simplest invention is needed to bring the music to its punctual close – like the plain daylight that follows a many-coloured sunrise. Listen to the magnificent coda of the first movement of the Sixth Symphony – the theme floats on a swelling, iridescent sea of harmony, like a majestic ship bathed in glowing colour, until the sun is clear in the sky...<sup>20</sup>

And a passage from *Beethoven and the symphony* shows the kind of insight into the art of composing that was typical of him:

I think it's revealing that the first movement of [Beethoven's] Ninth modulates less widely than a good many of Bach's fugues; in its first fifteen minutes or so it goes less far afield than, say, No. 4 of the Art of Fugue, which lasts about four minutes. Yet the sense of illimitable space and inexorable movement is indescribable.

He himself, however, would have found the following BBC transcript of one of his talks intensely amusing (and these are not the only examples of mis-spelling in the document):

Well, you see you talk about ore and mystery, and you use the word religious, I don't think that it's, the two things are necessarily the same, I feel ore and myster I'm often all struck and overcome with this sense I don't interpret it in a religious sense, if I look at a mountain I'm ore struck, if I look at any great

<sup>19</sup> Music and Musicians, July 1971: Simpson's talk, re-titled 'Against Lipsius', was published in *The Listener*, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1971.

<sup>20</sup> *The symphonies of Bruckner*, BBC Third programme, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1963, p. 4.

manifestation of nature the stars I contemplate everything, I'm ore struck, I think it's fantastic it's mysterious it's colossul, and when I hear some of Bruckner's music, when I hear Beethoven's music, and Bach's music I get the same feeling. Now obviously this is not necessarily any thing to do with the composers particular beliefs it's to do with something in the nature of his music, itself, if I look at a mountain it strikes ore into me...<sup>21</sup>

His outspoken views are as evident here as elsewhere:

One of our bright young composers once said "the rot started with Beethoven". This shows a gross misunderstanding of Beethoven. He didn't "start the rot"; it happened *in spite of* him, not *because of* him. If some of his successors had paid more attention to his music and less to colourful descriptions of his dynamic personality they might have seen that he was doing something that could have changed the whole course of musical history. But no-one had the greatness, not only to see it, but to follow it up.<sup>22</sup>

Or take this passage from his programme note on Dvořák's *Symphonic Variations*, written in 1961:

Dvořák founded no 'school', which may be a reason why the intellectuals (for whom music is nothing if it does not provide suitable red herrings as talking-points) tend to neglect him nowadays. He is not usually considered to be among the most 'interesting' of nineteenth-century composers, yet few would deny that he is one of the most gifted. Any sane judgment [sic] would regard his gifts as interesting in themselves, but the trouble with some people is that they have to judge everything in terms of glib irrelevancies, or there is nothing to discuss. The routine assessment of Dvořák as a musician is that he was immensely gifted, was naïve, and lacked discipline, relying on his heaven-sent melodic genius to an excessive degree. Like all routine criticisms, this is as unobservant as it is flagrantly unfair. Dvořák happens to be a great composer. Anyone who looks only at the surface of a great artist's work is bound to make a fool of himself. Take careful stock of this musician's greatest works; so subtle and powerful are they that naïvety and lack of discipline become the portion of those who have failed to grasp what is really going on in them.

Perhaps it is Dvořák's misfortune to possess a gift for startlingly beautiful melody, for nothing is so likely to make the beetle-browed cogitator suspicious....<sup>23</sup>

How much poorer we would be without these gems!

Work at the BBC often entailed introducing broadcasts of little-known, unknown, or new music; Simpson's work in this field was often printed in *The Listener*, but thumb-nail sketches – such as the exquisite miniature on Howells's *Missa Sabriensis* written before he had even heard the piece – would also appear in the columns of *Radio Times*:

<sup>21</sup> *Bruckner and Metaphysics*, BBC Third Programme, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1972, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Carl Nielsen's chamber music*, BBC Third Programme, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1953, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Programme note for Henry Wood Promenade Concert, 31<sup>st</sup> August 1961.

In the Third programme on Tuesday from Worcester Cathedral comes the first performance of a new Mass by Herbert Howells, whose *Hymnus Paradisi* has recently created so deep an impression. The new work, completed in the early part of this year, is called *Missa Sabriensis* – Mass of the Severn. Howells was born at Lydney, in Gloucestershire; for him the River Severn is a symbolic as well as a physical link between that country place and Worcester, where the Mass is to become sound for the first time. A great part of the English choral tradition has been cradled in the region of the Severn – Elgar, Holst, Vaughan Williams, and Howells all sprang from that part of the country. In recent years Herbert Howells has become increasingly conscious of his inheritance, of a compulsion to affirm his kinship with this line, particularly in its reflection of English cathedral life. This is shown, not merely as a flattery of other composers, but in the spirit of his work, expressed by a style that blends a sense of tradition with deep individuality.

What are the characteristics of Howells's style? He is, in matters general as well as musical, a man of lucidity and precision. These two words of themselves imply coldness; to them must be added a sensitive awareness of his fellows, of atmospheres, and of the sadness passing beauty can engender. Often there is a strong religious feeling. The lucidity and precision of his mind exist only to canalise his expressive powers; there is never anything mechanical in his music. Above all other elements melody rises, and his remarkable gift for clear and beautiful counterpoint never obscures but only enriches this prime ingredient. His harmony is usually so finely imagined that its apparent ease and smoothness are deceptive; its modernity overlooks few apt possibilities and rejects only irrelevancies. His music thus derives power from fastidiousness, and the intensity of his feeling is great enough to make the fastidiousness serve it. All these facts perhaps need pointing out, but what is self-evident is the essentially English character of the man and his art.

The *Missa Sabriensis* is on a large scale, with four soloists, chorus and orchestra. The soloists are not given extensive freedom; their main purpose is to enrich and liven the texture – often they emerge from and then retire into the general choral sound. Sometimes, however, a single voice becomes solitary, with moving effect (listen to the contralto near the end of the *Kyrie*). The Mass is divided into the normal six sections, and after an apex of tension in the *Credo* and *Sanctus*, there is a gradual easment, until the final *Agnus Dei* both reflects and calms the more troubled mood of the *Kyrie*.<sup>24</sup>

He wrote many programme notes, about his own music and about others'. The persuasiveness of his writing is not only the result of the clarity of thought that goes into it, the special insights that he has into the composer's craft and his knowledge of the difficulties faced by a creative artist; it is also the result of the precision of his language, and the unerring choice of the *mot juste*. Most commentators, for example, might be quite satisfied with the word 'sinews' (or, perhaps, 'muscles') rather than the more obscure 'thews' in the following passage; but consider how impoverished it would be without the additional poetic alliteration that results from the choice of the less familiar word:

Where the climaxes of the ebullient Strauss and the self-tormenting Mahler spread themselves almost rapaciously around the listener, Brian's knot themselves tightly with taut thews tense as a coiled spring.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Radio Times, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1954.

<sup>25</sup> 'The Later Works of Havergal Brian', The Musical Times 100, November 1959, p. 586.

And few would immediately associate restraint with Berlioz, though Simpson wrote an article on 'The Restraint of Berlioz' to introduce a performance of *L'Enfance du Christ*, a work that was little known at the time.<sup>26</sup> Since even fewer would associate Simpson himself with Tchaikovsky, many will be delighted to encounter the following, which was written for a performance of the First Piano Concerto by Victor Schiøler and the Danish State Radio Orchestra, conducted by Launy Grøndahl, at the Royal Festival Hall in its very early days, on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1951:

Tchaikowsky is often dismissed by nicely brought-up folk as a blatantly unrestrained vulgarian. This piano concerto is now so popular that it might fairly be called hackneyed. Yet those who regard this composer as beyond the pale, and those who never listen to this work because it is so often played, might do well to consider at least one point, as follows. Tchaikowsky, when he hit on the opening tune of the concerto, certainly found a winner: nothing fruitier could be imagined, and it is what J.D.M Rorke called a 'mighty, mouth-filling song, a thing to shout and thank its maker for...' Now if Tchaikowsky had been an unregenerate vulgarian, a shameless gallery stormer, what ought he to have done? Obviously he should have blared this thing forth on the brass at the end of the whole work, with colossal pianistic fireworks which, though they would undoubtedly have been inaudible, would be magnificently visible. But, of course, he has more artistic sense than that, and he has also the musical perception to play this introductory tune out of the tonic key, in D flat major, so that its prominence and its power to grip the memory are assured without the need to adorn it with neon lights. This is, in fact, a very unusual piano concerto, and even the stalest of us may take pleasure in observing how frequently what actually happens is a shade better than what we expect.<sup>27</sup>

Simpson has always been opposed to the merely 'fashionable': and his belief in ignoring fashionable trends in the judging of music is nowhere more clear than in the radio series *The Innocent Ear*, whose cessation was deeply lamented. He introduced the series thus:

How often have you twiddled your radio knobs, found some music you couldn't identify, and been fascinated by it? This has happened to me many times, and I have always found myself listening more intently than if I had known beforehand what the music was. The experience gave me the idea that some music programmes might be deliberately planned in this way[...]

This is not a 'quiz' – the title *The Innocent Ear* indicates a serious intent to give the listener a chance to approach music with a special kind of attention, to make his own discoveries. There is a great range of music that can benefit from 'innocent' listening: music by famous masters operating in unfamiliar territory, or less-known composers who have been perhaps unjustly overshadowed by others with bigger reputations, or younger ones of our own time whose work is not yet familiar – the possibilities are endless and the rewards immense.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The Listener, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1952.

<sup>27</sup> Programme for Danish State Radio Orchestra, Royal Festival Hall, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1951.

<sup>28</sup> Radio Times, 23<sup>rd</sup>/30<sup>th</sup> October 1959.

As a composer Robert Simpson had an inside knowledge of the workings of a composer's mind; indeed, he often said that 'A composer's procedures are best understood by another composer'.<sup>29</sup> Many of his preoccupations as a composer thus surface in his lectures and his writings. Large-scale tonal planning is discussed in his broadcasts on Beethoven's *Leonore* and *Fidelio*;<sup>30</sup> and that type of planning is seen as a precursor to the 'progressive tonality' (which Simpson always preferred to call 'emergent tonality') of Nielsen. His interest in the one-in-a-bar scherzo as practised by Beethoven is discussed in his talks on the 'Rasumowsky' String Quartets and his own Fourth, Fifth and Sixth String Quartets;<sup>31</sup> the importance of ongoing rhythmic motion and life force in his many discussions of Nielsen and Sibelius;<sup>32</sup> the importance of cohesion in a symphony in his editorial essays introducing the two volumes of *The Symphony*;<sup>33</sup> and so on. His knowledge of the peculiar balances within sonata form – the places where a composer has 'saved space' or where a groundswell of forward motion has been sufficient to carry a subsequent slower passage or support a recapitulation – are found throughout his writings. But his belief that 'A composer's procedures are best understood by another composer' did not prevent him from helping others to understand such procedures; his writings are thus peculiarly valuable. They are often infused with metaphors drawn from his non-musical interests, such as astronomy:

[Sibelius's Seventh Symphony] is like a great planet in orbit, its movement vast, inexorable, seemingly imperceptible to its inhabitants. But, you may observe, the Finnish forests of *Tapiola* are also on the surface of such a planet, revolving. Yes, but we never leave them, we are filled with *expectation*, and nothing but a great wind arises. There is no real sense of movement. The symphony has both the cosmic motion of the earth and the teeming activity that is upon it; we are made to observe one or the other at the composer's will. Indeed, 'observe' is not the right word – we experience these extremes, and when one is operative, the other does not exist for us.<sup>34</sup>

As Robert Layton comments, this is writing worthy of Tovey.<sup>35</sup> Tovey, indeed, crops up frequently in Simpson's writings, for he admired his predecessor deeply, though

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, *The Essence of Bruckner*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1967, Preface.

<sup>30</sup> Reprinted in *Robert Simpson on Beethoven*, ed. Lionel Pike, Egham: Lionel Pike Publishing, 1996, pp. 69–109.

<sup>31</sup> Three radio broadcasts about the relationship of Simpson Fourth, Fifth and Sixth String Quartets to Beethoven's 'Rasumowsky' Quartets, in conversation with Malcolm MacDonald; in this volume pp. 272–304.

<sup>32</sup> See especially 'Sibelius and Musical Movement', *The Listener*, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1964.

<sup>33</sup> *The Symphony*, ed. Robert Simpson, 2 volumes, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966.

<sup>34</sup> *Sibelius and Nielsen: a Centenary Essay*, London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1965, p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Layton, 'Simpson at Half Time', in *Robert Simpson, Fiftieth Birthday Essays*, ed. Edward Johnson, London: Triad Press, 1971, p. 10.

not to the point of agreeing blindly with all his views.<sup>36</sup> He shows himself to be his spiritual successor in his ability to explain the complexities of music so that anyone might understand them, ‘even if they can’t tell a fifth from a rissole’ (to use his own expression). As with Tovey, a deep knowledge of music is at least partly the result of his composing, and like Tovey he will often use a delightful turn of phrase:

This marvellous economy wins the composer time for a deeply poetic expansion in the coda, where the piano, using the sustaining pedal, drops notes through the still air like dew from a leaf.<sup>37</sup>

and he will include insights into the craft of classical Viennese composition that are as apposite as they are fresh:

After the C minor opening the *ritornello* moves grandly and rather abruptly into E flat major and its first sustained tutti is an E flat counterstatement of the main theme (bar 24). This is early for the solid establishment of a new key, so we can accept it as an environ of C minor, not necessarily disturbing the proper equilibrium of a *ritornello*. But Beethoven then turns it to E flat minor, a disconcertingly sure way of misleading the ear into regarding it as a tonic in its own right.<sup>38</sup>

In the chapter from which these two extracts are taken Simpson takes the opportunity of warning against some of the errors into which commentators unthinkingly fall:

We should also not need warning that the history of music criticism swarms with real mistakes, especially in relation to stokes of genius, the more so when they are characteristic and persistent in a composer’s work: Schubert’s ‘digressions’ in sonata expositions, Bruckner’s ‘clumsy sonata form’, Max Reger’s ‘eternal modulating’, none of which exist in objective fact when these composers are in full control (far more often than not) – such intrepid generalisations are still common usage in some quarters.<sup>39</sup>

Simpson was nevertheless aware that analysis could not explain music entirely. He liked to use the simile of a smile: ‘If someone smiles at you, you know instantly what sort of a smile it is – friendly, humorous, sarcastic, sneering, downright evil. But not even the most learned of neurologists has been able to analyse the fantastically com-

<sup>36</sup> Cf., for example, *Bruckner and the Symphony*, London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1963, pp. 89f.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Simpson, ‘Beethoven and The Concerto’, in *A Companion to the Concerto*, ed. Robert Layton, London: Christopher Helm, 1988, p. 105.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101. In Simpson-Doran Simpson expands on the point about Reger: ‘Reger can establish a tonality while hardly touching it: he can make tonality the centre of a passage which appears to be modulating all over the place. The people who talk about Reger’s ‘eternal modulating’ as if it was some kind of meandering or lack of control...they’ve missed the point entirely – they just don’t understand what he was doing. It was Harold Truscott who drew my attention to that, back when we were both youngsters’.

plex processes that produce a smile'.<sup>40</sup> Another of his favourite similes was a sunset: you can use all sorts of chemical and physical means to explain a sunset – but you have not gone far to assessing its emotional impact. The same is true, he maintained, of attempts to 'explain' music.

An exchange of letters published in the *Musical Times* during 1955 admirably demonstrates the fact that Simpson was at first noticed more as a writer and scholar than as a composer, and it serves to illustrate Simpson the Pugnacious Combatant, standing up fearlessly for his own point of view. The exchange began with Donald Mitchell's review of Simpson's first three string quartets (though in fact he only concerns himself with No. 3):

Robert Simpson's three string quartets were performed at the Arts Council on 11<sup>th</sup> February by the Element Quartet. The third (1953-4) was performed for the first time. Composer-conductors must always find it tiresome when critics suggest that they compose, or re-compose, merely what they conduct. The critic-composer – perhaps too rare a phenomenon? – finds himself in a similarly unenviable position: the subject of his latest book or learned paper is read into his music. Dr. Simpson, having written a detailed account of Carl Nielsen's music, must be resigned to a fate where his music and Nielsen's are inextricably and inexplicably wedded. As it happens, however, Nielsen's influence is generally slight, and where it does compel attention, as in this quartet's second movement, the derivation is 'felt' and natural rather than forced and imitative. It is, perhaps, Beethoven, and even more Schubert, who come to mind as Dr. Simpson's models, a fact which stresses his classical sympathies and the comparative orthodoxy of his language. It would not be fair to say that Dr. Simpson's quartet is academic. That it sounds well throughout is, of course, a tribute – in a good sense – to its academic competence. Its two-movement conception, slow, then quick, is successfully unconventional – a kind of chamber-musical Introduction and Allegro on an enlarged and subtle scale – and each movement's ideas are distinctive and often beautifully expressed, the first movement's in particular. The quartet seems substantially to fail in its workings-out, when, as in the finale, the development of the musical argument is over-developed and the composer recedes in favour of the perceptive critic, quick to fault other composers' developments and thus over-anxious to tie up every loose note in his own. It was surely this manifestation of an academic conscience which resulted in the tedious prolongation of the finale's development and the exceptional repetitiveness of the movement's basic rhythm, though the latter may well be a dubious legacy from Schubert. Dr. Simpson's inspiration, which may yet prove valuable, would doubtless benefit from less critical self-examination during periods of creative activity. His technique is so good that he should forget it, not flourish it.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> See Simpson-Doran.

<sup>41</sup> The *Musical Times*, April 1955. When one considers this very public exchange it strikes one as odd that Simpson knew Donald Mitchell well: 'I don't know whether people associate me with [Max Reger], but I have been fascinated by him for a long time – since my early twenties. I first encountered his music when Donald Mitchell's mother – a gifted singer – sang many Reger songs in musical evenings we used to have at their house' (Simpson-Doran).

Simpson – who from the higher vantage-point of his later quartet writing rather turned his back on his Third String Quartet<sup>42</sup> – was not at this stage content to be given a lesson in composition by a non-composer, and he wrote to the *Musical Times*, his fastidious courteousness being a blind for seething rage:

In his comment on my quartet no. 3 (as, indeed, in his advice to many another grateful composer) Mr. Donald Mitchell has given me much to think over. Giving composers advice, is, however, a tricky business, especially when it is based on a solitary hearing, without a score, of a complex piece of unfamiliar idiom. Even an angel might fear to tread such ground.

Mr. Mitchell could have helped me by defining his terms. What does he mean by ‘technique’? I am much gratified to learn from him that my ‘technique’ is ‘good’. In all honesty I can say that I was unaware of this; now that he has informed me both of its existence and high quality I shall, however, find it difficult to follow his advice that I ‘should forget it’. So far as I have discovered, composing is the art of writing down what you imagine – I had no idea that there was more to it than that. Mr. Mitchell makes much of the fact that I have been, in my time, poverty-stricken enough to take to music criticism, and his knowledge of this regrettable fact leads him to observe that the least satisfactory parts of my work are those in which ‘the composer recedes in favour of the perceptive critic’.

Evidently he has his own ideas about the value of perceptive criticism; these prevent him from blundering into it himself. I am most grateful for a hint that in future I shall act upon. Henceforth I shall be as self-critical as possible, but not perceptively.

Your critic remarks that Carl Nielsen’s influence on me is ‘slight’; while I appreciate this tribute to my independence, may I remark that this influence is pervasive? He also refers to the length of the development in my second movement; this section is, in fact, the shortest part of the piece, concerning itself only slightly with what he calls the ‘basic rhythm’. How valid is his assessment of the form of a work if he confuses its main issues and identifies what he thinks to be the development with the recapitulation? In view of this mishit, I should be intrigued to know what subtleties he professes to see in the work – in a scheme he erroneously imagines to be a ‘kind of chamber-musical Introduction and Allegro’. What is an ‘enlarged and subtle scale’? What are ‘classical sympathies’? What is ‘comparative orthodoxy of language’? Oh, for a stiff course in semantic discipline for our critical scribes (especially the perceptive ones)! The enjoyment of one’s own vocables does not necessarily produce good sense.

ROBERT SIMPSON<sup>43</sup>

Naturally Donald Mitchell – beginning with an atrocious mixed metaphor – replied to this. He wrote:

Dr. Simpson’s ‘mishit’ badly misfires. I criticized the second movement of his third string quartet on two counts, in one sentence: ‘It was surely this manifestation of an academic conscience which resulted in the tedious prolongation of the finale’s development and the exceptional repetitiveness of the move-

<sup>42</sup> ‘The First Quartet is a sort of favourite – and the Second too. I’m very fond of them both – I think there’s something in them that’s so spontaneous. I can look at them at sufficient distance now – it’s almost as if they’d been written by someone else, and I can say, “Well, that’s good, what he did”. I don’t feel that way about the Third Quartet, funnily enough: sometimes I like it, sometimes I don’t’ (Simpson-Doran).

<sup>43</sup> The *Musical Times*, June 1955.

ment's basic rhythm, though the latter may well be a dubious legacy from Schubert'. Dr. Simpson states that his development concerns itself 'only slightly' with what I called the movement's 'basic rhythm', as if I had claimed the contrary. As may be readily seen, I hadn't.

From this mistaken interpretation of a straight-forward sentence he has obviously misunderstood, Dr. Simpson draws the no less erroneous conclusion that the development and recapitulation of his movement are wrongly identified therein. But they aren't.

As for the length of his development, perhaps Dr. Simpson would have been better pleased – semantically satisfied – if I had written that 'the shortest part of his piece' was not short enough.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps 'misfires' should have been 'ricochets'. At any rate, this elicited a private response from the composer Sorabji, never one to hide the fact that he despised critics. It was sent to Simpson on a postcard, and read 'Heartiest congratulations on dealing so faithfully with that pompous pretentious windbag, that dreary prig! Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji Corfe Castle. XXXI.V.MCMLV'.<sup>45</sup>

But before the end of the matter another composer (who was, indeed, later a noted academic but who nevertheless ignored Donald Mitchell's apparent use of 'academic' as a pejorative term) entered the lists:

I am struck by Mr. Robert Simpson's self-condemnation as a composer-critic. Why should a composer be expected to teach but not criticize? After all, the art of composition, far from being Mr. Simpson's 'art of writing down what you imagine', is really an intermingling of three processes: (1) creation; (2) criticism; (3) acceptance, alteration or rejection. Since criticism is an indispensable part of composition, why should there be any prejudice against a composer who applies his critical capacities to fields outside his own creations or those of his pupils? Abroad a composer is just as often a critic as not.

I have had experience of two great composers as teachers. One could certainly teach but tried to exert 'influence', with the result that I rebelled. With the second, an incapacity for mutual understanding led to frustratingly negative results. I believe that a composer can continue to teach for years without his deficiencies being found out; but to be a critic, he has to pull his socks up – or else!

REGINALD SMITH BRINDLE<sup>46</sup>

Simpson replied to this:

Mr. Smith Brindle is incorrect in supposing me to have held that it is not possible to be both composer and critic. Of course it is. My remarks referred to the use of the word 'technique' in relation to composition. I entirely agree with Mr. Brindle that composing involves (1) creation (2) criticism and (3) acceptance, alteration or rejection. But the end of all this is still simply writing down what is imagined. A 'technique' for doing this cannot be taught – as Mr. Brindle seems to have discovered for himself.

ROBERT SIMPSON<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., June 1955.

<sup>45</sup> The postcard is to be found in Robert Simpson's scrapbook No. 1, p. 50.

<sup>46</sup> The Musical Times, July 1955.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., August 1955.

There the matter rested: but it was neither the first nor the last brush between Simpson and hostile critics (though it has to be said that Donald Mitchell's review was neither particularly hostile nor particularly wide of the mark). An even more acrimonious exchange with Sir John Manduell, for example, took place much later.<sup>48</sup>

One of the fruits of Simpson's work for the BBC – especially of his collaboration with colleagues at the music department there – is to be found in the splendid editorial introduction to the two volumes of *The Symphony*,<sup>49</sup> for which he was harshly criticised. The two essays arose from a Radio discussion, *Musicians Talking*, between Simpson (as chair of the discussion), the pianist Denis Matthews, the musicologist Deryck Cooke and the conductor Bernard Keffe: this was a spontaneous conversation, which turned for a while to the nature of the symphony. Robert Simpson's views on the necessity for logical growth, and the presence of the 'large-scale integration of contrasts', caused him to deny a place in his two published volumes for Britten and Stravinsky, among others. His view of the necessity for coherence within a work was not universally held during the late twentieth century, and some composers actively sought to avoid such feelings; but for Simpson the example of the Viennese classics, and of Bruckner, Nielsen and Sibelius, was always paramount. (Indeed, Simpson's own reworkings of Beethoven's three 'Rasumowsky' string quartets are in a sense commentaries on Beethoven and reconstitutions in his own language of Beethoven's principles.) The volumes on *The Symphony* contain, as it happens, an example of a very short piece of writing that is so full of understanding and so far-sighted, and yet so condensed that one could scarcely remove a single word from it. It is an editorial footnote to Basil Lam's treatment of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony:

It seems to me that Beethoven in this symphony strongly anticipates the so-called 'progressive tonality' of Nielsen; in the first movement F and C are notable foreigners to the tonic A, in the *Allegretto* they are more easily related to the prevailing A minor, and in the scherzo F major is strong enough to take over, the first change of key being to A, which is now itself so much a foreigner that it can behave only as the dominant of D, into which key the trio inevitably falls. After all this, only the greatest vehemence can restore A – hence the tremendous insistent energy of the finale.<sup>50</sup>

Much of Robert Simpson's material on Beethoven is available in *Robert Simpson on*

<sup>48</sup> The letters are private, and date from December 1990 and January 1991: they concern the Cheltenham Festival. Simpson himself preferred the spelling 'cretics'.

<sup>49</sup> *The Symphony*, ed. Robert Simpson, 2 vols., Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

*Beethoven*:<sup>51</sup> this collection spans many years of production, though it includes only such articles and talks as were not issued in book form. But there is a gem of an introduction to a Beethoven programme given in the Great Hall of the University of Aston – a concert in which Simpson himself conducted the Orchestra da Camera (leader Kenneth Page):

Only the Fifth, Sixth and Ninth Symphonies of Beethoven really need an orchestra very much bigger than Haydn's or Mozart's. Like those two masters, he also wrote string quartets, and only rarely in that field has it been felt that greater resources are needed to give full weight to the scale and intensity of his thought – we sometimes hear the *Grosse Fuge* played by an orchestra, yet in the end it is the quartet version that gives us the true scale of the music, that conveys the sense of effort which is so much part of the music itself. It is certainly easier to get to the top of a mountain by cable car, but to climb it is to realise the size of the thing. The *Grosse Fuge* is bigger and more astounding in relation to a string quartet than to the easy power of a massed string orchestra. So it is with the symphonies, at least those that do not demand extra forces to balance the weight of trombones and percussion; Beethoven's imagination is not essentially lessened if some of his works are played by an orchestra of the size that was normal in his day – rather it is brought home to us that his advance upon his immediate forerunners (insofar as we can speak of “advances” in art) lies in the nature of his thought rather than in any question of extended physical resources. The increased size of concert halls in the last hundred years has meant that Beethoven's (and even Haydn's and Mozart's) symphonies have frequently been given with excessive string strength, resulting in a serious misbalance between strings and wind. To do without this comfortable modern cushion of string tone throws, of course, a greater burden on the performers, but something may emerge that is rather nearer to the spirit of Beethoven.<sup>52</sup>

The typescript copy of this note kept in the archives in the Bodleian Library has an absolutely characteristic ending in Robert Simpson's own hand:

The [Seventh] Symphony will be played with all Beethoven's repeats; he did not put them there to amuse himself, or to placate convention.

It was also utterly characteristic that Simpson should have published the following, which looks behind the music (even in a programme note) to explore the fundamentals of existence. ‘Energy’ is a concept often associated with his own music, so it is not surprising to find this account of a Beethoven symphony in a programme note for

<sup>51</sup> *Robert Simpson on Beethoven*, ed. Lionel Pike, Egham: Lionel Pike Publishing, 1996. Simpson's lifelong interest in Beethoven resulted in one book (*Beethoven's Symphonies*, London: BBC Publications, 1970); a substantial chapter (‘Beethoven and the Concerto’), in *A Companion to the Concerto* (ed. Robert Layton, London: Christopher Helm, 1988); and another substantial chapter (‘The Chamber Music for Strings’), in *The Beethoven Companion* (ed. Denis Arnold and Nigel Fortune, London: Faber and Faber, 1971, etc.).

<sup>52</sup> *Beethoven's orchestra*: introduction to the programme notes for the Orchestra da Camera concert in the Great Hall of the University of Aston, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1969.

a BBC Symphony Orchestra concert conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1960:

There is no stronger symphony than this in existence, and it is a perfect, although not always obvious, illustration of Blake's phrase 'Energy is eternal delight'. The completed delight cannot be attained unless the subject is blessed with ample reserves of energy; the most relaxed of pleasures become penances when we are too exhausted even for them, and the deeper our reserves, and the better our mental and physical health, the fuller is our capacity for happiness. The more energy we have (provided it be true energy and not the fervid nervous tension that often results in undirected activity) the greater and more satisfying are our powers of relaxation.<sup>53</sup>

The reader by now surely imagines that Robert Simpson is discussing Beethoven's Seventh Symphony: in fact, the programme note is about No. 6, the *Pastoral*.

In 1980 Robert Simpson resigned from the BBC, and spoke out about the changes for which he had been fighting internally as a staff member of the Corporation. As an employee he had been unable to comment publicly on these matters; but on resigning he wrote a book called *The Proms and Natural Justice* laying out the points he had been attempting to get across within the BBC.<sup>54</sup> Simpson's full argument is, of course, presented in the book. Not surprisingly, the BBC hierarchy (and, indeed, some others) took exception to it, and many letters objecting to Simpson's stance appeared in the national press, although many people also wrote in support of Simpson's theses. Simpson was unrepentant: after all, he had nothing to repent about. The final paragraph of a letter to *The Times* read as follows;

It has still been possible for me as a producer to do many things I have wanted to do, sometimes on a large scale, and there is no narrow personal frustration involved. But I can no longer work for the BBC without a profound sense of betrayal of most of the values I and many others believe in, and its management includes elements whose authority I cannot accept without shame. It is now necessary for me to be able to say what I wish to whom I wish, without the shackles of that all too sinister phrase "corporate loyalty". This is why I have resigned.

Yours sincerely,

ROBERT SIMPSON<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Programme note for BBC Symphony Orchestra concert, Royal Albert Hall, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1960.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Simpson, *The Proms and Natural Justice*, London: Toccata Press, 1981.

<sup>55</sup> The Times, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1980. 'On a large scale' would certainly include the mounting of the first professional performance of Havergal Brian's *Gothic Symphony*.

Thereafter he had more time in which to compose. Less prose came from his pen after that time, and he himself said that he did not want to write any more books.<sup>56</sup> In some ways this was a pity, as he had much more of value still to say about the music of other composers, as well as his own, but the disadvantage is more than outweighed by the large number of new compositions he produced during his final years. Nevertheless, he went on talking about music – it would, indeed, have been difficult to stop him doing so – and many who attended his courses at Missenden Abbey towards the end of his life are grateful for what they learned from him.

Although many composers have been unwilling to discuss their own music, Robert Simpson was perfectly happy to do so. He produced the following note for *Contemporary Composers*:

My work aims at recapturing the momentum to be found in classical music and at direct human communication. It is not “atonal” and most of it is not (in the classical sense) “tonal”, but seeks to release the energy locked in the basic intervals and resonances. This, too, is an essentially human rather than academic aim. I have been described as an “avant-garde radical” and I suppose that hits the nail on the head. I have no interest in trends or fashions.<sup>57</sup>

The first performances of nearly all his works were introduced by programme notes, and sometimes also by pre-concert talks. These varied from brief treatments to detailed studies that introduced the public to his methods of working and to his ideas and ideals. An example was the week-long ‘Seminar’ that he directed at his home in Killelton, Ireland, in July 1989, giving two sessions each day except for Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 29<sup>th</sup>, which had a single session each. The lounge at Siochain (the name of his house is Irish for ‘peace’), with its 180 degree window giving panoramic views of the Dingle peninsula and the Atlantic, was crammed with members of the Robert Simpson Society (this series had been provided for their benefit) and the composer’s other friends and admirers, some on chairs, some sitting on the floor. The approach was utterly relaxed, Angela and Robert Simpson always understanding of the needs of their guests, and desperately trying to find ways of accommodating the crowd. It was typical of Simpson to appeal to local colour in his descriptions, and he used it to illustrate the strife that exists between two tonal centres in his Third Symphony. He had witnessed the en-

<sup>56</sup> Robert Simpson in conversation with Malcolm MacDonald, during a discussion of the relationship between Simpson’s Fourth String Quartet and Beethoven’s ‘Rasumowsky’ String Quartet Op 59 No. 1. The three talks were broadcast on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1980, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1980, and 10<sup>th</sup> February 1980 and are reprinted in the present volume on pp. 272–304.

<sup>57</sup> *Contemporary Composers*, ed. Brian Morton and Pamela Collins, Chicago and London: St. James Press, 1992.

ergetic and somewhat violent sport known as 'Irish Hurling', and commented that the end of the exposition of the first movement reminded him very much of an Irish Hurling match. With relish he told the Seminar that he had been shown a mediaeval Hurling field on the Dingle peninsula, which had a burial field next door 'for the losers'.

Such talks would often bring much illumination to his music. He told how he discovered Nielsen while writing his First Symphony, and how this had upset his composing for a long time. Before this happened Bruckner had been an influence: it was from him that the alternate great blocks of loud and soft without transitions were derived. The slow movement was originally called 'Cathedral Music' in tribute to Gothic architecture, of which Simpson had a great love. He in fact started the symphony in the middle, the slow movement being written first: it is in the style of an English madrigal, and has an 'easy flow'. 'I'm very fond of writing calm music', he said. It is the finale that reflects Nielsen's influence. He had reached the point just after the beginning of the finale, at the brass chorale in the slow version, when he first heard the *Sinfonia Espansiva* ('What a way to start a symphony!', he added). He said that he always knew that sort of music ought to exist somewhere, but he had never encountered it previously, and his own music was quite changed by it. The first bar of the symphony ('like the *All Clear* sounded during the war') was a late addition; the work originally started with bar 2. It is, he commented, useful to have various ideas to draw on at the start of a big work, and he added that balance and symmetry are important, 'hence the recapitulations in sonata form'.

This is typical of the information provided at the Seminars: it found its way into many discussions of Simpson's work, and my own treatments of the Seventh and Tenth Quartets, and the treatment of the Ninth Quartet in the present symposium, are heavily indebted to the sessions guided by the composer. Personal details were often mentioned: the connection between the Fifth Symphony and his serious illness from a brain haemorrhage were discussed, though he made it clear that the programme – the idea that there is always a part of oneself that is not involved in what is going on, but stands outside, observing – did not arise out of the illness, since the programme was already decided upon before that time: but the illness clarified it. The portion written while in hospital was Canone 2. The finale is 'like Satan flying from heaven to hell in *Paradise Lost* – it has a hidden grandeur'. In the Sixth Symphony 'the baby fugato was written for another work – a *Concerto for Cello and Piano* commissioned by a couple who then got divorced'.

'The *Fourth Symphony* is genial, the *Fifth Symphony* a blockbuster, being fierce and aggressive: I always try to make my works as different as possible', he said. He main-

tained that the Seventh Symphony contains the most intense fugue he had ever composed, and said that the work contains passages that move him more than any others that he has written: the final pedal C# 'is the longest anyone has dared to write; it stares you out'. He pointed out that the end of the Tenth Quartet 'is one of the most beautiful passages I've written'. The double bass D# that starts the Ninth Symphony was an afterthought: in fact, Simpson's first attempt at the symphony was quite different. It was the last music ever seen by Hans Keller, who – coming across a passage for four solo violins playing very high – said 'they'll never get that in tune'. There are no vestiges of this first attempt in the surviving work. For many participants the week of Seminars on Robert Simpson's own music were a formative influence. But not all was work, and the idyllic family existence of Bob and Angela in their home in the west of Ireland was a part of the experience. The fun that was had there is evident from Simpson's 'programme' notes to the final session, *Safety Valve*:

Loaded questions, offensive general remarks, advice to the composer, infrasocietal strife, additions to the English language, sardonic analytical theories, proposals for disposal of works discussed, suggestions for changing the eponymy of the [Robert Simpson] Society, etc.

The couple's 'green' politics is amusingly invoked in the final comment

Angela repeats with some agitation that ALL rotten eggs MUST be FREE RANGE.<sup>58</sup>

These personal views extended to a concern for all humanity. Simpson did not suffer fools gladly, as those who crossed him found out very rapidly. Yet he was concerned to help all creatures (and not only humans), and would write personally to any who approached him, stating his own views openly and frankly even to those he had not met. An example is his letter to Donald Macauley, who he did not know at all at the time of writing:

Dear Mr Macauley

Thank you so much for your very kind letter – such reactions are always highly encouraging. All we can do is to try and keep aiming at genuine humanity in the arts – as you say, too many people are obsessed with private and fruitless experiments. Artistic work is not experiment, it's achievement. One

<sup>58</sup> Also humorous was the warning to stay in a hotel overnight if catching a certain car ferry: failure to do so would have drastic effects: 'This timetable ensures that when you get here your eyes will feel like two fried onions and your tongue like the Irish roads'. The 'green' politics issue involved a horror of cruelty to animals: when I had written the liner notes for the Hyperion recording of his Ninth Symphony he asked me to remove my remark that the scherzo was like some infernal hunt ('I would *never* write about a hunt', he said vehemently). He was even annoyed with me for lunching at *The Huntsman* at Waterville on the Ring of Kerry.

should keep one's experiments to oneself! Of course we have to explore and continually find new corners in our own minds – but this is an evolutionary process and *never* cuts the ground from under anyone's feet if it's going to have any lasting value. The world isn't yet so overpopulated that we have to go and live on the airless moon!

I agree with you, really, about Mahler: fascinating though he is as a musician, he is too hysterical and egotistical for me. It's true that I don't really like Elgar very much (I always get the feeling I *won't* be spoken to like that!!!) but I'd rather have him than Strauss, who seems to me completely hollow. As for Brian – he's a difficult customer, but rewarding despite his maddening habits and bloody-minded clumsiness. At his best he can be tremendous – wait till you hear the scherzo of the Gothic properly played!

Good luck with your own work. Don't ever lose heart. Thanks again,

Kindest regards,

Robert Simpson.<sup>59</sup>

He was concerned, too, to enshrine his admiration for his many friends and acquaintances in obituaries. There is a particularly moving portrait of Georges Enescu:

In nearly three decades as a B.B.C. music producer I encountered many of the best musicians in the world; the best of them in the comprehensiveness of his gifts and the simple grandeur of his humanity was certainly Enescu. He would have become more obviously celebrated if he had sustained any one of his gifts at the expense of the others; but he chose to enjoy them all, and to some extent paid the price – for people will not easily believe in versatility. He did not care much about that. Like other men of great natural genius, his outlook was apparently simple, but only apparently. Rationalizing or intellectualizing his thoughts did not appeal to him greatly; he preferred to trust his instinct, and whatever he did, it was with a whole heart and without calculation. Ambition, except to do the best he could, was unknown to him. It was a great privilege to have his friendship, though he would not have considered it so; to him, we were all straightforward people like he was himself, and he saw nothing special in his own nature. So it is with some of the very finest creatures.

In remembering him the first quality that comes to mind is therefore, naturally enough, his humility... We talked often about the state of contemporary music; he was always interested in what was new, though not in fashions, and his huge knowledge of classical music made it essential to him that any composer worth his salt must learn from the past, as well as from his native soil. His inner ear was prodigious. There are plenty of musicians who can hear wrong notes in complicated textures, but few who can sit in an armchair with a pencil score of a new piece and read it like a book, though the idiom be un-

<sup>59</sup> The letter is printed in *Leading Notes* 56, April 2001. In his conversations with Mark Doran Simpson expands on several of these points. 'I can't say I like the music [of Mahler] all that much: I find it rather sentimental. Mahler's at his best, I feel, when he's most savage – when he's writing a really sinister, ferocious thing with loads of energy. You can see then just what a master of counterpoint he is – the invention is fantastic – but I can't take his syrupy serenity'. '[As for Elgar,] There is a sort of bombastic Englishness which I react strongly against – "Plump and Circumference" marches, "Land of Dope and Tory" – that sort of thing. It makes me think "I'm not going to be spoken to in that way" – it's like a lecture from Baden-Powell or something! I don't go for that. Elgar, for example, is much better when he's being quiet and withdrawn'. Havergal Brian 'is a very uneven composer. But at his best there's something unique about him, something extraordinary. I think [symphonies] Nos. 8, 9 and 10 are remarkable works – the *Gothic* too. That's an astonishing work - and more astonishing the better you get to know it'.

familiar and no piano in sight. “You must mean a natural here, not a flat, surely?” So it was when I took him the first of my quartets in the hotel room in London; he was always right, and found every slip, and it somehow made the dedication to him more apt – the score owes to him many of its corrections as well as its very origin. As he read it, he hummed and muttered to himself, and every comment he made proved to me that he could hear every single note in his head.<sup>60</sup>

Those interested in Robert Simpson’s writings can still obtain many of them: but it may be as well to reproduce a small article that sums up his feelings about composing chamber music. He was himself a great composer of that type of music, and said that, if he were condemned to write for only one medium, he would choose the string quartet. Those who know his splendid series of quartets will have no difficulty in relating the features discussed in the following article to the composer’s own works. Since the article is not readily available, I make no apology for quoting it in full:

#### *On Composing Chamber Music*

There can be no greater challenge to a composer than a kind of music in which every detail must be heard with frightening clarity; in composing for a few instruments he is really up against it. I forget who it was who said, sharply, “There is no mercy in art”<sup>61</sup> – but he might have been thinking of chamber music, and of string trios and quartets in particular. Indeed, there is no mercy in any art; if you aim at perfection in anything you are up against the nearly impossible. It is perhaps easier to create an effect if your resources give you a certain kind of scope. A not very good composer can sometimes get away with a blast from the brass or a few detonations from the percussion department if he doesn’t know what to do next in an orchestral piece but he can’t do that in a real symphony, and if he’s the sort of composer who can’t resist temptations like that, he’s not really capable of composing proper symphonies, which are the most serious and demanding kind of orchestral music. There’s no better training for writing symphonies than writing string quartets – and vice versa. Perhaps I should have said that chamber music, with its intimate quality and its natural transparency, is the ideal medium for the finest kind of musical thinking, and that composing symphonies for the orchestra means that you have to apply the same sort of discipline. If you want to do the very best you can in any medium, don’t look for mercy!

There is of course good and bad chamber music. Those who play it are very much aware of what sort of part it is they have. Is it merely padding or does it feel like an individual voice? To play a great quartet by Beethoven is to feel part of a profound conversation, and the music exists for you whether or not there is an audience – you and the other players are engaged in an activity that absorbs you quietly, and you don’t (or shouldn’t) think about *projecting* yourself to an audience as you would, say, in a concerto. The music may have its periods of vehemence, even fierceness, but these are not attempts to stun the hearer with main force, as in some orchestral climaxes. There are the times when the pressure of the thought or the feeling demands an extra intensity that the players must direct *towards each other* rather than towards an audience at a distance. There are a good many highly accomplished chamber ensembles (some of them very famous) that do not appear to understand this.

All music needs to reach a wide range of humanity if it is to survive, and if we are to say that chamber music is meant mainly for the players, we don’t mean that it’s exclusive of the listener. Audiences love

<sup>60</sup> Robert Simpson, ‘He was made of music’, *ADAM International Review* 43/434–436, 1981, pp. 34–36.

<sup>61</sup> See Donald Francis Tovey, *The Integrity of Music*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941, p. 61: ‘I was told by a pupil of Liszt that one of his proverbs was: “There is no mercy in art”’.

listening to chamber music, and rightly, because there is nothing more illuminating than to eavesdrop on a marvellous conversation (that is, if you can't take part in it yourself!). But the more the music absorbs the players and makes them forget the audience, the greater it is, and the more it must appeal to the listener. This is what the composer of chamber music must remember all the time. As he writes each part, he must think of its contribution to a coherent conversation; it must be utterly individual as an instrumental part, yet it must never get out of hand and hog the limelight, unless there's some enormously compelling reason, as for instance in those remarkable recitatives for the violin in Beethoven's Op. 132 quartet. Normally there's no limelight in chamber music, and if one player gets temporary prominence, the balance has somehow to be restored before long. Since everything can be heard by players and audiences with great clearness it is essential that the composer be sure that his own imagination hears everything with clarity and justice – clarity because he should in any case never write down anything he can't imagine (this happens all too often these days!), and justice because he must see to it that each player gets a share of the argument. So composing chamber music is the finest possible discipline for sharpening the inner ear and for developing the power of sustained musical thought with the utmost precision.

Chamber music not only shows these basic necessities in a composer (or their absence); it ruthlessly exposes any tendency he may have to exaggerate. He won't be able to get away with extravagance. Just as in playing chamber music it is fatal to show off, so it is with composing it. Brilliant fireworks have to be justified by the current of the music; they can be thrown off only when the conversation reaches a pitch of excitement that infects all the participants, or when one member gains the exhilarated support of the others (how wonderful when this happens in the coda of the first movement of Beethoven's E flat quartet, Op. 74!). Brilliance can erupt at the right time; emotional inflation never. Intensity isn't the same thing as emotionalism piled on for effect; real intensity of feeling comes when the music itself grows into it, when it is the inevitable consequence of real inner pressures. Nothing is crueller to the habitual emoter than chamber music, as we can see in more than a few late romantic works that try to sound like symphonic poems. If the feeling of the music is not also its substance we have disaster; this applies of course to any music, but the fact is never concealed by chamber music.

In writing individual parts the composer must take care to respect the natural qualities and possibilities of the instruments. Present-day composers don't do this often enough; players frequently complain that they are asked to force from their instruments things for which they were not evolved. It's true that instrumental techniques have evolved through the demands of composers, and many things that were once thought unplayable are now taken for granted. This is natural, and the composer who too often plays safe is as doomed as the one who thinks of nothing but inventing new tricks. But if the composer genuinely stretches the capabilities of an instrument, he does this by extending what is natural to it; it may at first seem strange or difficult, but time will show whether the extension is natural and whether the music justifies it. In chamber music the thought must justify everything, and as in all other aspects of it, falsity is mercilessly revealed. I have often heard players say that in many new works they aren't conscious of playing different instruments – they merely make the same sort of sounds at different pitches. In this way all character disappears, and composers begin to sound nightmarishly alike, having forgotten, for instance, that string instruments are tuned in fifths (ask yourself why!), that they are played normally with the bow and can *sing*, that the natural sonority of intervals on the piano can have meanings far beyond the mere instant combination of notes, or that wind instruments have registers other than extreme top or bottom. The chamber music composer, now more than ever before, must learn the truth that this is the medium that more than any other will show what he is really made of.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Written in 1980 for the programme book of the Chamber Music Competition for Schools held in February 1981. The editors unwisely made changes in the text, and Simpson complained in such a vigorous fashion that the original text was eventually printed.

These thoughts were very much in Simpson's mind at the time, for he was then concerned with the composition of his Ninth String Quartet – that massive set of variations that is discussed elsewhere in the present symposium.

This interest in chamber music led to Simpson being concerned with The London Society of Chamber Music, and the Society's fascinatingly original programmes reflect his influence. In 1981/2, at a time when he was their Music Adviser (and Sir Colin Davis was Chairman) he wrote the following article, making reference to some of the works to be performed during the season; it appeared in the programme books for each concert:

#### Variations as Finale

Every work in these four concerts ends with a set of variations; at first sight, this idea might seem to threaten some sort of monotony, or even didacticism (the last thing you want at a concert!) But there is great variety, and every work is an individual masterpiece – some of them supreme masterpieces. Why have so many masters ended works with variations? The question is impossible to answer in a note like this, but we can touch on a few points.

On the face of it, variation form is static with its continual covering of the same trace; if it has large motion it is very large – from variation to variation, perhaps through groups of variations, building a grand edifice that is rarely dramatic like sonata. This is true of nearly all independent sets of variations from the Goldberg and Diabelli downwards. But when variations become part of a larger scheme, they may have a different function – perhaps to begin a work on a quiet plane, or to provide a period of repose in the midst of more active elements. As finale, a set of variations is likely to be pressed into a greater variety of uses. Essentially it is often a high plateau, reached after a climb or a variegated journey: or we might at length find ourselves strolling in gentle country after various breathless adventures: or we may in the end be staring at something at once static and active, fulminating majestically like a volcano or the finale of Brahms's Fourth Symphony. In all these cases, calm or blazing, the variation-finale is a last steadying or canalizing of the work's energies.

In chamber music we rarely find the powerfully assertive kind of variation-finale; sustained orchestral weight seems natural to it. The most monumental finales in this series are in Beethoven's incomparrable Op. 111 and in Busoni's impressive and neglected second violin sonata, and both these in the end make a profoundly calm resolution. Beethoven of course will never do the same thing twice, and in Op. 96 and Op. 109 the two finales, while they show varied movement and texture, like someone wandering happily in a beautiful country he has discovered, are in a sense opposites, the violin sonata moving to a lively conclusion that brings back the scent of activity (not the material) of the sonata-form first movement, and the variation-finale of the piano work reacting from both the improvisatory first movement and the whip-like severity of the scherzo. Here Beethoven makes the finale as self-contained as possible, beginning and ending (like Bach's Goldberg Variations) with the plain theme itself.

If a work is disturbing, like Mozart's D minor quartet, or perhaps elegiac, like Brahms's [sic] Clarinet Quintet, the variation-finale seems to concentrate the nature of the work by distilling it in a succession of ways, and in both these cases (as also in Mozart's C minor wind serenade and the piano concerto in the same key) we end with the impression of something ineradicable – almost the feeling of coming full circle, as if the music never really left the character in which it was born. This is a very Mozartean thing, and it is interesting that Brahms came to it late in life.

It is also likely that if a work demands a gently humorous conclusion the composer will find himself, like Nielsen and Rubbra, writing variations. Nielsen's Wind Quintet finally makes comic play with a

chorale, which represents the plateau reached when the work has moved undramatically from E to A. Rubbra's kindly and witty finale [in the Sonata No. 3 for violin and piano] settles down to variations as a relaxation after deeper matters; this is a masterwork by a composer who, like Busoni, has not had his due.

There is also the type of variation-finale that, while it is happily relaxed or lives calmly, is an intellectual *denouement* in the sense that it sums up the essence of some musical specific with which the work has been pre-occupied – an interval, or an oscillation between tonalities hitherto exploited on a broad scale and now encapsulated. Some may be surprised that one of the finest examples of this second kind is by the proverbially easy-going Dvořák. But his beautiful string sextet is only one of many subtle works by this much loved and misunderstood master – loved usually in his less substantial works and otherwise shamefully disregarded.

These programmes, we hope, will stimulate the thought of enjoyment and the enjoyment of thought. The examples here are only a few of their kind, and a much larger series could be derived. But there is as much range here as could be got into four concerts emphasising the classics. If each work gives its final settlement in a way possible only to variations, that involves none but the best and most artistic kind of monotony, the kind various as the leaves on the trees or the persons in the audience. Art, as Nielsen said, is the sound of life. Here is one aspect of it.<sup>63</sup>

Simpson's interests were still expanding and developing late in his life. In his final years he was determined to study closely Palestrina's *Song of Songs* motet cycle, and he spent much time pondering whether the prolonged dominant at the start of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony had any precursors.<sup>64</sup> We can only regret that increasing weaknesses of body – not of mind or of originality – prevented him from putting his ideas down on paper. Nevertheless, what remains is an extraordinary legacy of fine writing – voluminous, witty, fearless, far-sighted, instructive, and outspoken. Simpson deserves a place among the very greatest writers on music.

<sup>63</sup> Programme Notes, The London Chamber Music Society, 1981-82 season; reprinted in *Tonic* 18, 2008, p. 5–6.

<sup>64</sup> I suggested Victoria's *O magnum mysterium* as a possibility, but he would not accept that it began on the dominant. A secular oratorio also filled his mind. 'There's one work which I've always wanted to do. I don't know whether I'll ever be able to...and that is a big choral and orchestral piece – big: one evening's worth – which would be about the biological system on this planet, and the fact that unless we change our ways we will be the means of its destruction. It would be a kind of non-religious version of *The Creation*.... It would start with the formation of the solar system, the Earth, Sun, and so on, and the the beginnings of life, the coming of intelligence, the distinctions between the animals and the plants, and so on – and the arrival of man, with all that implies...finishing up with a pretty tough conclusion – a warning, if you like. But something positive: 'what we must do', though of course I have no real conviction that we are likely to have any chance of it, really' (Simpson-Doran).

Towards a study of musical motion:  
Robert Simpson's *Variations and Finale on a theme of Haydn*  
for piano (1948)<sup>1</sup>  
Lionel Pike

The mighty String Quartet No. 9 (32 *Variations and Fugue on a theme of Haydn*), which Robert Simpson wrote in 1982, may well have overshadowed the much earlier set of piano variations on the same theme: indeed, Simpson himself did nothing to discourage this when he appended to the score of the Quartet the comment, 'I first tried my hand at variations on [Haydn's Minuet] in 1948, for the piano, and it was looking at these that prompted enough shame to provoke the present attempt'. But the 1948 variations are much more than just an interesting fore-runner of the Ninth Quartet, even if it is true that the piano work can give much guidance as to the manner in which we might approach the later piece. Though an early work, the set of piano variations deserves consideration as fascinating music of great imagination and immense skill: as we shall see, it was here that Simpson first explored the nature of one of his abiding interests: musical motion, especially that generated in the works of the Viennese classical composers.

Tovey once said that composers of variations can be divided 'into those who show that they know their theme and those who show that they do not'.<sup>2</sup> The listener, too, would do well to get to know the theme supremely well if he or she is to appreciate Simpson's variations to the full, for it is quite clear that Simpson is one of those composers who knows his theme intimately. Some time spent in examining the theme will therefore be vital to a study of the variations that follow.

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in *The Music Review* 54, 1993, pp. 137–148, reprinted by permission in *Tonic* 7, 1995, pp. 3–12 as well as here. I am grateful to Raymond Clarke for sharing with me his views on this article.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Tovey, *Beethoven*, London etc.: Oxford University Press, 1944, p. 124. See also the comments in Donald Tovey, *A Musician Talks, I: The Integrity of Music*, London etc.: Oxford University Press, 1941, pp. 91–92. There is a discussion of the Simpson variations in Brian Duke, 'Two Early Piano Works by Robert Simpson', *Tonic* 1/1, 1980, pp. 13–15.

## The Theme

The theme for these variations (see Example 1) is a particularly fascinating one. Haydn used it twice: once in Symphony No. 47 in G, and once in the Piano Sonata No. 26 in A. It is a Minuet in the more-or-less conventional 3/4; but almost nothing else about it is conventional. In a regular Minuet the phrase structure would have been regular, with 4 bars + 4 bars repeated, then a longer second part consisting of a different 4 bars + 4 bars, leading to a repeat of the opening 8 bars: the second section would then have been repeated. This structure, which the listener of Haydn's time would be expecting, is abandoned in favour of two ten-bar phrases, each repeated: the second 10-bar phrase is a retrograde of the first, including not only the melodic line but everything else as well, for rhythm and harmonies are also exactly reversed.

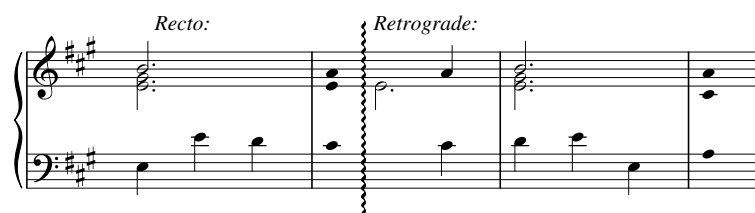
### Example 1

**Tempo di Minuetto**

*dolce*

Palindromic writing is extremely hard to arrange in tonal music, because certain progressions are end-directed, and thus lead the ear to expect a cadence. Such progressions cannot be reversed successfully: the conventional *IV–V–I* cadence must be avoided in palindromic writing, for *I–V–IV* is a much more uncomfortable progression. Any (short) note occurring at the strongest point of a bar in the recto version will find itself in the weakest place when reversed: bars 8 and 9 demonstrate this very well, for the long dominant on a strong beat and short tonic on a weak beat become a short (but strong) tonic and long (but weak) dominant in the second half. A dotted rhythm becomes a Scotch snap when reversed (only a rhythm such as quaver-crotchet-quaver produces the same result in both directions): and any counterpoint that is not strictly note-against-note will have different pitches sounded together when played in one direction than when reversed. Since Haydn avoids this problem by writing almost entirely in note-against-note style it is not possible to provide an illustration from the theme as it stands: but if one were to imagine the right-hand of bar 2 as a triad of E major (a dotted minim in length) rather than the melodic line  $g\sharp'-e'-b$ <sup>3</sup> then the  $e-e'-d'$  of the bass would form a counterpoint against it (see Example 2). When reversed the E chord would still be struck at the beginning of the bar, but with  $d'-e'-e$  sounding against it. The  $d'$  is now treated more like a harmony note than a passing-note. (Haydn in fact avoids the feeling that  $d'$  is an accented upward passing-note in the reverse form of the theme by suggesting a hemiola rhythm at the end.)

### Example 2



Dissonances pose certain problems in palindromic writing, for they conventionally resolve on the following sound, and often they do this by shifting down a step: the tension of the dissonance and the fact that it gives the impression of seeking release in a consonance gives the feature a feeling of forward motion, and one that is not necessarily reversible. Byrd's *Diliges Dominum*, an eight-voiced piece in palindromic form, avoids the problem by dispensing with primary dissonances. Haydn does not go quite

<sup>3</sup> This article describes pitches according to the Helmholtz system, whereby the cello's lowest note is C and the seventh degree above that is B; the viola's lowest note is c (rising to b a seventh above), and middle C is c'. An octave above middle C is c'', etc.

as far as this, but he does minimise dissonances – a treatment that is in keeping with the Minuet style: *d'* and *d''* are the only notes used as dissonances, and in a sense this helps the ear to hear them as being collectively resolved at the end of the piece; the continual use of only one dissonant pitch-class helps maintain a sense of forward flow to the point where the less-obviously-resolved dissonances finally fall to a consonance. But there are also more conventional treatments. In bar 2 the *d'* on the first beat is transferred to the bass on the third beat, resolving on the first *c#* of bar 3: in the retrograde version (bar 19) that *d'* falls directly to *c#* in a much more conventional cadential fashion, as befits the end. The *d''* in bar 4 proceeds to a *c#* whichever direction the music is played in. The *d''*s in bars 8 and 9 are problematical: clearly they resolve on *c#* in both bars, but in the retrograde version (bars 12 and 13) the first resolves (on *c#* in bar 13) while the second has no obvious resolution. One might argue that the ear supplies a *c#* to complete the chord at the start of bar 14; but the ear would be more likely to carry the dissonant effect over to bar 17, where *d''* occurs as a dissonance again, this time resolving conventionally. There is a subtle end-directedness about this long-unresolved *d''*, and it gives an airy 'lift' to the second half, as well as a feeling of forward flow. This is all part of that sense of musical movement – not always dynamic, and sometimes quite subtle – that has fascinated Simpson throughout his life.

To avoid the difficulties raised by counterpoint, Haydn writes mainly in note-against-note style in the Minuet: he also avoids the *IV–V–I* cadence, for reasons mentioned above. Yet the note-against-note style does not in this instance result in simplicity, for many subtleties are worked into the piece. Basically the first 10-bar phrase – after a short initial descent – rises until the cadence, when it briefly falls again: the second 10-bar phrase, naturally, reverses this procedure. Scalic passages abound, some of them used in sequence, but some given in contrary motion between treble and bass (parallel thirds and tenths, incidentally, are frequent in the piece, and Simpson makes much use of them in his variations). Naturally the idea of contrary motion suggests invertible counterpoint, for the rising treble and falling bass of the first part becomes a rising bass and falling treble in the second. The sequence, by contrast, picks up the opening melodic idea (*a'–g#–e'*) and uses it upside-down in the first half: the second half, therefore, also contains the figure in both rising and falling versions.

At the centre of Haydn's Minuet – the point where the mirror is held so to speak (the place that corresponds to the 'r' in 'Able was I ere I saw Elba') – there is a dominant chord: the repetition of this E-major chord helps the ear to recognise the important structural place at which the music is put into reverse: and the octave leaps in the bass also draw attention to this point, making it a much clearer structural feature

than the letter 'r' in the sentence above. Such clear sign-posts are a great help to the listener, and Simpson also provides them in the variations that follow. A further detail is that the bass that emphasises the opening chord with its rising A–e–a is developed in the melodic line of bar 2 (the triadic g<sup>#</sup>–e'–b').

### The variations: structure

In many sets of variations the listener need do no more than follow the theme as it is gradually embroidered with more and more embellishment. Clearly, if the theme itself is no more than simply a tune, that approach is perfectly reasonable. But Haydn's theme is rather more than simply a tune: palindromic; with melodic sequences; including a touch of invertible counterpoint; with a subtle treatment of Ds that helps maintain a sense of rhythmic floating and flow; containing melodic inversion within the first half itself; including the rhythmic interchange of short and long, weak with strong, elements – the list seems endless. To treat such a theme as fit only for melodic embellishment would be to do it a grave injustice – and Simpson, that great lover of Haydn, is scarcely likely to do that.

He provides twelve variations and a finale: since the theme is palindromic, Simpson has also made all the variations palindromic:<sup>4</sup> the finale, however, is not reversible. We need not take seriously Simpson's remark, 'Writing palindromes saves a great deal of time: you only have to write half the music, because you just copy the rest out backwards'. The writing of successful palindromes in tonal music requires enormous skill; but Simpson has pointed out that there are great benefits. He has observed that hearing music in forward and reverse form is like making the same journey in two different directions: the scenery looks quite different on the return journey from the way it did on the outward leg; and he has further observed that when writing palindromes it is useful to include little figures that are themselves palindromes, so that the melodic line does not sound contrived when heard backwards. On the other hand, if the structure is to be understood, there must clearly be such features as the listener can readily identify as being reversed – features that are acceptable in mirror form without themselves being palindromes, yet obvious to the ear as being played backwards.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 'A good palindrome is easy to hear, once you've spotted it', he said in the talk given after the recording of his Ninth Symphony (Hyperion CDA66299).

<sup>5</sup> The information given in this paragraph is taken from a lecture given to music students at Royal Holloway College (University of London): when asked to talk on palindromes, Simpson wrote back, 'O.K.: palindromes. I'll walk in backwards'. The lecture was repeated during a seminar at Simpson's home in Killelton, Eire, in July 1989.

The variations fall into three groups: Nos. I–IV are all (more or less) quick, and each has a central double-bar and a repeat of both halves. Nos. V–VIII are slow, in the minor (a change foreshadowed by the major-minor conflicts in the bi-tonal fourth variation), and without either central double-bars or repeats: they form a discrete slow movement, all being based on the slow chords of variation V,<sup>6</sup> with variations VI–VIII playing continuously in a logically-expanding contrapuntal web. Variations IX–XII, which return to A major, form a kind of scherzo: each variation has a central double bar with the two halves repeated,<sup>7</sup> and the central dominant chord of the mid-point is sometimes displaced by a semitone, becoming F♯.

Haydn's suggestion of invertible counterpoint is expanded in the variations: thus it sometimes seems as if Simpson is applying a mirror horizontally in addition to the one that occurs vertically at the mid-point. Variation 1 raises the matter briefly (in bars 9 and 10), but the invertible counterpoint is stated in the passage before the first double-bar rather than being spread (as in Haydn) across the two halves: the invertible counterpoint therefore recurs – melodically reversed – in the second half. The idea is expanded in variation II, where the first two bars are immediately given in invertible counterpoint as bars 3 and 4:

### Example 3

**Allegro ma non troppo**

*pp sempre*

8va

<sup>6</sup> Variation V may well have been conceived under the influence of variation 20 in Beethoven's Diabelli Variations.

<sup>7</sup> In variation X the repeats are written out in full, and the double bars omitted; but the effect is virtually the same as if the variations had been written out with double bars and repeats.

It is not until variation 6 that the device is heard again, and here an additional rhythmic ‘mirror’ is applied in each bar, for the rhythm [ $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$ ] followed by [ $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$ ] results in a cohesive variation whose underlying rhythmic type does not change when the first half is reversed (see Example 4).

#### Example 4

VAR. VI  
Largo e pochettino espressivo

*pp con sordino*

*Retrograde:*

This cohesion helps the central ‘slow movement’ set of variations to provide a point of repose in which the ear is not continually pressed to relate the forward and reverse versions.

The final two variations make a different rhythmical point while continuing to use invertible counterpoint: variation 11 begins with a very short tonic note on the weakest pulse of the bar – an up-beat of the briefest kind; the accompanying figure in the left-hand (bars 1–2) also starts on the very weakest pulse – a similarly brief up-beat.<sup>8</sup> In reverse, however, these two upbeats become strong down-beats, for what is to the left-hand of a bar-line on the outward journey is bound to be on the immediate right-hand side of the bar on the return passage: the change from weak to strong provides a very satisfying resolution to the variation:

<sup>8</sup> Variation X is written out in full so that the repeat of the first half can be shifted forwards in the bar by one crotchet as compared with the first playing.

## Example 5

*Recto:*  
VAR. XI  
*Presto*

*Retrograde:*

Variation XII expands this idea: the quaver-crotchet-quaver of each half-bar is the same when given in reverse, providing an overall uniformity for the variation; but the chords that accompany this shape, which are on the off-beats in the first half (i.e., they occur on the second and fourth beats in 4/4), are, of course, on strong beats (beats one and three) in the second half, so again providing a nice sense of resolution (see Example 6). (The crotchet chords of the first half are given as minims in the second half, though the difference in performance is negligible given that all chords are marked with a *sforzando*.)

## Example 6

*Recto:*  
VAR. XII  
*Moderato e pesante*



We have already noted the use of parallel thirds which derive from those in the theme: other harmonic derivations also occur. Variation VI, which opens and shuts like a fan, makes much harmonic use of the open fifth (see Example 4, p. 449): this sound is a verticalisation of the horizontal movement of the opening of the bass part in the theme. Variation II is clearly built on the harmonic scheme of Haydn's Minuet – indeed, most of the variations are loosely built upon that harmonic scheme, at least insofar as the central point tends to be a dominant sound of some kind. The central point of each variation tends to stand apart from the remainder of the writing; by changing the style, however slightly, when the 'mirror' is reached Simpson draws clear attention to the important point at which the music goes into reverse.

### **The variations: dissonance**

The palindrome presents a problem for any composer concerned with musical movement, for how can forward motion be achieved when the obvious end-directed progressions must be avoided, and when dissonances (which normally have a feeling of movement towards a resolution) must be handled with caution? It hardly needs to be pointed out that dissonance and resolution have different connotations in the twentieth century from those at work in Haydn's Minuet. A brief example can show how the treatment of dissonance can contribute to a sense of motion in Simpson's music.

Example 6 shows the first two and last two bars of variation 12. In bar 1 the octave A in the right hand sounds a tritone against the octave E $\flat$  in the bass, and it resolves in a classical fashion onto G $\sharp$  (acting as A $\flat$ , and a consonance, as is required by convention). But in the final bar, because the music is now moving in the opposite direction, that same octave A 'resolves' down a fourth onto a dissonant E $\flat$  – a much less conventional treatment, and one that is more pungently abrasive. Why is it that the more conventional treatment occurs at the start of the variation rather than at the end? Should not the end have a sense of relaxation so that the foregoing clashes are 'resolved', just as the syncopated chords of the recto version are 'resolved' so that they sound on the main pulses in the retrograde?

One of the answers is found in the mixture of  $E\flat$  ( $D\sharp$ ) and A major in this variation – a conflict foreshadowed in variation VI (see Example 4, p. 449): that mixture is such that the listener perceives the final bar of variation 12 in a different manner from its first bar. In the last two bars of variation XII the  $E\flat$ s (one chord has C rather than  $E\flat$  in it) that sound on the strong beats are drawn back towards the home tonic: the first octave  $E\flat$  of the final bar is part of the process, and the  $D\sharp$ – $E$ –A of the last minim beat rounds the process out neatly. The more gritty dissonance treatment of the final two bars as compared with the more conventional opening leads to a greater sense of tension as the  $B\flat$ s are dragged back to A major, and the maintenance of that grittiness up to the last moment is a splendid device for indicating that the idea is not yet played out, and that more music must follow. Indeed, a conflict between A major and  $E\flat$  is to play some part in the finale.

A palindrome may seem an odd choice of piece in which to explore forward motion: but the very fact that the most obvious means of creating end-directedness must be avoided makes the writer explore other, less obvious, devices for creating musical movement. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the conception of dissonance has moved, within this variation, from a straightforward and conventional treatment in which the tritone resolves down onto a major third, to a more global attitude in which pitches remote from the home tonic must be brought back within that tonic. Clearly, the more remote the ‘dissonant’ pitch, the more power will be required to force it back into the realms of the tonic. The seeds of a large-scale handling of dissonance, with all that that implies for the long-range organisation of motion, are encapsulated in this little example; for a ‘tonal dissonance’, such as is provided by  $E\flat$  within a piece on A, must create a feeling that a resolution is required, and it will point towards that resolution so as to give – if only subconsciously – a sense of movement towards a tonal goal. Dissonance has become dynamic.

### **The variations: use of melodic material**

Since the casual listener will probably be more aware of the melodic material than of the matters discussed above, it is worth spending some time exploring that element: for although invertible counterpoint and rhythmic inversions are the very stuff of this set of variations, Simpson also uses Haydn’s tune (and its accompanying bass) in a thorough fashion.

Let us begin by taking the most obvious element – the scale passages: Haydn uses a complete descending scale ( $e'$ – $e$ ) in the bass of bars 2–3, with shorter rising scalar figures elsewhere in the first half. Simpson begins Variation I with the descending scale (in

the right hand) counterpointed against the four-note ascent that has been used in sequence in the theme. Variation III has scales at its mid-point. Variation IV has left-hand scales which are slightly ornamented with a turn phrase taken from variation III. The bass of the variation in slow chords (variation V) is almost entirely scalic, and the scales become something of a joke in variation IX: variation IX, indeed, is like a pianist practising scales in octaves, adorned only with a cadential formula taken from Haydn's central cadence, but abruptly cut short: the octave scales do much to break the spell of the flowing, ever-thickening counterpoint that precedes them, just as the 'comic march' (to quote Brian Duke<sup>9</sup>) of variation III provides relief from the invertible counterpoint that precedes it. The idea of a pianist practising scales persists into variation X, where the player apparently uses scales in thirds as well as octaves (the parallel thirds derive from the theme); and variation XI has massive scales spread over many octaves. Parallel thirds, a prominent feature of the theme, are a large factor in three variations; I, VIII and X.

The A–e–a–e–e' figure in the bass of the opening of the theme contrasts markedly with the more conjunct motion of the bass later: its striding nature is of immense value to Haydn in providing a rounded-out cadence for the second part. It is variation III that first picks up this leaping character, though it turns it into a piece of soft galumphing broken only by the much higher central scales. Clearly this ballet for tortoises and gnats provides relief from the complications – the invertible counterpoint, etc. – of the first two variations. The striding figure is one of the elements in variation VI (see Example 4): it is combined with the semitone rise and fall which happens in the bass of bars 8 and 9 of the theme. Both elements – the *I–V–I* and the semitone rise and fall – are very clear in variation XII (see Example 6, pp. 450f.).

One figure remains to be discussed: the a'–g#–e' of the opening of the theme, a figure of which Simpson makes much wider use in the Ninth String Quartet. Although the shape crops up fairly frequently, it is most obvious in the right hand of variation IV, in the bass of variation V, and in the horn-like material that accompanies the scales in variation IX (see the left hand of Example 5, p. 450).

## The Finale

The finale is a large one, and, being free of the constraints of palindromes, Simpson is free to use non-reversible material in it. It balances the preceding variations so that the overall feel of the complete piece is of a sonata-like structure consisting of first movement-slow movement-scherzo-finale. Basically the form of the finale is that of

<sup>9</sup> Brian Duke, 'Two Early Piano Works by Robert Simpson', *Tonic* 1/1, 1980, p. 14.

a double fugue, though there are passages that use a non-fugal, more sonata-like, musical idiom. The subject of the first fugue is utterly memorable: it is a great striding theme, starting with a high trill and leaping downwards – like some enormous bird of prey hovering and swooping – by large intervals, covering the majority of the keyboard. Its dramatic nature and dynamism show that we have here a composer fully conversant with the late piano fugues of Beethoven and such works as the *Grosse Fuge*. The leaps, being of fourths, fifths and sixths, echo those found in the Haydn Minuet, and the first leap has been foreshadowed by the descending chords of the end of the last variation. The tonic and dominant of A, which start the subject, reflect the overall tonal scheme of the first part of the Minuet, but the use of *V* and *I* in C major to follow it gives a dynamic feel to the subject such as has been discussed above. The effect of this is to make the subject sound as if it might possibly be in A minor, the key of the central set of variations.

The same intervals as are found in the subject also govern the pitch of the entries in the first exposition, for they are on a<sup>2</sup>, f<sup>♯</sup>''' and c<sup>♯</sup>'''. There is no regular counter-subject, but various ideas much used in the variations are tried against this subject, an upward scale and a series of parallel thirds being prominent. The contrary motion is, of course, virtually dictated by the nature of the subject; but it is worth noting that contrary motion also derives from Haydn's Minuet:

### Example 7

The musical score for Example 7 is written for piano in 2/4 time, marked 'Allegro moderato'. It begins with a piano introduction (Pled.) featuring a trill on the right hand. The main theme is characterized by large intervals, including fourths, fifths, and sixths. The score includes various rhythmic markings such as 'Pled.', '\*Pled.', and 'Pled. (etc)'. The key signature is A major, and the tempo is 'Allegro moderato'.

A much more relaxed theme appears in bar 24: it is used in stretto imitation, and leads the tonality into F major for the first real cadence: this modulation recalls the fact that, for some of the variations in the 'scherzo' section, the pitch used at the mid-point had been shifted from the dominant to F<sup>♯</sup>. The new theme turns out to be an episode, the main leaping subject returning at bar 33, now with entries a tritone apart (b<sup>2</sup>'' and e<sup>2</sup>'''), and this time with a more regular counter-subject that consists of a rising scale played in a dotted rhythm running in contrary motion to the subject. The dot-

ted rhythm has derived from the preceding episode, and that episodic material soon reappears, the dotted-rhythm scale being inverted and treated in sequence (a treatment that recalls the sequences of the Minuet).

A series of trills vainly attempts to re-start the fugue subject, though at bar 65 that theme appears in a series of inversions (on B, G, C) which lead to a recto statement on g<sup>'''</sup>. This last, in bar 84, is accompanied by a new counter-subject, again built on scales but in a different, far more tumultuous, rhythm. The contrary motion between the subject and this new counter-subject not only refers back to Haydn's Minuet, but it does much to raise still further the already hot temperature of the music:

### Example 8

The musical score for Example 8 consists of two systems. The first system shows a treble clef with a trill on a high note (likely G<sup>'''</sup>) and a bass clef with a fast, rhythmic scale. The second system continues the bass clef scale and adds a treble clef with a series of chords. The music is marked 'fff' (fortissimo).

The resulting increase in tension leads to a diminution of the fugue subject (at bar 96) whose downward leaps are doubled in thirds: these recall the parallel thirds of Haydn's theme.

For the time being the main fugue subject ceases to play a part in the finale, and Simpson moves to a non-fugal section in which, over a running bass derived from variation II, various tattoos of repeated notes are sounded: they are on g<sup>'''</sup>, a<sup>'''</sup> and C<sup>'''</sup> – a shape derived from the opening of Haydn's theme – but they home in on E as if indicating that the central point of some further palindromic variation has been reached, rapidly-repeated dominants indicating the point at which the reversal happens (as the Es do in the middle of Haydn's Minuet). Close examination of the music

shows that there is certainly an element of the palindromic around this high E tattoo: the preceding statements of it in the treble are transferred to the bass in the passage that follows this conjectural ‘central mirror’, but the feeling that the passage might constitute a XIIIth variation – with the counterpoint inverted in the ‘mirrored’ section – is weakened by the fact that the running bass before the supposed ‘mirror’ becomes a set of virtuoso scales in the right hand after it. This is not, then, a further variation within the finale – the ear does not hear it as such, even if the analyst might be tempted to see it in this light – and the rapidly-repeated notes turn into repeated chords which lead to three abortive starts of the main subject. When all three attempts have failed, a new fugue takes over (in bar 110).

The second fugue subject is much less dramatic than the first; its head uses the first three notes of Haydn’s Minuet, and the rest uses the fifth and sixth leaps from that theme as well as the motion up and down a step that happens in bars 8 and 9 of the theme:

#### Example 9

The musical notation for Example 9 consists of two systems. The first system, starting at bar 140, shows a treble staff with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and a bass staff with rests. The second system, starting at bar 144, shows both staves with piano (*pp*) dynamics and the word *sempre* in the treble staff. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, slurs, and a triplet.

The fugue is closely worked, using *stretto* and *per arsin et thesin*<sup>10</sup> entries, and – after some considerable time and after much development of the parallel thirds – there is also a diminution of its head (at bar 216). An attempt to combine the two fugue subjects begins at bar 224, but the combination will not, for the moment, settle: first the

<sup>10</sup> i.e. entry of the subject with strong beats displaced by weak beats.

original subject is syncopated, then – when it occurs on the strong pulses – the second subject evaporates. The time is not yet ripe for the expected combination that will turn this piece into a double fugue, and from bar 246 Simpson develops the second fugue subject in a sonata (rather than a fugal) style, building to a great climax. At bar 278, at last, the combination of the two subjects is effected, their power in counterpoint being enhanced by the blazing tonic major in which they are announced. Their contrasting natures complement each other perfectly, but the combination is only momentary, for the tattoos soon swamp the texture and lead the music away from the fugal style yet again.

A *stretto* on the first three notes of Haydn's tune leads to a pause on a low B – the pitch-class often used at the central point of the variations: it is followed by a rising C-major scale that reflects the momentary diversion into that key during the first fugue subject, but it turns into E $\flat$  at the top. There follows a reminiscence – as if from a great distance – of the beginning of the Minuet: it is a cloudy reminiscence, for it is in E $\flat$ , the farthest tonal point from the one so strongly established by the contrapuntal combination of the two fugue subjects in the preceding bars; E $\flat$  – and other flat areas – has nevertheless been foreshadowed earlier in the fugue as well as in variation XII.<sup>11</sup> The E $\natural$  that so frequently marks the 'mirror' has, evidently, been shifted down a semitone to E $\flat$ , just as the dominant had been shifted up a semitone to F $\sharp$  in some of the 'scherzo' variations. E $\flat$ , then, counters the F $\sharp$ s of those final variations. The E $\flat$ –B $\flat$  of bars 302–303 (in the bass) helps the listener to identify the connection between this descent of a fourth and the opening of the main fugue subject; and the following note, A $\flat$ , makes a link back to the tonic by becoming G $\sharp$ . After some use of the episodic material of bars 23–24, a final statement of the main fugue subject sounds majestically through the final tonic chord, ending – for the only time – on the tonic and relating the G $\natural$  and C $\natural$  to the chord of A major that co-opts it.

This early work not only tells us much about the further variations that occur in the Quartet No. 9, but it is the initial stimulus for an interest in palindromes that has remained throughout Simpson's composing life. The variations in the second movement of the Quartet No. 1 (1951–2) and the second movement of the Symphony No. 2

<sup>11</sup> A contrast of A and E $\flat$  seems to have fascinated Simpson about this time: he had heard Nielsen's *Sinfonia Espansiva* in 1947, and thus knew of the way in which E $\flat$  is coloured by two wordless solo voices which draw attention to that key – the farthest point of travel from the 'home tonic' of A. Simpson's First Symphony (1951) and the String Quartet No. 1 (1951–2) both embody a conflict between these two areas. The tritone was, incidentally, used as the distance between the entries in bar 33 (b $\flat$ ''') and 38 (e''') of the finale of the 1948 variations.

(1956) owe their character to this interest.<sup>12</sup> Even more far-reaching, though, is the indication given in the 1948 variations that Robert Simpson has begun to explore the miracle by which music is made to convey a sense of muscular movement that is much more dynamic than simply running on the spot or hopping from one foot to the other. It was an interest that was to remain with him for the rest of his composing life.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth pointing out that the palindrome operating in the slow movement of Symphony No. 2 behaves slightly differently from the other examples of this technique in Simpson's work. Here, the mirror is placed at the centre of the whole movement (in the middle of variation 7), so although it is still a set of palindromic variations – like the ones studied in these two essays – there is just one big mirror, rather than several smaller ones. If anything, this technique is even more difficult to handle successfully [Ed. of *Tonic* i.e. John Pickard].

## The Concertos of Robert Simpson

### Paul Conway

Whilst it is possible to chart the artistic development and changing preoccupations of composers such as Alun Hoddinott and John McCabe through their numerous concertos, this is not the case with Robert Simpson. In contrast to the two hugely impressive series of eleven symphonies and fifteen string quartets, the production of which spanned his creative life and which may, without hesitation, be regarded as his most valuable legacy, the concertante works consist of a modest and sporadic collection of one-off examples: for violin, piano, flute and cello.<sup>1</sup> In each instance, the composer conceived them as a vehicle for a particular soloist; two of them were actually commissioned by the artist.

Simpson was not in the habit of taking the easy way out and it is inconceivable that he would have elected to produce works of shallow virtuosity and empty rhetoric. Consequently, his concertos are the outcome of deeply personal attempts to reconcile both the time-honoured element of display in the solo part and the traditionally combative scheme of instrumentalist pitted against orchestral forces with his own intuitive concerns with long range tonality, rhythmic energy and melodic growth. The composer's unique success in providing a rewarding, idiomatic solo part which interacts effectively with the orchestra inside the framework of an organic structure of inimitably Simpsonian integrity and logic has largely gone unnoticed, overshadowed by the relative critical and popular success of his contributions to other genres. It is time for a reappraisal of a distinctive group of works undeserving of the neglect into which they have fallen both in the concert hall and, thus far, the recording studio.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Two brief sketches for a Double Concerto also exist, scored for the rare combination of solo cello, solo piano and orchestra. One of the manuscripts is dated '6.ii.76': it is interesting that Simpson should have decided, albeit abortively, to revisit the concerto form at a time when he was preoccupied with writing symphonies and string quartets.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing only the Piano Concerto has ever been released on disc. A live recording of the work's second performance appeared on a long-deleted BBC Radio Classics CD (15656 91762) featuring soloist John Ogdon with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra under Constantin Silvestri recorded on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1967 at Colston Hall, Bristol. In addition, a live recording of the concerto's London

## Violin Concerto (1957-9)

Interviewed by Lewis Foreman on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1980, the composer expressed the wish to ‘revise or even re-compose the fiddle concerto’, going on to describe it as ‘my least satisfactory piece...I don’t think it works. I don’t think I’ve extracted from the material what is in it’.<sup>3</sup> Sadly the projected editing apparently never took place; the work was withdrawn and remains officially outside the authorised canon. However, some brief comments on it are appropriate in a consideration of Simpson’s pieces for soloist and orchestra.

A substantial three-movement work lasting around forty minutes, the Violin Concerto is scored for a large orchestra, including a modest percussion section, sparingly deployed. The score is inscribed ‘To Ernest Element – profound artist and irreplaceable friend’. In his capacity as leader of the Element Quartet, the dedicatee had premiered Simpson’s String Quartets 1–3 and he was the soloist in the concerto’s first performance with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra under Sir Adrian Boult on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1960.

Completed some thirteen years after the Piano Sonata (Simpson’s first acknowledged piece), the Violin Concerto is in no sense an ‘early’ work and the composer’s rejection of it is not the result of any inexperience in his craft. By the late 1950s, he had already produced his first two ‘official’ symphonies and his first three ‘official’ quartets, and thus the concerto was written from a well-armed position of having proved his mastery of form and string writing in both large-scale orchestral works and chamber music.

Marked *Con ira, ma maestoso*, the first movement begins with a forceful *tutti* statement. However, the vehemence of this opening salvo is unrepresentative of the movement as a whole, which is alert and lively, rather than overheated: as Simpson observed in his notes for the 1982 brass band piece *The Four Temperaments*, ‘The choleric man is quick to anger, but is not simply vituperative – he has in him good and generous qualities, but when he is calm something is smouldering inside him, ready to burst into flame.’<sup>4</sup> The principal subject is a florid, urbane idea, bedecked with trills, and the soloist’s opening material has a radiant lyricism that characterises the whole piece. This initial movement is one of Simpson’s most regular sonata-form essays, the exposition and development being of commensurate size and the recapitulation less truncated than one might expect from this composer.

premiere at St John’s Smith Square on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1993 by Raymond Clarke, with the Royal Holloway Symphony Orchestra under Matthew Taylor is available on disc from Dunelm Records (DRD0014).

<sup>3</sup> British Music Society Newsletter 106, June 2005, pp. 315–316, reprinted in *Tonic* 16, 2006, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Matthew Taylor’s booklet notes for Hyperion CDA66449.

There follows, without a break, a gentle and flowing central *Largo* with a brief cadenza-like passage at its heart. Though arguably somewhat prolix when considered in relation to Simpson's accustomed ruthless excision of the slightest hint of padding,<sup>5</sup> it is beautifully lyrical and expressive, unfolding steadily in long-breathed paragraphs. The slow movement closes with a brief bridge passage for the soloist leading into a dance-like rondo finale marked *contando con allegrezza*. This is around five minutes shorter than the other movements and the surviving full score reveals that Simpson has struck out several passages in its development and recapitulation. Here the material is least representative of the composer, the dashing cross-rhythms being uncharacteristically Latinate rather than Nordic in spirit. There is a throw-away ending redolent of Malcolm Arnold or Malcolm Williamson at their most larkish.

Had Simpson returned to his Violin Concerto he would surely have enhanced it, possibly tightening up or even telescoping its extended three-movement form, but the score as it stands has many valuable assets, not least the memorable and tuneful nature of the material. It has a refreshingly pastoral, 'open air' atmosphere which Robert Layton has perceived, citing what he described as 'the grievously neglected' Violin Concerto as an example of the composer's 'feeling for nature'.<sup>6</sup> This Arcadian quality is also discernable, curiously enough, in the Violin Concerto No. 1 of John McCabe, a work also completed in 1959 and also generally atypical of its composer.<sup>7</sup>

An engaging first attempt by Simpson to remain true to his structural and melodic convictions within the conventions of the genre, the Violin Concerto shares with its successors a conscious attempt to capture and reflect the individual qualities of his soloist in a context of *primus inter pares* rather than as a single protagonist against combative orchestral forces. Yet there the resemblances end and the work's influence is arguably more tangible in aspects of it that Simpson was at pains to avoid in his later concertos, such as its substantial, clear-cut and occasionally discursive movements, expansive treatment of ideas, incorporation of a conventional cadenza-like episode and lengthy duration. Eight years elapsed before Simpson completed another concertante piece: this time instead of taking him three years to write, he produced it in a matter of weeks.

<sup>5</sup> As exemplified by his suppression of the first version of Symphony No. 4's slow movement.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Layton, 'Simpson at Half Time', in *Robert Simpson: Fiftieth Birthday Essays*, ed. Edward Johnson, London: Triad Press, 1971, p.10.

<sup>7</sup> John McCabe wrote a second concerto for violin in 1980, a splendid example of the genre and a much more characteristic piece.

## Piano Concerto (1967)

Robert Simpson's Piano Concerto was commissioned by the Cheltenham Festival and received its first performance at Cheltenham Town Hall on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1967.<sup>8</sup> Dedicatee John Ogdon was the soloist, with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra conducted by Hugo Rignold. Scored for a large orchestra, it is cast in one continuous movement, made up of a number of shorter episodes analogous to archetypal forms such as exposition, slow movement, scherzo and finale.

The opening *Largo*, measured, weighty and protean, gradually unfolds the main elements from which the rest of the work is derived; this includes the initial *acciacatura* that recurs throughout the work and, together with the principal note, constitutes a two-note intervallic motif, a *reductio ad absurdum* of the conventional 'motto theme' (at one point it even crops up inverted, a nod to Bruckner's custom of inverting his themes, perhaps). Also in this first section, sustained dissonant string sonorities are juxtaposed with, and eventually undermine, vigorous, densely chordal piano writing. Various keys are suggested and almost immediately contradicted in a parade of paradoxical statements and counter-statements. These destabilising shifts in tonality, together with the acutely antithetical character of the material's constituent elements, establish an air of unpredictability. A constant confounding of the listener's expectations spawns, if not anarchy, then a vein of anarchic humour.

Eventually, having successfully tamed the soloist's pretensions to grandeur,<sup>9</sup> the

<sup>8</sup> Also premièred at the festival were Harrison Birtwistle's *Three Lessons in a Frame*, Benjamin Frankel's Viola Concerto, Peter Maxwell Davies's *Hymnos* for clarinet and piano, Edmund Rubbra's Eight Preludes for solo piano, Hugh Wood's Quintet for clarinet, horn, violin, cello and piano and Priaux Rainier's *Aequora Lunae* for orchestra, whilst Lutosławski's *Three Preludes*, Webern's *Im Sommerwind*, Bacewicz's *Pensieri Notturmi*, Gorecki's *Refrain for Orchestra*, David Bedford's *Trona* for chamber ensemble and Serocki's *Segementi* were all heard for the first time in the UK. In addition, the revised version of Prokofiev's Sonata No. 4 for piano received its first performance in the West, Martin Dalby's *Songs from the Chinese* and John McCabe's *Fantasy on a theme of Liszt* had their first public performances and Alun Hoddinott's Third Piano Sonata, Elizabeth Lutyens' *Music for Orchestra III*, Thea Musgrave's *Sinfonia* for orchestra and John Ogdon's *Theme and Variations* for piano all received their second performances. Added to the mix was a concert of 'Partsongs, Madrigals, Frivolities – and Guitar' featuring the Louis Halsey Singers with guitarist John Williams and a selection of jazz pieces featuring Cleo Laine and John Dankworth. The breadth of repertoire and stylistic diversity evidenced here suggests that Cheltenham was adopting a genuinely 'pluralist' approach to programming and commissioning long before that term gained currency.

<sup>9</sup> This subduing by string chords of the initial piano utterances is strongly reminiscent of the slow movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4, also referenced, more overtly, by Tippett in the slow movement of his Piano Concerto, a work John Ogdon also played (and recorded). The piano concertos of both Simpson and Tippett constitute two distinctive mid-twentieth century responses to the challenge of producing a Beethovenian statement for piano solo and orchestra.

strings herald the arrival of an avowedly non-ironical chorale, hushed and imposing, introduced on the piano and subsequently accompanied by strings. After a gratuitous allusion to the start of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the pulse quickens as an *allegro moderato* section supplies fragments of a charming, guileless Haydnesque minuet. This, improbably, generates a massive *tutti* climax, at the height of which the minuet's *gruppetto* turns go head-to-head with the all-pervading *acciaccatura* in a grotesque battle of the ornaments, and the minuet is distorted into a series of audacious bitonal clashes topped by shrieking piccolo.

Following a truncated reappearance of the opening material, an extended rollicking *vivace* cuts in, driven by a propulsive rhythmic figure reminiscent of the scherzo of Beethoven's Ninth. Then a more fully developed version of the minuet idea reappears in a relaxed *andante con moto* passage, where it is wafted urbanely from woodwind to muted strings prior to being taken up in a full statement of the theme by the soloist.

A transitory recollection of the chorale precedes a truncated *allegro con brio* finale in the form of a manic polka (actually an accelerated variant of the minuet idea), whose stomping gait brings the work to one last frenzied and clamorous *tutti* climax of almost tangible density. In its aftershock, dislocated piano tracery flits around before the concerto is smartly despatched by a brutal last appearance of the intervallic motif with its ubiquitous *acciaccatura*, delivering what might be termed (purely in the concerto's punning spirit) a *coup de grace* note.

In a typically laconic and modest anti-programme note, Robert Simpson wrote:

Composed for this year's Cheltenham Festival, and dedicated to John Ogdon, this concerto is in one continuous movement, with the following tempo fluctuations: *Largo – allegro moderato – vivace – andante con moto – allegro con brio*. If it conveys some inkling of the artistry of its remarkable soloist the music will have served its purpose.<sup>10</sup>

On first scrutiny, these scant remarks appear to disclose very little about the nature of the music, Simpson standing fast to his principles by consciously avoiding offering journalists 'material to pervert'.<sup>11</sup> Yet, by drawing attention to the dedicatee, perhaps he was providing some clues as to the essence of the concerto. Its assimilation of such a bewildering variety of styles of pianism suggests it is essentially a glorious celebration of John Ogdon's art, Simpson paying his own personal tribute to the enormous range and technical facility of his illustrious soloist. Thus, the grand (even grandilo-

<sup>10</sup> 1967 Cheltenham Festival booklet, p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Simpson, 'Why Compose?', in *Twenty British Composers*, ed. Peter Dickinson, London: Chester, 1975, p. 10.

quent) opening *Largo* section's pounding octaves and crashing chords could be regarded as guying the declamatory gestures of an old warhorse of the repertoire. The ensuing beautiful chorale is as rarefied and mystical as a slow movement from a late Beethoven piano sonata and here Simpson shows reverence for his model by avoiding any suggestion of parody. In addition, the classical style is conjured up by the delightful minuet, whilst the boisterous *vivace* passage is as blithe and fleet-footed as the Scherzo from Litolff's *Concerto symphonique in D minor*, Op. 102, which Ogdon later recorded for EMI.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the breathless, frantic closing *allegro con brio* might be considered as Simpson's wry take on strutting, overwrought perorations.

Although certainly Robert Simpson's quirkiest and most subversive piece with its tongue almost continuously in its cheek, the Piano Concerto is also wonderfully organic, and something of a *Concerto symphonique*, to borrow Litolff's title. Its multi-sectional one-movement structure is reminiscent of Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 2, but the miraculous integration of wildly disparate elements into a single utterance is more redolent of the prodigious chemistry of Sibelius's Seventh Symphony or Roy Harris's Third.

Despite being written in the midst of what we might now look back upon as the 'modern' era, it is an incredibly 'post-modern' work: examples of irony and pastiche abound, as if the composer is resolved to cram in every pianistic cliché and keyboard writing archetype into the work's compact 20-minute duration. Its predominant high spirits and sardonic turns of phrase do not preclude genuine depth of feeling, however, exemplified by the chorale, as truly *innig* an invention as may be encountered in the late piano music of Beethoven or Schubert. In a sense, Simpson's is a piano concerto *about* piano concertos, thirty years before Peter Maxwell Davies's contribution to the medium, which is also concerned with, or at least consciously mindful of, the genre's considerable legacy.

Viewed within the context of his own orchestral output, Simpson's concerto is a pivotal work between his Third Symphony of 1962 and the Fourth and Fifth from ten years later. References to Beethoven's Ninth scattered throughout the piece give it an affinity with the first movement of the Simpson Third Symphony, whose first movement might be described as a commentary on the great German composer's masterwork. At the same time, the strange held chords in the strings which underpin and ultimately undermine the piano's blithe initial poundings are a precursor to the watchful, ever-present string chords that eventually snuff out Simpson's Fifth, and the use of a Haydn-like minuet looks forward to the scherzo of the Fourth with its incorporation of a quotation from an actual Haydn symphony.

<sup>12</sup> With the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra under Louis Frémaux on 17 and 18 June 1971.

More significantly, in this work the composer establishes the template of concerto-writing that he would return to again, namely that of a single, unbroken, organically-conceived and closely-knit structure. The hypnotic effect of the strings in the first section of the piece effectively removes any notions the soloist might have of dominating the score, leading to a genuine partnership between the two forces developed further in the Flute and Cello Concertos.

Thirteen years after its first performance, Robert Simpson observed:

The Piano Concerto – I'm not that happy about it myself. On the other hand when I look at the score of it I'm reasonably satisfied with it. And both times – it's only been played a couple of times – both times the orchestral contribution was very, very bad and I still have a feeling that it would come off if it were really well performed: that the relationship between the soloist and the orchestra would come off.<sup>13</sup>

The Carlton CD of the work's second performance preserves Ogdon's naturally big-boned conception: technically very impressive, he is a little unsmiling compared to later accounts; though not ideal, the contribution of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra under Constantin Silvestri is not as negligible as suggested in Simpson's comments above. The main drawback with the reading is its lack of any coherent overview: the work's diverse episodes sound perversely unrelated to each other and the piece almost grinds to a halt in the chorale-like passage, for example. It is a great shame that the composer never lived to hear soloist Piers Lane with the BBC Concert Orchestra under Barry Wordsworth at the 1998 Proms, where, in an assured reading completely attuned to the score's mischievous spirit, its wit and high spirits were joyously celebrated and, at the same time, thanks to a firm architectural grip exerted by all its executants, the work's complex, sectional structure was rendered entirely convincing. On the Dunelm Records release, Raymond Clarke's deftly sophisticated view of the solo part is also of great interest, revelling in its iconoclastic humour, but also keenly alert to unexpected moments of poetry.

These three very different approaches prove that the Piano Concerto is open to a variety of interpretations. Its ambiguities are an essential part of its mercurial character and, far from resulting in a vague, ill-defined piece, have contributed to one of Simpson's most forthright, accessible and entertaining works. It would make an ideal introduction to his music for listeners apprehensive of tackling the great symphonies and string quartets, for example.

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Simpson in interview with Lewis Foreman 3 November 1980, *British Music Society Newsletter* 106, June 2005, p. 315, and *Tonic* 16, 2006, p. 7.

After many years of living at Chearsley, Buckinghamshire, in 1986 Robert Simpson moved to Ireland, where, by his own acknowledgement, the idyllic nature of his surroundings encouraged him to adopt a calmer outlook on life. This shift in attitude seemed to affect the nature of the works he produced from this time onwards. In an interview with Stephen Johnson in December 1988, he referred to the changes in the sound of his music:

Now at my age I find I'm aiming at something calmer, grander than I've done before. One reason I came to live in Ireland is the sense of peace that comes out of these large unoccupied regions. I find that a lot of the rage I used to feel in England – rage at politicians, the arms race and all the attendant propaganda – I just don't feel it so much here. I can walk along the beach and breathe that sea air and feel it all going away. Perhaps you can feel something of that in the finale of the Ninth [Symphony] – at least at the end I think you can.<sup>14</sup>

Whilst it would be erroneous to claim that from now on, Simpson adopted wholesale a gentler, more conciliatory style of writing (the massive Tenth Symphony of 1988 and the later Cello Concerto, though both essentially contemplative in manner, contain enough episodes of explosive power to challenge such an assertion), several pieces from near the end of his creative life exhibit a certain sparseness of texture, whilst possessing an atmosphere of deep serenity (of the hard-won variety, not otherworldly). Late works which inhabit this more introspective domain include the Eleventh Symphony (1991) and, especially, the Flute Concerto.

### **Flute Concerto (1989)**

Some twenty-two years after the sturdy Piano Concerto, Simpson produced another work for soloist and orchestra in the more modest shape of his Flute Concerto, commissioned by and dedicated to the flautist Susan Milan. She requested the piece and premièred it with the City of London Sinfonia under Richard Hickox on 24<sup>th</sup> May at the 1992 Malvern Festival, where Simpson was 'featured composer', an accolade never previously extended to him. The festival also showcased the first performances of the Eleventh Symphony, Cello Concerto and Fifteenth String Quartet and would also have included the première of the Second String Quintet if his stroke had not delayed its completion.

One of the most striking aspects of the Flute Concerto is its scoring for reduced orchestral forces, consisting of piccolo, oboe, cor anglais, clarinet, bass clarinet, bas-

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Johnson, 'Being Composed', Gramophone, December 1988, p. 934.

soon, double bassoon, two horns, timpani and strings. Like the Piano Concerto, its one-movement form may be divided into shorter sections signalled by changes in tempo. In this case, there are three distinct episodes, played continuously, whilst the overall structure is that of a seamless series of variants upon the initial orchestral statement. Drawing inspiration from the many examples in Beethoven's œuvre, Simpson had turned to variations and variation techniques from his earliest creative years, this preoccupation reaching something of an apogee in the massive String Quartet No. 9 of 1982. The Flute Concerto, the *Variations and Finale on a theme by Beethoven* for piano (1990) and the Cello Concerto constitute his last thoughts on an exacting form in which he had already attained pre-eminence.

In a relaxed 6/8 time, the opening *Allegretto* is launched by an airy theme, marked *dolce*, given out by muted first violins. This forms the basis of the whole work, including the soloist's opening statement, supported by a falling counter-melody on muted violins, another seminal recurring feature. For most of the first section, the accompaniment is delicate, ethereal and lightly shaded, the dynamics held at *pianissimo*. After the melody has been taken up by other instruments with the soloist providing florid decoration, a brief climax is reached, in the aftermath of which the tempo shifts into 4/4 time, ushering in a lyrical duet for cor anglais and the soloist. There is another crescendo, and an increase in intensity heralds the arrival of the central *Allegro non troppo* section.

This is a bustling one-in-a-bar scherzo, though not on the cosmic scale of the hefty examples within the Fourth or Eighth Symphonies. Here, the effect is mostly gossamer and will o' the wisp, like the elfin second movement of the Eleventh Symphony. It begins softly on strings before the flute enters, accompanied by chamber-like, diaphanous orchestral textures. Wind instruments make brief interjections and the soloist has a short but athletic dialogue with the timpanist. As in the previous section, the scherzo builds to an emotionally taut climax, subsiding into the final *Adagio*.

With the purity and simplicity of a Bach chorale, this elegiac concluding passage transfigures the lyrical opening material into a slow, passacaglia-like processional. Introduced by strings alone, the chorale is taken up by the soloist and woodwind in turn. During a final *tutti* climax, the flautist is instructed to go to sit with four string soloists for the work's last five minutes. From now on, the conductor is required to relinquish authority in favour of the members of this newly-formed flute quintet, who bring the piece to an ethereal conclusion '*senza direttore, molto calmo*'. The closing pages' ruminative and inward-looking character evokes similar passages in the later symphonies and, more especially, string quartets. The *Adagio* is an especially poignant inspiration,

avoiding the slightest hint of sentimentality; despite its steadily etiolating textures, it forms a natural culmination of the entire work.

Simpson regarded Nielsen's Flute Concerto as the finest ever written and his own contribution to the genre betrays the Danish master's influence in its light and spacious sonorities and chamber forces. Nielsen darkened the colours of his score with the use of a bass trombone, whilst Simpson achieves similar results with the use of bass clarinet and double bassoon, providing a satisfying contrast to the soloist's often vertiginous heights. In fact Simpson ensures that each instrumentalist has a vital role to play in a conversational piece full of dialogues and groupings, intimate exchanges and sophisticated interplay. The thinning-out of the texture into chamber music for the last five minutes, though audacious, is really the logical outcome of a paring-down process at work throughout the piece. By the end the soloist is literally *primus inter pares* as Simpson offers a viable alternative to the customary concerto format of an individual struggling against the masses.

It may be thought that in a relatively brief work, a requirement for the conductor to lay down his or her baton for a substantial period might militate against it; yet Rossini's scoring for cello choir of the substantial opening section of his *William Tell Overture* has hardly been injurious to that work's perennial popularity. If any conductors are put off Simpson's Flute Concerto by having to sit out the last few minutes and having the spotlight taken off them, this piece is hardly suited to them in any case, being one of the composer's subtlest and least demonstrative pieces. Interpretative demands are made on the performers, however, and both conductor and soloist are stretched throughout, the former in terms of balancing a wide range of sonorities and the latter through having to interact sensitively with an ever-changing variety of instrumental combinations.

Almost classical in its chaste beauty, the concerto is one of Simpson's more elusive works, whose fragile and consciously repetitive paragraphs contain secrets not easily yielded up even after repeated hearings. He had produced orchestral scores for classical forces before (the Second and Seventh Symphonies) and would do so once more in the Eleventh Symphony of 1990, yet in this work he pares down his expressive means to an unprecedented degree. At times it feels as though the composer is wilfully suppressing a vital aspect of his creative personality in much the same way as, whatever their undoubted merits, the Bergman-esque 'serious' Woody Allen films such as *Interiors* or *September* seem perversely determined to eradicate any traces of humour, their creator's main asset. In a 60th birthday tribute, fellow symphonist Edmund Rubbra singled out the qualities which Simpson's belief in the inexhaustible

possibilities of tonality gave to his music as being those of ‘urgency, vitality and originality.’<sup>15</sup> Whilst the Flute Concerto is certainly an original piece (not least in blurring the lines between chamber and orchestral textures), its generally austere and occasionally detached (almost passive) mode of expression can sound as if Simpson is at pains to suppress those other two qualities Rubbra outlined above, a handful of brief *tutti* passages notwithstanding. John McCabe proved in his 1995 Flute Concerto with its brilliance of tone and gripping narrative that it is possible to write an urgent, virtuosic work in this genre, but that is not the way Simpson chose in his cooler, more understated piece.

Listeners already familiar with Robert Simpson’s œuvre through his forthright, compelling and sweeping symphonies may be surprised by the delicate, subdued and comparatively restricted path traced by the Flute Concerto. However, those approaching the composer for the first time and daunted by the often intensely vigorous manner of his massive large-scale structures may well find this gentler score with its tender, chamber-like sensibilities a more congenial way in to his sound-world.

### **Cello Concerto (1991)**

Lasting some twenty-five minutes and requiring a substantial orchestra, the Cello Concerto was written for Raphael Wallfisch, who gave the first performance at the Malvern Festival on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1992 with the BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra under Vernon Handley. On the face of it, Simpson’s last completed work for soloist and orchestra repeats the format of its predecessor, consisting of an unbroken set of variations based upon the introductory material. Yet on closer inspection, the two works reveal themselves to be markedly different in character and effect.

One major distinction is the greater scope of the later work, as evidenced by its inaugural statement. Whereas in the Flute Concerto this consisted of a single utterance, uniform in mood, the Cello Concerto’s seminal opening material may be divided into a number of shorter, contrasting episodes, each featuring motives ripe with possibilities for individual treatment by the ensuing variations. Amongst these ideas is a seminal figure oscillating between two notes a minor third apart. There is a particularly satisfying symmetry to this launching *Allegro* section, whose introductory upward reaching four-note figure is complemented by a concluding series of falling cadences.

<sup>15</sup> Edmund Rubbra in ‘A Birthday Hansel’, *Tonic* 1/2, 1981, p. 13.

Signalled by the solo cello's entry, there begins a series of eleven sharply contrasting and strongly characterised variations, the first four being dominated by the soloist. Whilst Nos. 1 and 2 are faithful to the pulse and contours of the opening statement, No. 3 relaxes the tempo, allowing the cello to explore expressive, song-like aspects of the material. No. 4 is coloured by triplets, edging the music onwards and introducing a greater variety of orchestral timbres, until halfway through the orchestra takes over completely in a bold and dynamic *tutti* marking the end of the expository first set of variations.

Another batch of three variations follows, this time scherzo-like in nature, taking the soloist into more technically challenging, bravura areas of expression. Variation 8 is for orchestra alone. Mirroring the opening section, it forms both the midpoint and the climax of the whole piece in a substantial and powerful release of energy. Its apparently unstoppable momentum is ultimately curtailed by three sustained cello notes. These herald the final set of three variations equating to the 'slow movement' of a conventional concerto. In Variation 9, the strings are muted and the mood becomes one of serene introspection. In the next variation, marked *Allegretto*, the pulse quickens as the cello has a sequence of duets with piccolo and then oboe. The last variation is an elegiac *Adagio molto*; fulfilling the role of epilogue to the entire concerto, it breaks into a soft fugato episode before the textures are pared down to strings and soloist only. In their stark expressiveness and archaic-sounding modal inflections, these closing pages of Simpson's final piece for orchestra call to mind another last orchestral work, Vaughan Williams' Ninth Symphony, and it is particularly moving to encounter this (perhaps unconscious) connection between two great British 20<sup>th</sup>-century symphonists.

One notable aspect shared between the Flute and Cello Concertos and the Fifteenth String Quartet is their *a niente*, fading conclusions. However, in each case, the endings reflect the nature of the individual work: hence, the Flute Concerto, one of Simpson's most tranquil pieces, floats away almost imperceptibly, the textures having thinned out irrevocably long before the evanescent final bars. In contrast, the dark and tough quartet, full of stark, sinewy counterpoint and angular dissonance, dissolves as if it has corroded into silence. The Cello Concerto stands apart from these two aforementioned works; a more balanced and full-blooded work than either, it proceeds to its close with the cogency of a born persuader: placed in the solo instrument's deepest register, the final bars incorporate a pair of undulating notes, a minor third apart, relating to material in the opening *tutti* section; now drained of energy, they are repeated several times in a reverie of calm resignation before fading to silence.

Robert Simpson had already demonstrated what he was capable of in terms of long, lyrical cello-led melodies in the opening of the *Andante* slow movement of the Fourth Symphony and the start of the *Adagio semplice* of the Trio for violin, cello and piano (1989), so it should come as no surprise that his Cello Concerto is one of his richest and well as one of his most affecting scores. Its autumnal glow links it to other British cello concertos such as those by Elgar, Finzi and Moeran. This song-like character does not preclude several passages of vigorous intensity, however, and it is particularly refreshing to hear Robert Simpson at his purposeful and directly communicative best in his last orchestral piece, skilfully combining memorable, compelling ideas tenaciously worked out with clarity and transparency of writing (even in the biggest climaxes, the score is so well-balanced that the soloist is always audible).

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As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the archetypal concerto conceived as a vehicle for a soloist with opportunities for bravura display and spectacular tussles with orchestral forces would appear to be the very antithesis of a typical Simpson work with its symphonic unity, intensely logical development and subtle formal integrity. However, the composer was possessed of a sufficiently authentic, flexible and varied musical character to tackle the genre head on and successfully forge his own very personal take on it.

The concertos for piano and cello in particular strike me as two of Robert Simpson's finest and most approachable works. Future generations must be allowed to rediscover these compelling, idiosyncratic pieces through performances and recordings. Though fashioned and tempered by the individual demands of their solo instrument and the unique qualities of the soloist for whom they were written, they also bear the unmistakable hallmarks of their composer's concern for structural clarity, exploration of tonal and intervallic implications and honest expression. In short, they are essential Simpson and an indispensable branch of his legacy.

## Robert Simpson's Brass Band music and Salvation Army background Terry Hazell

Listeners to BBC Radio 3 on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1991, hearing a programme billed as 'Michael Hall interviews Robert Simpson', and celebrating his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, might have been surprised to hear him say that until he was a teenager he had 'played the cornet in a Salvation Army band'. Even more so when they knew Simpson as a confirmed atheist and pacifist and that during the second world war he had been a conscientious objector.

In 1865 the Reverend William Booth, an itinerant preacher, formerly of the Methodist New Connection, started preaching in the East End of London naming his organisation 'The Christian Mission'. In 1878 the name was changed to 'The Salvation Army', becoming both a church and provider of social facilities. This organisation is deemed the last great religious revival of the Victorian age and rapidly spread throughout the world. The Salvation Army now works in over 120 countries.

Robert Simpson was born into a third generation Salvationist family in March 1921, when his parents, Robert senior and Helena, were officers (ministers) in the Salvation Army, in charge of the corps (church) in Leamington Spa. Shortly after his birth his parents were moved to South East London, eventually settling at Lewisham corps where Simpson grew up, taking part in normal Salvation Army activities, learning to play a brass instrument and playing in the Young People's band. It is very possible that the first music Simpson became aware of was played by a Salvation Army brass band and it seems apposite that the first sound we should hear in Simpson's first symphony should be that of brass instruments!

His paternal grandfather, Wilfred Levick Simpson (1862–1937), had been a Blue Coat scholar at Christ's College School and a member of the Anglican church. Wilfred's cousin, Florence, was the wife of Bramwell Booth, Williams's son, and it is possible that through knowing her he heard William Booth's wife, Catherine, speaking at the Steinway Hall in London and as a result became a Salvationist. He became an officer in 1880 from the Whitechapel corps and spent the rest of his life working for

the Salvation Army, eventually rising to become a Commissioner (the Salvation Army's equivalent of Bishop) with heavy responsibilities in Salvation Army administration.

His maternal grandfather, Gerrit Jurriane Govaars (1866–1954) was born in the Netherlands, where he became a schoolmaster, and in his twenties became one of the Salvation Army's earliest converts in that country. He was only 12 years old when his father died but by gaining a free six year scholarship he was able to go to a teacher training college. He spoke Dutch, English, German & French and played the violin and piano. It is considered that his greatest ability was in music. He also composed, and a number of his songs were published by the Salvation Army, with the tune of one of these having been taken into the Salvation Army's standard hymn book under the title 'Govaars'. He too became an officer, and after training went to the Dutch East Indies as a medical missionary.

In 1929 a crisis occurred in the Salvation Army when a group of officers met to try to prevent Bramwell Booth from appointing his own successor as the next General (International Leader) of the Salvation Army, as they wanted to end what appeared to be nepotism in the Booth family. A group of seven officers, Commissioner Wilfred Simpson included, insisted on calling together the first High Council, which was appointed to find a successor to Bramwell and to ask him for his resignation from the position of General. Since this date the High Council has met each time to elect the current General.

This situation must have been painful for Wilfred as he was both a cousin of Bramwell's wife, Florence, and because his son's father-in-law, Gerrit Govaars, supported Bramwell's position. Florence's mother's maiden name was Levick, hence the inclusion of this name in Simpson's full name – Robert Wilfred Levick Simpson.

Robert Simpson was a man of strong convictions and we might wonder how these came to be held. His position on pacifism came early on in life, and he later signed the Peace Pledge. When he was conscripted into the forces at the beginning of the Second World War he refused to take up arms and was summoned to a tribunal to explain why. He gave his Christian beliefs as the reason although he later became a convinced atheist.

Simpson had a strong sense of duty and social conscience, which is perhaps not surprising when we consider his roots in an organisation such as the Salvation Army. At one time when he was young he wanted to become a missionary in the Dutch East Indies, following in the footsteps of his Dutch grandfather, although his medical ambitions were eventually replaced by music, much to his parent's consternation. His

concern for other people was highlighted in 1980 when he gave support to the BBC's orchestral players who were facing redundancy, resigning in protest and writing his polemic 'The Proms and Natural Justice'.

Whether he was aware of it or not, or acknowledged it, the Salvation Army's strong moral principles ran in his genes and help explain much of the behaviour of this highly individual composer and man. And, of course his constant interest in compositions for brass band may be part of this inheritance.

### *The Four Temperaments*<sup>1</sup> Kevin Norbury

*The Four Temperaments* was completed in August 1982. It was commissioned by the Yorkshire Imperial Band and funded by the Yorkshire Arts Association. In this music Robert Simpson portrays those elusive metaphysical qualities: the sanguine, phlegmatic, melancholic, and choleric temperaments, which are all ingredients of the human persona.

In his two previous works, *Energy* and *Volcano*, the composer was concerned with portraying the elemental forces of nature. They could both be thought of as symphonic poems. This suite is concerned with portraying the elements of human nature. The composer has chosen to portray these different qualities by the use of various forms which are eminently appropriate. They are: (1) Scherzo – sanguine, (2) Intermezzo – phlegmatic, (3) Elegy – melancholic, and (4) Fantasia – choleric. It would be tempting in the case of Robert Simpson's music to squeeze this work into a symphonic mould, but if we must think of this work in those terms, then let us think of it as a symphonic suite.<sup>2</sup> The compositional processes do reveal the mind of a symphonist so perhaps that is the best place for comment of this nature to rest. Keen-eared listeners will recognize common characteristics from the two previous works, but it would be as well to mention the most obvious. 1. Robust, traditional scoring in the main, but with a heavy reliance on the soprano cornet. 2. Strong, triplet-based rhythms. 3. The interval of a fifth as a basis for musical construction. 4. Superimpo-

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in *The British Bandsman* 4194, 4<sup>th</sup> March 1983, and reprinted in *Tonic* 3/1, 1987, pp. 13–16. Reprinted by kind permission.

<sup>2</sup> This work also exists in a version for Symphonic Brass Ensemble.

sition of rhythms creating strong cross-rhythms. This suite can perhaps be regarded as the composer's finest opus for the brass band to date.

### 1. Scherzo – The sanguine temperament

The sanguine temperament crashes through life with irrepressible enthusiasm. Obstacles stop him only for a moment, and he goes roaring on as if nothing had happened. (Robert Simpson)

This movement is marked *Presto* and because of the 6/8 time signature a considerable amount of music is condensed into a relatively short time-span of approximately three and a half minutes. The music erupts into life with two explosive flourishes which rise scalically through the band. The motif which provides the generating force and musical basis of the movement is then heard immediately in baritones, trombones and euphonium:

#### Example 1



This motif is aggressive and has a strong sense of forward motion. It would be a mistake to search for too many musical clues such as motifs and themes since the music is so tightly constructed that nearly all of the melodic content is either based on, or is an extension of, this one motif. There is, however, a theme which should be pointed out, and that is the soprano solo early on in the movement:

#### Example 2



This illustrates an element in the structure of this movement – the interval of a third. Whether sounded simultaneously or in rapid reiteration, this is one of the prime motivating factors in this piece. Another feature of this movement is the considerable use of constant quaver motion which is achieved either by dovetailing in the score or by scalar movement. A rhythmic device featured in this movement is the use of hemiola. This is simply a rhythmic device which consists of superimposing two notes in the



by the lower instruments. The music takes on a static air which is punctuated by general pauses. It is as if the composer seeks to demonstrate further the imperturbable qualities of this temperament – ‘it is seen to be unperturbed by a considerable disturbance from the timpani and side drum.’ Timpani and side-drums engage in a dialogue under sustained but fragmentary phrases. The intensity and disruptive force increase until, with the aid of *fortissimo* trombones, the percussion soloists are ushered out of existence. The music is now stylistically akin to that at the opening of the movement. An unaccompanied duet between soprano and solo cornet which is very close and interweaving at times brings the movement to a peaceful conclusion on a major triad. Reference is made to previous procedure in the way the final cadence is constructed downwards.

### 3. Elegy – The melancholic temperament

The melancholic nature is not merely lugubrious. It is deep-feeling, serious and dignified. There is something grand and courageous in its gloom, and strength in its willingness to face grim facts. (Robert Simpson)

The indication is *Mesto* (sad, mournful) with a very slow tempo indication,  $\text{♩} = 56$ . The movement is opened by solo baritones (Example 5)

#### Example 5



and is answered in fugal style by E♭ bass and soprano cornet. After this thinly scored opening the weight of the scoring is increased and Example 5 receives a more homophonic treatment. After this the scoring thins and we embark upon a passage of textural contrasts in which passages of movement are answered by straight, crotchet-motion chord streams. The music increases in intensity to a dramatic climax over a timpani pedal fifth. These climactic chordal measures are punctuated by four bars of contrary-motion crotchet movement in trombones, euphonium and cornets over a bass and timpani pedal. After this climactic sequence the volume and texture diminish rapidly and the music reaches a subdued and resigned conclusion at a low dynamic level, on a low octave unison.

#### 4. Fantasia – The choleric temperament

The choleric man is quick to anger, but is not simply vituperative – he has in him good and generous qualities, but even when he is calm something is smouldering inside him, ready to burst into flame. (Robert Simpson)

It has already been remarked that each movement is an appropriate formal expression for the temperament the composer seeks to portray. It is equally appropriate then, that a free form like the fantasia is the chosen mode of expression for such an unpredictable quality. The music explodes into being with much semiquaver activity at high dynamic levels. After this intimidating opening the volume decreases and the texture thins. The music becomes more tranquil with the occasional flurry of semiquaver activity and high-dynamic outbursts. The texture again thins until a duet between soprano and solo cornet is accompanied only by sustained notes low in the register of the lower instruments. Whilst the scoring stays thin, the widely spaced registers converge until most of the action takes place in the upper part of the band. A motif appears (Example 6)

Example 6



which seems to have some bearing on the ensuing music. The increase in intensity is controlled beautifully and the music builds up to an eruption of the opening measures, only this time transposed. From here on the music is fiery and aggressive. The final section of the work is in triple rhythm, as in *Energy* and *Volcano*, and can therefore be regarded as an element of Robert Simpson's style. The effect is one of strength and inevitability. The reiterated interval of a tone harmonised as a seventh chord over a pedal is featured. The music concludes with five irregularly spaced unisons.

## *Introduction and Allegro on a Bass by Max Reger*<sup>1</sup>

Eric Wilson

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

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

The rather lengthy title gives some clues to the identity of the piece. The bass in question is taken from Reger's Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, Op. 135b, where it is part of a gigantic *ritenuto*. Robert Simpson treats it, after a slow introduction, as an *Allegro* throughout, altering Reger's compound time signature (12/8) to 3/4 and flattening one note of it to make it more combinable with a string of rising fourths which grow from the last notes of the bass. These fourths accompany the Reger bass rather like the counter-subject in a fugue, and are an important element in the composition.

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

The slow introduction is mysterious and deliberate. The low brass make the first statement (Example 1) – the first five notes of Reger's germinal bass, the horns quickly following suit. Tension is created by the shifting chromaticism and contrast-

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in *The British Bandsman* 4452, 13<sup>rd</sup> February 1988, and reprinted in *Tonic* 3/2, 1988, pp. 17–19, under the title 'New Simpson Masterwork'. For this publication the text was kindly revised by the author.

ing dynamics. Mighty chordal ‘pyramids’ grow from the basses upwards fortissimo, but the volume is not sustained long as there are pianissimo interjections creating an air of pregnant instability.

#### Example 1



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

#### Example 2



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

#### Example 3



#### Example 4



Simpson's link to the allegro section is note-worthy. Whilst the rest of the band hold a sustained chord, the euphonium and basses, assisted by the timpani, interject with ‘shot’ notes which, though the tempo is slow, imply a quicker triple metre so that the

change to *doppio movimento*, four bars before the allegro proper, is imperceptible except for the *accelerando*, which takes the speed up to ♩. = c.66.

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

#### Example 5a



#### Example 5b: Max Reger, Op. 135b. Pedal part from bar 103 of the Fugue



#### Example 6



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

#### Example 7



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

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

## Some Simpsonian views on Reger

### Jürgen Schaarwächter

#### I.

At the time of Robert Simpson's birth Max Reger had been dead for nearly five years. For the music theory of Simpson's formative years he was thought to be quite out of date, in spite of Arnold Schoenberg's wording: 'I actually think he is a genius'.<sup>1</sup> Reger's music had been neglected especially after the Second World War – it was considered outdated and irrelevant (only very few compositions, such as several of his organ works and a considerably kitschy *The Virgin's Cradle Song* (*Mariä Wiegenlied*), Op. 76, No. 52, retained international renown). Nowadays, Reger's innovative compositional techniques, similarly innovative as those of Carl Nielsen and Jean Sibelius, have been discovered, though not yet entirely understood.<sup>2</sup> Simpson was a Reger enthusiast from at least as early as the end of the 1940s, when he was Director of Music of the Exploratory Concert Society. In a letter dated 15<sup>th</sup> January 1949, he writes to violinist Adolf Busch:

One of the composers whose music we are most anxious to perform is Max Reger. Knowing that you are yourself keenly interested in his works and are undoubtedly one of the most authoritative interpreters of them, I wondered if it might be possible (should you and your colleagues be willing) to arrange a Reger concert to coincide with your next visit to England. [...] I feel quite certain that a large audience would come to hear a programme like the following, for instance:–

Quartet in A major, Op. 54, No. 2

Variations on a theme of Telemann for pfte. (possibly played by Philip Lèvi, who is a very fine player of Reger)

Quartet in E flat, Op. 109<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arnold Schoenberg to Alexander Zemlinsky, 26<sup>th</sup> October 1922, in Alexander Zemlinsky, *Briefwechsel mit Arnold Schönberg, Anton Webern, Alban Berg und Franz Schreker*, ed. Horst Weber, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995 (Briefwechsel der Wiener Schule, 1), p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> For such more recent research see Lukas Haselböck, *Analytische Untersuchungen zur motivischen Logik bei Max Reger*, Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2000 (Schriftenreihe des Max-Reger-Instituts, XIV), and Matthias Kontarsky, *Kompositorische Tendenzen bei Max Regers Sonaten für Violoncello und Klavier*, Stuttgart: Carus, 2005 (Schriftenreihe des Max-Reger-Instituts, XIX).

The concert didn't materialise, but Simpson continued to further Reger's cause, with concert programme notes<sup>4</sup> and radio broadcasts, such as that of July 1967 on *Reger and the keyboard*, together with pianist Friedrich Wührer.<sup>5</sup> When trying to trace the reasons for Reger's neglect, several reasons were discussed in this broadcast talk – an immense amount of rehearsal time which is required for appropriate performance, and the fact that at a time when tone poems and operas were fashionable Reger wrote largely absolute music, especially in the 'odd' areas of chamber and organ music, and was intentionally 'unfashionable' from fairly early on. With regard to Reger's piano music Simpson says:

I imagine also that pianists who were perhaps interested in Reger found that the works themselves [such as the Bach Variations op. 81] weren't such a success with the public, simply because although they were very difficult, they could play things which were more display pieces, like Liszt for instance. With Reger you have enormous difficulties, but you don't have this tremendous brilliance and pianistic display which you find in Liszt for instance.<sup>6</sup>

Both Simpson and Wührer were slightly mistaken in assuming that the audience may not accept the works by Reger performed after considerable rehearsal time, and Wührer only very shortly later adds that especially the critics write

about Reger in very lukewarm phrases and that's not a thing the young artists need for their career, and then most of these young people turn away from Reger – they play on the radio stations, but never on, almost never in recitals.<sup>7</sup>

Still now, 45 years on from that broadcast discussion, impresarios reject Reger works for assumed non-acceptedness by the audience but in fact much more fearing several critics' ignorance.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Simpson to Adolf Busch, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1949, in *Tonic* 17, 2007, p. 3. The original letter is located in the BuschBrothersArchive in the Max-Reger-Institut, Karlsruhe.

<sup>4</sup> The only concert programme note on a Max Reger composition which has survived in the Robert Simpson Archive at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, is on Reger's Suite in D major, Op. 131d, No. 2 for viola, published in *Tonic* 18, 2008, p. 18. The programme note on Reger's Clarinet Quintet in A, Op. 146 is not extant.

<sup>5</sup> The 'telediphone recording by sound direction', a transcription of which can be found at the BBC Written Archives Centre at Caversham, Reading, was broadcast on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1967, 9.00–9.45; due to its incompleteness the transcription cannot be published in full. – Friedrich Wührer (1900–1975) was a pianist and professor of the piano in Vienna, Munich and elsewhere; amongst his recordings is an Electrola 78 of two small Reger pieces: *Humoreske*, Op. 20, No. 4 and *Gavotte*, Op. 82, No. 5 (E.G. 6122 CORA 2297).

<sup>6</sup> *Reger and the keyboard*, 'telediphone recording by sound direction', p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Reger and the keyboard*, p. 3.

Robert Simpson was interested in Reger for several of his very special features. Though not necessarily relevant for his own ways of composing, techniques of structuring thematic material, of *Klangflächen* anticipating Ligeti, techniques of developing motivic material<sup>8</sup> and especially techniques which were used in Reger's organ works were closely taken into account. Some of these techniques and Simpson's dealing with them will be illuminated in this paper.

Maintaining in the broadcast interview that Reger was not 'an outstanding melo-dist',<sup>9</sup> Robert Simpson stresses that very special feature of Reger's which has been called by Susanne Popp 'musical prose' (in contrast to musical lyricism and melodism practised by most contemporaries) and which she compared to techniques used by Arnold Schoenberg.<sup>10</sup> This technique of 'musical prose', of irregular emphasis and metre, has risen to a very typical means of expression in contemporary music, such as, for instance, Schoenberg himself or, to mention a British composer, Havergal Brian.<sup>11</sup>

Richard L. Edwards, a close friend of Simpson's and only slightly his junior, occasionally supplied the composer with Reger records, 'altogether fine performances but nothing really special'.<sup>12</sup> This was largely caused by the fact that for a very long time Reger was hardly recorded at all. Only after 1966 (the fiftieth anniversary of his death) was there a strong increase in Reger recordings, culminating in the centenary year 1973. By that time, Simpson supplied Edwards with broadcast recordings of two works<sup>13</sup> – the orchestral Serenade op. 95 with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Raymond Leppard (first broadcast in 1961) and the first movement of 'a gigantic unfinished Requiem'<sup>14</sup> begun in 1914 but discontinued at the recommendation of Reger's close friend Karl Straube, who had some fifteen years previously premiered several of Reger's most important

<sup>8</sup> See *Reger and the keyboard*, pp. 2/2–3/1.

<sup>9</sup> *Reger and the keyboard*, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Susanne Popp, 'Zur musikalischen Prosa bei Reger und Schönberg', in *Reger-Studien 1. Festschrift für Ottmar Schreiber zum 70. Geburtstag am 16. Februar 1976*, ed. Günther Massenkeil and Susanne Popp, Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1978 (Schriftenreihe des Max-Reger-Instituts, I), pp. 59–78.

<sup>11</sup> See Jürgen Schaarwächter, 'Zu Havergal Brians Gebrauch der deutschen Sprache in seinen Kompositionen', in *Music as a Bridge, Musikalische Beziehungen zwischen England und Deutschland 1920–1950*, ed. Christa Brüstle and Guido Heldt, Hildesheim: Olms, 2005 (Studien und Materialien zur Musikwissenschaft, 37), pp. 93–111.

<sup>12</sup> Richard L. Edwards in a telephone conversation with the author, 31<sup>st</sup> October 2002.

<sup>13</sup> The tapes were kindly supplied for duplication to the author and the Max-Reger-Institut, Karlsruhe.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Simpson to Richard L. Edwards, 29<sup>th</sup> November 1975; letter in the Robert Simpson Archive at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

organ works.<sup>15</sup> This Requiem was published only in 1939 and 1975 respectively (first and unfinished second movement), and the tape in possession of Robert Simpson was performed by soloists of international renown with Helmuth Rilling's Gächinger Kantorei and the Choir of the Gedächtniskirche Stuttgart. Due to immense rehearsals required,<sup>16</sup> since then only very few performances of this expressionist work have taken place, and even fewer featuring both movements. Reger uses here, especially in the unfinished 'Dies Irae' movement, expressionist means which make *Salome* and *Elektra* sound stolid by comparison.

In the broadcast discussion of 1967 Simpson stresses that it is a myth that Reger always produced 'thick texture, immensely complicated sound, enormously difficult passage-work, in fact what they call typically inflated German romantic music.'<sup>17</sup> He mentions in contrast that

there are a great many delicate and extremely refined pieces by Reger. In fact he had – I sometimes think – a mind which is akin to Debussy's in some way [...]. For instance this passage from the Hiller Variations [op. 100] for the orchestra – it's most beautifully orchestrated. I don't think Debussy himself could have produced a more refined sound.<sup>18</sup>

(See Example 1, pp. 487f.) 'The interesting thing about Reger, I think,' he continues,

is the extreme variety of his music, which again is something which most people don't realize. I think, for instance, the extraordinary use he makes of ordinary common chords, apparently unrelated to each other, but which when you get a whole sentence make complete sense, make perfect sense. Also I think sometimes he uses the old modes very beautifully. I think particularly, for instance, of the opening picture in the Böcklin Suite [*Vier Tondichtungen nach A. Böcklin* op. 128] which used to be very often played, but now seems to have fallen into neglect. But the first movement, The Hermit with the Violin [The fiddling Hermit], again an exquisitely delicate and beautiful piece of music, [is] one of the most peaceful pieces of music I think I know.<sup>19</sup>

(See Example 2, pp. 489–491.)

<sup>15</sup> Instead of completing the Requiem on the Latin text (WoO V/9), Reger wrote a new Requiem, Op. 144b, on a poem by Friedrich Hebbel. Though baptised in the Catholic faith, Reger had been excommunicated when in 1902 he married the divorced Protestant Elsa von Bercken, née von Bagenski.

<sup>16</sup> After its 1998 performance, Helmuth Rilling stressed that due to the rehearsals the performance of the two Requiem movements proved to be the most expensive performances he had ever made, even more expensive than performances of contemporary music.

<sup>17</sup> *Reger and the keyboard*, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Reger and the keyboard*, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Reger and the keyboard*, p. 2/1. This movement *The Hermit with the Violin* was broadcast in Simpson's *The Innocent Ear* on Christmas Eve 1979.

## 2. Variation.

**Allegretto con grazia.** (♩ = 56-60) (*non troppo allegro*)

2. variation.

**Allegretto con grazia.** (♩ = 56-60) (*non troppo allegro*)

Fl.

Ob.

Kl.

Fg.

**Allegretto con grazia.** (♩ = 56-60) (*non troppo allegro*)

Hr.

in A E H

Pk.

(Flageolet)

Hrf.

**Allegretto con grazia.** (♩ = 56-60) (*non troppo allegro*)

Vln.

Br.

Vol.

C.B.

**Allegretto con grazia.** (♩ = 56-60) (*non troppo allegro*)



Example 2: Reger, *Vier Tondichtungen nach A. Böcklin*, Op. 128, 1st movement (beginning)

**Molto sostenuto.** (♩ = 60-66) (*doch nie schleppend!*)

Zwei große Flöten.

Zwei Oboen.

Zwei Klarinetten in B.

Zwei Fagotte.

Solo-Violine  
senza sordino.

I. Violinen  
senza sordini.

II. Violinen  
senza sordini.

Bratschen  
senza sordini.

Violoncelle  
senza sordini.

I. Violinen  
con sordini.

II. Violinen  
con sordini.

Bratschen  
con sordini.

Violoncelle  
con sordini.

Kontrabässe.

**Molto sostenuto.** (♩ = 60-66) (*doch nie schleppend!*)

poco strin - gen-do rit. - - - -

Fl. *pp* *espress.* *mf* *pp*

Ob.

Kl. *pp* *pp* *mf* *espress.* *pp*

Fg.

Solo Vl. s. sord.

Vln. s. sord. *pp* *espress. ben marc. sul D.* *p cre - scen - do f* *pp*

Vln. c. sord. *pp* *espress. sul G.* *p cre - scen - do f* *pp* *espress. sul D.* *pp*

Br. s. sord. *pp* *espress. p cre - scen - do f* *pp*

Vol. s. sord. *pp* *p cre - scen - do f* *pp*

Vln. c. sord. *sul A.* *p* *sul D.* *mf* *p* *espress. sul A.* *mf* *pp* *espress. sul D.* *mf* *pp* *espress. maro.* *f* *pp*

Br. c. sord. *p* *mf* *pp* *espress. pp* *espress. pp*

Vol. c. sord. *p* *mf* *pp* *espress. pp* *espress. pp*

Kb. *divisi pp* *p* *unis.* *f* *ppp*

cre - scen - do f

poco strin - gen-do rit. - - - -

**1 a tempo**

Fl.

Ob.

Kl.

Fg.

Solo VI.  
s.sord.

Vln.  
s.sord.

Br.  
s.sord.

Vol.  
s.sord.

Vln.  
c.sord.

Br.  
c.sord.

Vol.  
c.sord.

Kb.

poco stringendo

**1 a tempo**

**poco stringendo**

The diversity of Reger's music is not at all explored extensively in the broadcast discussion, though the stormy, 'almost chaotic' 13th (penultimate) variation in the Bach Variations, Op. 81 is mentioned.<sup>20</sup>

Example 3: Reger, Variations and Fugue on a theme of Bach, Op. 81, 13th variation (beginning)

**Vivace.** (♩ = 132 - 152.)

*sempre ben legato*

*m.g. m.d.*

***ff***

*poco a poco*

*di - mi -*

*nu - en - do p*

***ff (non dim.)***

*meno f ff (non dim.) meno f*

*pp sempre poco a poco cre*

<sup>20</sup> Reger and the keyboard, p. 3/1.

Not mentioned, but possibly even more important, is Reger's sense of humour, his sarcastic-impish scherzo movements both in chamber, orchestral and piano music as well as in some of his *lieder*.

Example 4: Reger, Piano Trio in E minor, Op. 102, Scherzo (beginning)

**Allegretto.** (♩ = 92-96)

The musical score is written for Violin, Viola, and Piano. The key signature is E minor (three flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked **Allegretto.** with a note value of a quarter note equal to 92-96 beats per minute. The score is divided into five systems. The first system shows the Violin and Viola playing pizzicato (pizz.) and piano (pp), while the Piano part enters with a forte (pp) dynamic and the instruction *sempre assai leggiero*. The second system continues with the Piano part playing *sempre pp* and the Violin and Viola also playing *sempre pp*. The third system shows the Piano part playing *sempre pp* and the Violin and Viola also playing *sempre pp*. The fourth system shows the Piano part playing *sempre pp* and the Violin and Viola also playing *sempre pp*. The fifth system shows the Piano part playing *sempre pp* and the Violin and Viola also playing *sempre pp*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

As usual at the time of the broadcast discussion mentioned above, it was common practice to play many Reger works slower than prescribed in the metronome markings. This was the result of two factors: firstly from the necessity of extreme virtuosity of the performers (especially with regard to phrasing and dynamics) and an immense number of rehearsals to achieve the results prescribed in the score, and secondly from Straube's teaching, who in later years felt it unsuitable to play Reger's works as prescribed (he was able to do so in his earlier years) and took into closer consideration the relevance of the instrument and the place of performance to achieve accurate results.<sup>21</sup> Taking Reger's music broadly (which very often coincides with supplying Reger's music with thick texture) was meant to increase the understanding of Reger's harmonic and contrapuntal proceedings. The digital age (and the re-assessment of contemporary performances, such as that of the *Telemann Variations* by their dedicatee, Frieda Kwast-Hodapp<sup>22</sup>) has proven that, given the technique, interpretative insight and persuasive strength, Reger's tempi can be performed properly.<sup>23</sup> This was largely forgotten at the time of the 1967 broadcast discussion (as were the details of the composition of *Fantasia and Fugue in D minor*, Op. 135b, see below).

## II.

Like Reger, Simpson had 'a great passion for cathedrals and churches'<sup>24</sup> and a great love of Bach, and while for Reger Bach was an important basis of his musical thinking, he was much less so for Simpson, both due to his close connection to the Viennese classics Haydn and Beethoven, but also because of Simpson's generally non-religious position (while Reger remained religious throughout his life). Baroque forms and techniques certainly found their way into the works of both composers, but Reger also frequently adopted very special conceptions such as solo suites or sonatas for violin, viola or violoncello. His penchant for chorale preludes and fantasias, prelude and fugue, or trio sonatas for organ very strongly display this extremely close connection.

<sup>21</sup> Henrico Stewen, *The Straube Code: Deciphering the Metronome Marks in Max Reger's Organ Music*, Helsinki: Sibelius Academy, 2008 utterly misunderstands Reger's intentions.

<sup>22</sup> This performance (recorded on the Welte Mignon player piano in November 1920 and re-recorded in 2006) was issued on the Tacet CD label (*The Welte Mignon Mystery Vol. V: Max Reger and Frieda Kwast-Hodapp playing their 1905/1920 interpretations: Selected works by Reger*; TACET 152).

<sup>23</sup> Marc-André Hamelin and Markus Becker are amongst those who perform Reger at the tempo prescribed, but also Sviatoslav Richter, who with Andreas Luczewicz performed the *Beethoven Variations*.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Simpson's father Robert Warren Simpson to his brother Gordon Simpson, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1944. Quoted in *Leading Notes* 60, August 2002, p. 4.

Reger, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was, like many of his contemporaries, very much involved in arranging others' music for different forces (piano reductions, orchestrations etc.). In this section of Reger's œuvre the Bach arrangements are of central importance since they are so large in number and diverse in texture. Reger transcribed organ works for piano, piano works for organ, piano works for orchestra, orchestral and organ works for piano duet; he edited cantatas, piano works (together with August Schmid-Lindner, who premiered the Bach Variations), concertos and Rheinberger's piano duet version of the Goldberg Variations; furthermore he added a third part to Bach's two-part piano Inventions in a version for organ (*Schule des Triospiels*). In comparison Simpson's interest in Bach bore much less fruit: but there is a completed version of *The Art of the Fugue* for String Quartet, and his last (orchestral) variation cycle was the Bach Variations of 1991.

Another piano duet reduction of Reger's that may be mentioned in this section offers an even more and yet somewhat strange coincidence: the so-called 'Jena' symphony once attributed to Beethoven, but now known to be composed by Friedrich Witt (1770–1836). Reger's friend and early biographer Fritz Stein had in 1909 found at Jena a MS copy of parts of the symphony, which was in two of them inscribed with Beethoven's name (albeit with a question mark). Reger prepared the piano duet reduction in connection with the publication of the score by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1911 (he still considered the work to be possible early Beethoven), and he conducted the symphony at Meiningen on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1913. In 1950 Robert Simpson contributed some 'Observations on the 'Jena' Symphony' to the *Music Survey*.<sup>25</sup> H. C. Robbins Landon has meanwhile proven that the symphony is a kind of pastiche plagiarism from Haydn<sup>26</sup> – a solution not far away from Simpson's results.

While Simpson's main interest was in symphonies and string quartets, neither of the works which Reger composed with the intention to become symphonies was completed or has survived.<sup>27</sup> Certainly both the Sinfonietta Op. 90 and the orchestral Serenade Op. 95 are of symphonic dimensions, but they do not have the weight of, say, a Bruckner or Mahler symphony. And instead of – like Simpson – concentrating on writing string quartets (though he composed some half a dozen of them, from his

<sup>25</sup> Robert Simpson, 'Observations on the "Jena" Symphony', *Music Survey* 2/3, 1950, pp. 155–160.

<sup>26</sup> H. C. Robbins Landon, 'The "Jena" Symphony', *The Music Review* 18, 1957, pp. 109–113.

<sup>27</sup> There are some symphonic movements from several periods which have survived: Reger's early Symphony in B minor, however, which he wrote with the intention to be published by the London publisher Augener & Co., seems to be lost.

early age of sixteen until five years before his death), Reger wrote a huge amount of chamber music for different forces, most prominently violin sonatas. Undoubtedly chamber music is the most prominent genre Reger dealt with (a 23 CDs edition did not contain all of his chamber works), while Simpson, apart from his 15 string quartets, wrote only a dozen of such works, amongst them one violin sonata (1984).<sup>28</sup>

Most of Reger's independent variation works depend on themes by others – in this Simpson resembles Reger quite closely. Analysing the Bach Variations in the radio discussion on *Reger and the keyboard* Simpson comes to the conclusion that Reger's variation techniques are considerably advanced<sup>29</sup> (he did not know that Reger was occasionally Schoenberg's ideal and model which inspired the latter's theories).

Table 1: independent variation works by Max Reger:<sup>30</sup>

Phantasy and Fugue in C minor, Op. 29	organ	1898
Introduction and Passacaglia in D minor, WoO IV/6	organ	1899
Phantasy and Fugue on B–A–C–H, Op. 46	organ	1900
Variations and Fugue on <i>Heil, unserm König Heil</i> , WoO IV/7	organ	1901
Symphonic Phantasy and Fugue, Op. 57	organ	1901
Introduction, Variations and Fugue in F# minor, Op. 73	organ	1903
Bach Variations in B minor, Op. 81	piano	1904
Beethoven Variations in B♭ major, Op. 86	2 pianos	1904
	orchestrated	1915
Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue in B minor, Op. 96	2 pianos	1906
Hiller Variations in E major, Op. 100	orchestra	1907
Chaconne in G minor, Op. 117, No. 4	violin	1910
Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue in E minor, Op. 127	organ	1913
Mozart Variations in A major, Op. 132	orchestra	1914
	2 pianos	1914
Telemann Variations in B♭ major, Op. 134	piano	1914
Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, Op. 135b	organ	1915

<sup>28</sup> I am speaking of those items that have been counted or survived – works that are destroyed or lost are not included in this comparison, nor the student string quartet only recently discovered.

<sup>29</sup> See also Christoph Wünsch, *Technik und Form in den Variationsreihen von Max Reger*, Stuttgart: Carus, 2002 (Schriftenreihe des Max-Reger-Instituts, XVI).

<sup>30</sup> The original titles are given. – One may add as independent variation works the seven Chorale Fantasias Opp. 27, 30, 40 and 52 of 1898–1900 which are in fact sets of variations on chorale tunes.

Table 2: independent variation works by Robert Simpson:

Haydn Variations	piano	1948
Variations and Fugue	recorder, string quartet	1959
Haydn Variations (String Quartet No. 9)	string quartet	1982
Nielsen Variations	orchestra	1983
<i>Eppur si muove</i>	organ	1985
Introduction and Allegro on a bass by Max Reger	brass band	1986
Beethoven Variations	piano	1990
Bach Variations	string orchestra	1991

## III.

Simpson was, as Lionel Pike states, hugely impressed by Heinz Wunderlich's performance of Reger's Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue Op. 127; one of his remarks was that 'there is no reason why the movements of a Passacaglia should all be played at the same speed – a remark that is worth remembering when one comes to play *Eppur si muove*'.<sup>31</sup> Heinz Wunderlich (1919–2012) had been a pupil of Straube's from 1935 to 1941, and has until his nineties remained strongly interested in Reger. From 1979 he recorded some seven Reger LPs and CDs,<sup>32</sup> the most recent one in October 2001. In 1973 he published, on the occasion of the centenary of both Reger and Straube, an article on the interpretation of Reger's Symphonic Phantasy and Fugue Op. 57 with regard to Straube's performing prescriptions.<sup>33</sup> Wunderlich's performance of Op. 127 was originally released on LP in 1980, coupled with Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, Op. 135b and Introduction and Passacaglia in F minor, Op. 63, No. 5–6 (the last item being re-recorded in 1990).<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Lionel Pike, 'A study in cosmic motion: Robert Simpson's "Eppur si Muove"', *Tonic* 8, 1997, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Of the six LPs produced in 1980 (Arp-Schnitger-Records ASR 21 to 26 respectively), several items were re-recorded in 1990; all items were (re-)released on five CDs in 1990 (Signum Musikedition GmbH SIG X25-00 to X29-00). The 2001 CD was issued by Organum Musikproduktion in March 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Heinz Wunderlich, 'Zur Interpretation von Regers Symphonischer Phantasie und Fuge op. 57 (Karl Straubes Vortragsbezeichnungen)', *Mitteilungen des Max-Reger-Instituts* 19, 1973, pp. 15–26. For further information concerning the diverging performing tradition of Reger works through Straube see Max Reger, *Briefe an Karl Straube*, ed. Susanne Popp, Bonn: Dümmler, 1986 (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Reger-Instituts, 10), pp. 14–18 and Christopher S. Anderson, *Max Reger and Karl Straube. Perspectives on an Organ Performing Tradition*, Aldershot/Brookfield (Vt.): Ashgate, 2003.

<sup>34</sup> Arp-Schnitger-Records ASR 21.

The only works Simpson composed in 1985-6, accompanying the composition of his Ninth Symphony (which was begun about the time of finishing *Eppur si muove* and opens in fact with a massive Passacaglia), are two works which are outstanding in his œuvre: the organ work *Eppur si muove (Ricercar and Passacaglia)* and *Introduction and Allegro on a bass by Max Reger* for brass band. *Eppur si muove* (composed in the first half of 1985) parallels Nielsen's œuvre insofar as Nielsen also wrote only one substantial organ work, *Commotio* op. 58, 1930-1 (apart from which he only composed some 31 preludes, 1929-30). Furthermore, there are plenty of similarities between *Commotio* and *Eppur si muove*.<sup>35</sup> Simpson had heard *Commotio* performed by the celebrated Danish organist Svend Aage Spange – and he dedicated *Eppur si muove* to Spange and his wife Annalise. It was however not Spange who premiered *Eppur si muove* but Christopher Bowers-Broadbent, on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1988 in St Marylebone Parish Church, London. Lionel Pike stresses that

Simpson had the North German type of organ in mind while writing this work, knowing that it would ideally suit the uncompromising contrapuntal logic (his opening marking is *Severo, tempo giusto* – warm romantic strings are clearly quite wrong for this type of music).<sup>36</sup>

*Eppur si muove* is cast in one enormous movement, lasting about half an hour (thus similar to Reger's Introduction, Variations and Fugue in F# minor Op. 73 and Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue in E minor Op. 127). Its title, Galileo's famous muttering that the earth moved round the sun, which he had to recant, reflects Simpson's strong interest in astronomy (he was a Fellow of the Royal Astronomic Society).<sup>37</sup> Both the title and several aspects of conception show the influence of *Commotio*. But of even more importance to Simpson and his art was the concept of 'movement' itself – forward and backward, circular, spiral and into any other direction. Lionel Pike has thoroughly researched Simpson's special interest in palindromes.<sup>38</sup>

The subtitle of *Eppur si muove* offers a clear idea as to the formal conception of the work – two large sections, parallelable to any Baroque (or Regerian) conception of

<sup>35</sup> Lionel Pike, 'A study in cosmic motion: Robert Simpson's "Eppur si Muove"', *Tonic* 8, 1997, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Lionel Pike, 'A study in cosmic motion', p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> See Lionel Pike, 'A study in cosmic motion', p. 3. See also Lionel Pike, 'An astronomical Quartet: a lesson from Robert Simpson', *Tonic* 4/2, 1992, pp. 2-17; in this volume pp. 330-351.

<sup>38</sup> Lionel Pike, 'Towards a Study of Musical Motion: Robert Simpson's Variation and Finale on a Theme of Haydn (1948)', *The Music Review* 54, 1993, pp. 137-148; in this volume pp. 443-458; Lionel Pike, 'Knowing it backwards: Robert Simpson's Ninth String Quartet', in the present volume pp. 368-413. See also Robert Simpson, 'Haydn the Symphonist', *Tonic* 12, 2002, pp. 2-48.

Fantasia and Fugue, though in reversed order. Both sections are derived from a circling pattern (called ‘gruppetto’ by Pike<sup>39</sup>) heard at the outset of the work (in this sense according to Matthew Taylor showing similarity to the Sixth Symphony<sup>40</sup>) the intervals of which are of highest importance:

Example 5: *Eppur si muove*, central pattern



notes	intervals
1–2	major 3rd
1–3	whole tone
1–4	semitone
1–5	tritone
2–3	tritone
2–4	4th
2–5	whole tone
3–4	semitone
3–5	minor 6th
4–5	5th

The Ricercar falls into three sections, the first suggesting a kind of chorale prelude (with long pedal notes as a kind of ‘cantus firmus’), of strong and ‘most austere’ polyphony.<sup>41</sup> A transitory, ‘developmentary’ *fluente* second part with a ‘counter-theme’ growing out of the original one leads into the last part which compresses the bars from 3/4 to 3/8 (using a technique paralleling Nielsen in *Commotio*) as the counterpoint gains further intensity, ending in an animated climax. It may be said that in the Ricercar the Pas-sacaglia theme is not only ‘composed’ (i.e. built out of motivic elements), but these elements are simultaneously ‘developed’, ‘moved’ in almost every possible way:<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Lionel Pike, ‘A study in cosmic motion’, p. 3. (The spelling on p. 3 is a printing error – see e.g. p. 5.)

<sup>40</sup> Matthew Taylor, liner note to Ian Quinn’s world premiere recording of *Eppur si muove*, released in 1998 (Hyperion CDA67016), p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Matthew Taylor, liner note, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> See Lionel Pike, ‘A study in cosmic motion’, pp. 3–5.

Example 6: *Eppur si muove*, Ricercar (extract)

After this introductory, somewhat (but not strict) fugal ‘introduction’, the Passacaglia opens softly stating the theme in the pedals (see the closeness to the theme of the Passacaglia in D minor from Introduction and Passacaglia in D minor which has as a central feature the fifth in the beginning and in the end of the theme, and to the themes of Reger’s Passacaglia in F minor, Op. 63, No. 6, and the Passacaglia from Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue in E minor, Op. 127, both with an irregular eight-bar conception, with a seventh in the middle):

Example 7: *Eppur si muove*, Passacaglia, theme

Example 10: Reger, Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue in E minor, Op. 127, Passacaglia, theme



The Passacaglia theme includes concise strings of intervals, such as a series of rising fourths (which will also be of central importance in Introduction and *Allegro on a bass by Max Reger*). The re-arrangement of the notes of the central pattern (which in part results in some inversion, if one may say so), are the logical result of the ‘development’ of the pattern in the Ricercar. The theme would be four-square if one counted the last C# as the last bar – and furthermore, the second half of the theme would rhythmically be nearly palindromic. It opens with a rising perfect fifth, and if omitting the last note ends with a falling fifth.

The presentation of the theme is followed by  $6 + 5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6$  (i.e. 42) variations, the grouping of variations being caused by certain stylistic or compositional means. Again we find the importance of palindromes with regard to the order of grouped variations. All twelve pitches are traversed, beginning on C# and ascending by semitones.

The first half of the variations ends calmly after an explosive outburst (Variations 13 to 20), and after another build-up of tension (Variation 30) again a ‘decomposition’ of the original material takes places, a moving of key notes in florid and densely woven texture proves the importance of the work’s title, ‘*eppur si muove*’. The initial ‘chorale’ returns in the pedals (Variation 36), leading from C# to C, so that the ‘commotio’ could start again.

In fact *Eppur si muove* has comparatively few points of connection to Reger and his Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue Op. 127. Simpson’s comment that it might not be necessary to perform all variations of a Passacaglia at the same speed was but a stressing of an impulse for Simpson to compose the work (this technique of – prescribed – varying tempi in a passacaglia can actually be found in Reger’s Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue in B minor Op. 96 for two pianos, but in neither of Reger’s organ passacaglias).

## IV.

Another, totally different aspect in basing on Reger is one of Simpson's some six works for brass band, forces hardly known in Germany: Reger's only work for brass band is the 'Fanfaren für Infanteriecapelle' in the incidental music to *Castra vetera* (1899); another of Simpson's works for brass band is the incidental music to *The Pretenders* (1965). *Introduction and Allegro on a bass by Max Reger* was written in the latter half of 1986 at the request of Howard Snell, then the musical director of the Desford Colliery Dowty Band, who commissioned the work with assistance from East Midlands Arts and premiered it under the direction of the Swedish conductor Torgny Hansen at Warwick University on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1988.<sup>43</sup> This time Reger's last great organ work, the Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, Op. 135b, is the basis of the whole work. Simpson asserts in his preface to the score that Reger's op. 135b is 'one of the greatest organ works since Bach'.<sup>44</sup> Simpson was slightly mistaken as to the composition of the Reger work, which was actually finished by 17<sup>th</sup> May 1915; revisions in the proofs continued until April 1916; the score was published only shortly after Reger's death.<sup>45</sup> Unknowingly Simpson referred to Hans Klotz's edition of Reger's original manuscript, which was strongly reworked until publication, but which received inappropriate fame through its publication in the Reger 'Gesamtausgabe' (vol. 18, ed. 1966).<sup>46</sup> Simpson dedicated his work to Peter Wilson, former euphonium player, for 23 years editor of *The British Bandsman* and in 1991 recipient of the Iles medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians, but foremost head of Rosehill Music, who published all of Simpson's brass band works except the very first. The friendship between Simpson and Wilson deepened after they had first met in 1971 at the Royal Albert Hall at a World Brass Band Championship where *Energy* was the

<sup>43</sup> This information was kindly supplied by Peter Wilson, e-mail to the author of 12<sup>th</sup> December 2002.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Simpson, Preface to the score of *Introduction and Allegro on a bass by Max Reger* (1986), Beaconsfield (Bucks.): Rosehill. – For an analysis of Reger's Fantasia and Fugue Op. 135b see Hartmut Haupt, 'Max Regers letztes Orgelwerk op. 135b', in *Mitteilungen des Max-Reger-Instituts* 17, 1968, pp. 6–12.

<sup>45</sup> See Ottmar Schreiber, 'Zur Frage der gültigen Fassung von Regers Orgel-Opus 135b', in *Mitteilungen des Max-Reger-Instituts* 19, 1973, pp. 34–38 and Max Reger, *Briefe an Karl Straube*, ed. Susanne Popp, Bonn 1986 (*Veröffentlichungen des Max-Reger-Instituts*, 10), pp. 257–260.

<sup>46</sup> The Reger 'Gesamtausgabe' (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel) is neither a historic-critical edition nor a complete edition of all Reger works, although three supplementary volumes have tried to complete the survey of Reger's original compositions. Especially the organ works, edited from manuscripts instead than from the first editions, which not only approved by Reger but actually carefully proof-read and amended and changed in many places in comparison to the manuscripts, have been edited widely inadequately.

test-piece, and increased in 1978/79 in connection with *Volcano*. Simpson went to proof-read this piece at Wilson's office, using his gold propelling pencil which was a present from Carl Nielsen's daughter.<sup>47</sup> Reger had dedicated his composition to Richard Strauss, who had already been the dedicatee of the early Fantasia and Fugue in C minor, Op. 29.<sup>48</sup>

The formal conception is in some ways similar to Reger's. Whereas in Reger's work both sections are of equal weight (the Fantasia with varying tempi, the Fugue with a continuous main tempo *Molto sostenuto* [which is modified because of the compound metre which does not, however, cause any increase of tempo]), Simpson's composition clearly distinguishes between a kind of expository slow, 'mainly mysterious and deliberate'<sup>49</sup> introduction and the energetic Allegro. This formal conception, together with the title 'Introduction and Allegro', clearly refers to some British central works of similar title, by Elgar and Bliss (Elgar's work is for strings, Bliss's for full orchestra).

The introduction, however, presents only fragments of the theme, in a way 'constructing' it anew after some seventy years between the Reger and this Simpson work. Any kind of motivic element is used separately, increased or decreased in speed, including melodic formulas which were already of high motivic importance in *Eppur si muove*<sup>50</sup> but which already showed up in Reger's Fantasia and may have been taken from there:

Example 11a: Reger, Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, Op. 135b, Fantasia (extract)



Example 11b: *Introduction and Allegro on a bass* by Max Reger, Introduction (extract)



<sup>47</sup> This information was kindly supplied by Peter Wilson during a telephone conversation, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2002.

<sup>48</sup> See Jürgen Schaarwächter, "‘Enfants terribles’ der deutschen Musik. Bunte Blätter zu Strauss und Reger", in *Richard Strauss-Blätter Neue Folge* 49, 2003, p. 22.

<sup>49</sup> R. Simpson, Preface, *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Eric Wilson, 'New Simpson Masterwork', in *The British Bandsman* 4452, 13<sup>th</sup> February 1988, reprinted in *Tonic* 3/2, 1988, p. 18, in this volume pp. 479f.

It is interesting that in this introduction Simpson echoes dynamic means already found in Reger – the close connecting of dynamic extremes as early as in the first seven bars.

Example 12: *Introduction and Allegro on a bass by Max Reger, Introduction (extract)*

Adagio (♩ = c.60)

E♭ Horn

B♭ Baritone

B♭ Trombone

Bass Trombone

B♭ Euphonium  
B♭ Bass

E♭ Bass

The theme of the Allegro

Example 13a: Reger, *Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, Op. 135b, Fugue (extract)*

Example 13b: *Introduction and Allegro on a bass by Max Reger, Allegro, theme*

B♭ Euphonium

is a bass taken from a ‘gigantic ritenuto’<sup>51</sup> (which in fact is the final blaze on the penultimate page of the printed score) in Reger’s Fugue. Simpson alters Reger’s 12/8 time signature to 3/4 and flattens one note of it ‘to make it combinable with a string

<sup>51</sup> R. Simpson, Preface, *ibid.*

of rising fourths<sup>52</sup> which grow from the last notes of the bass (for the flattened note see Example 13b, marked note). These fourths, also evident in Simpson's Ninth Symphony, likewise of 1985-6 (the interval of the fourth is also an important feature in the opening the Reger Fantasia – see Example 14), accompany the Reger bass 'rather like the counter-subjects in a fugue'<sup>53</sup> and are an important element in the composition.

Example 14: Reger, Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, Op. 135b, Fantasia (extract)



A kind of counter-theme is totally derived from motives from the original theme (again with reference to material – in fact the second main theme – from Reger's Fugue),

Example 15a: *Introduction and Allegro on a bass by Max Reger, Allegro*, counter-theme



Example 15b: Reger, Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, Op. 135b, Fugue, second main theme



as is another figure with a strong connection to Reger's own theme, but which similarly recalls Simpson's *The Four Temperaments* (1982):

Example 16: *Introduction and Allegro on a bass by Max Reger, Allegro* (extract)



<sup>52</sup> R. Simpson, Preface, *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> R. Simpson, Preface, *ibid.*

‘During the final climax (bars 711–720)’ [rehearsal mark M1 to N1] ‘Reger’s own magnificent treatment of his bass is used.’<sup>54</sup>

Example 17a: Reger, *Fantasia and Fugue in D minor*, Op. 135b, authorised edition from 1916, Fugue (ending)

The musical score for the ending of the Fugue in D minor, Op. 135b by Max Reger, is presented in three systems. The first system shows the piano and organ staves with various tempo and dynamic markings. The second system includes a section marked 'Moderato molto' and 'assai marc.'. The third system includes a section marked 'Adagio.' and 'Adagissimo'. The score concludes with a final chord marked 'fff (Org. Pl.)'.

<sup>54</sup> R. Simpson, Preface, *ibid.*

Example 17b: *Introduction and Allegro on a bass* by Max Reger, Allegro (extract)

[M]

E♭ Soprano  
Cornet

Solo B♭  
Cornet

Repiano B♭  
Cornet

2nd B♭  
Cornet

3rd B♭  
Cornet

B♭ Flugel  
Horn

Solo E♭  
Horn

1st E♭  
Horn

2nd E♭  
Horn

1st B♭  
Baritone

2nd B♭  
Baritone

1st B♭  
Trombone

2nd B♭  
Trombone

Bass  
Trombone

E♭ Euphonium

E♭ Bass

B♭ Bass

This musical score is for the brass section of 'The Rose Tree'. It features 14 staves, each representing a different instrument. The instruments are: E♭ Soprano Cornet, Solo B♭ Cornet, Repiano B♭ Cornet, 2nd B♭ Cornet, 3rd B♭ Cornet, B♭ Flugel Horn, Solo E♭ Horn, 1st E♭ Horn, 2nd E♭ Horn, 1st B♭ Baritone, 2nd B♭ Baritone, 1st B♭ Trombone, 2nd B♭ Trombone, Bass Trombone, E♭ Euphonium, E♭ Bass, and B♭ Bass. The music is in 2/4 time and G major. The first staff has a 'ff' (fortissimo) dynamic marking. The second staff has a 'unis.' (unison) marking. The third staff has a 'ff' marking. The fourth staff has a 'ff' marking. The fifth staff has a 'ff' marking. The sixth staff has a 'ff' marking. The seventh staff has a 'ff' marking. The eighth staff has a 'ff' marking. The ninth staff has a 'ff' marking. The tenth staff has a 'ff' marking. The eleventh staff has a 'ff' marking. The twelfth staff has a 'ff' marking. The thirteenth staff has a 'ff' marking. The fourteenth staff has a 'ff' marking. The score is written for a full brass section, with each instrument having its own part. The music is in 2/4 time and G major. The first staff has a 'ff' (fortissimo) dynamic marking. The second staff has a 'unis.' (unison) marking. The third staff has a 'ff' marking. The fourth staff has a 'ff' marking. The fifth staff has a 'ff' marking. The sixth staff has a 'ff' marking. The seventh staff has a 'ff' marking. The eighth staff has a 'ff' marking. The ninth staff has a 'ff' marking. The tenth staff has a 'ff' marking. The eleventh staff has a 'ff' marking. The twelfth staff has a 'ff' marking. The thirteenth staff has a 'ff' marking. The fourteenth staff has a 'ff' marking.

[N1]

The musical score is written for a choir and a soloist. It consists of 11 systems of staves. The first system has six staves, the second and third have five, and the last three have four. The notation includes various accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and ties, indicating a complex harmonic and melodic structure. The soloist part is marked with the word *unis.* (unison).

*unis.*

Obviously the connections between the Reger and the Simpson work are much closer than would appear from looking at the Simpson only, without reference to the Reger. That Simpson's techniques sometimes resemble Reger's extremely closely does not prove that Simpson relied upon Reger, but that compositional techniques already developed by Reger were of high value for compositional techniques until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore Simpson in this work – in contrast to his organ composition, where only less direct resemblances can be found – depends entirely on thematic and motivic material supplied by Reger, and although his conception and development of the material may be different, he (nearly) ends with a full quotation from Reger's Op. 135b.

## Simpson, modernism, and relevance

### Simon Phillippo

The twin Romantic concepts of the autonomous artwork and the composer as isolated genius persist to this day in the popular imagination. While music now, just as in the past, is composed for a wide range of functions, most often to commission and frequently for mass consumption, we continue to judge a new musical work in terms of its relative success as an original conception, as something shut off from material concerns, and as proof of the composer's creative individuality. Throughout the nineteenth century, many composers felt increasingly compelled to write what Wagner called 'das Kunstwerk der Zukunft', and by the early decades of the twentieth century it was taken for granted that, as Carl Dahlhaus put it, 'art has to be new in order to be authentic'.<sup>1</sup>

With the modernism of the twentieth century, in particular those strands of modernism centred around the Second Viennese School and postwar Darmstadt, this key value of originality became highly self-conscious and explicit, even developed to an artistic point of principle. The modernist composer feels a moral obligation to explore new and innovative means of musical structuring, of scoring, even of sound-production; and he or she is also expected to present new 'content' to the listener, to speak as a kind of modern-day oracle. One must push the boundaries of what is possible still further, on an unceasing quest for new discoveries and inventions.

The conventional structure of history legitimizes our tendency to privilege the new in composition. The history of twentieth-century music, like our histories of music from other epochs, is written as a story of origins, of the (at-one-time-) new, and music is valued historically if it is ahead of its time, if it challenges the perceived status quo, or if it makes an individualistic stand against the cultural world from which it emerges. Thus, by these terms, any new music which might appear to be 'behind the times' is doubly damned; not only will it face exclusion on the grounds of contemporary irrelevance, but it will also find no place within a progressive view of history, modernism's principal measure of value.

<sup>1</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, 'Avant Garde and Popularity', in *Schoenberg and the New Music*, trans. Derrick Puffett and Alfred Clayton, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 26.

However, musical modernism before the Second World War did not focus so one-dimensionally on creating the artworks of the future. On the contrary, these composers were as critically conscious of the past as they were of the immediate present and the imagined posterity to come. Whether they worked explicitly with borrowed historical idioms, in the manner of Stravinsky, or aimed to develop radically new ways of generating and organizing musical material, as in the work of Schoenberg, increasing historical tensions existed between the moral crusade for novelty and the tonal tradition from which their music was felt to have evolved. In addition, in the early decades of the century, new music became increasingly autonomous in conception, and markedly esoteric in its public profile.

This condition was especially acute for the music of the Schoenbergian serialists. In 1919 Schoenberg set up his Society for Private Musical Performances, forcibly slamming the door on any listening public and establishing a real distance between composers' creative activities and the public sphere. By the time Robert Simpson came to establish his own artistic agenda (and to write his most tonal-sounding compositions) in the 1950s and '60s, the 'officially' sanctioned new music was more esoteric than ever, with composers writing more for each other, within a kind of mutual support and appreciation group, than for any listening public. This music also took the creed of originality to its extreme, concentrating on the radical techniques of total serialism on the one hand and indeterminacy on the other. Other composers, such as Pierre Schaeffer, took their lead from the Futurist movement of the pre-war decades and found musical potential in everyday sounds, rejecting the use of conventional instruments. Schaeffer and others began to explore the potential of recorded and computer-generated material to create new music. The trend, if such a thing can be identified from among these different compositional approaches, was towards what Adorno calls the 'atomization of sounds',<sup>2</sup> whether these were pitches or intervals generated from a statistical matrix as in the case of the serialists, produced by chance processes, or resulting from the semi-indeterminate combination of live and electronically synthesized sounds. In other words, there was a move from thematic material to isolated events; from 'the concept of musical form as something which presented the history of a musical theme',<sup>3</sup> to material with no history whatever. The term 'musical process' began to refer not to the development of material throughout

<sup>2</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Bloomster, London: Sheed & Ward, 1973, p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, 'Issues in Composition', in *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, p. 44.

a piece but to the actual formative processes that produced the individual sounds in the first place. And of vital importance in these decades was a negation of the music of the past, of Romanticism and pre-war modernism in particular, the values of which were held to have given rise to Nazism and the recent catastrophes in Europe and Japan. Whereas earlier modernism had confronted historical genres and traditions in its quest for novelty, and in clear contrast to the historically conscious Second Viennese or neoclassical composers, the musical avant garde of the postwar years attempted to find new music in a vacuum, to begin again from scratch.

From the perspective of the self-styled avant-gardist torchbearers, Robert Simpson's output can only appear historically irresponsible. It takes classicism and long-established genres as its inspiration, appearing to eschew originality as its principal consideration, and declining to incorporate the avant garde's radical 'innovations.' No particularly unusual instrumental forces are called for in his output, nor any unorthodox methods of producing sound from those for which he chose to write. The musical material is often formed from the stuff of earlier, tonal styles, such as basic diatonic triads, scalar patterns, or relatively conventional cadential procedures. Some of his works, such as the Third Quartet or Fourth Symphony, can be heard to maintain the nineteenth-century heroic optimism that was so fiercely rejected by modernist artists, and of course the aesthetic characteristics of organicism and teleology, representations of the jaded ideas of evolution and progress, are to be found in much of his output.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Simpson's music, as testified by the generic titles he used, epitomizes the notion of the 'work concept,' something that was anathema to composers of aleatory music, who valued spontaneous, unrepeatable musical creations above the 'concreteness' of a finished, objectified structure. None of this is to say that Simpson was alone in composing symphonies during the decades of high modernism; Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Vaughan Williams, and Walton all wrote important symphonies before and during Simpson's artistic career, and many other composers, notably Martinů, Henze, Hoddinott, Holmboe, Schuman, and Hartmann added valuable contributions to the twentieth century's symphonic catalogue. But such pursuits, whether they be accommodated within a post-Romantic, neoclassical, or more 'progressively' modernist musical style, have always seemed peripheral to mainstream twentieth-century history, which forms itself around the new. It is clear that

<sup>4</sup> For detailed discussions of the ideological crisis in symphonic composition in the twentieth century, see David Fanning, *Nielsen: Symphony No. 5*, Cambridge Music Handbooks, ed. Julian Rushton, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 8; and Simon Phillippo, *The Symphonism of Robert Simpson*, Ph. D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2000, pp. 27–36.

nothing about Simpson's music can reconcile it to the prevailing aesthetic values of the early decades of his career, and thus the image of a composer at odds with his immediate cultural context (at least in terms of what was 'acceptable' in new music) has come to seem, on the face of it, to be entirely justified. This situation has been rendered all the more acute by the fact that Simpson went to great lengths verbally to drive a wedge between himself and his avant-gardist contemporaries, emphasizing the classical inheritance of his music, embedding it within the much-scorned discourse of organicism, and describing it insistently – and misleadingly – as fundamentally 'tonal'. (Critics have been conspicuously credulous, and few have deemed it necessary to deconstruct this most 'constructed' of composers.) Weighing up Simpson's contemporary relevance in terms of the avant garde of the postwar period might lead us, as it has led others, to reject him out of hand, as not in touch with the creative or intellectual spirit of his time.

But it is not reasonable criticism to deny Simpson artistic relevance now on the basis that at the earliest stage in the reception of his music he was swimming against a particularly strong current. After all, the same could be said of Johann Sebastian Bach. Not only are we hearing Simpson's music at a time when the avant-garde practices and attitudes of those earlier decades have themselves come to seem dated; we may today be more inclined to evaluate his achievements in a spirit of historical relativism, judging it in terms of our own immediate experience, not in relation to compositional practice of its time of origin.

However, if we are pushed to identify the historical forces at work in Simpson's music, it would be grossly insufficient to regard him simply as a reactionary figure, delving into the annals of classicism and shirking his 'moral obligations' as an artist of the postwar epoch. Although Simpson wrote off the avant-garde music of the mid-century as 'the rotting remnants of the corpse of Romanticism',<sup>5</sup> and sought in his polemics to distance himself from the 'stinking' modernism of his own time, this does not mean that his music has nothing to do with modernity. The polemical distancing was surely a rhetorical, perhaps even psychological, means of creating 'space' for himself as a composer, of establishing his own ground. Thus rhetorically isolated, Simpson set about writing music that in fact reflected a profoundly modernist outlook. His music reflects no cool, Stravinskian *neue Sachlichkeit* in its reappropriation of historical elements; but, in its striving symphonic dialectics, the music of this so-called antimodernist composer, conventional characteristics and all, is entirely of the 'pro-

<sup>5</sup> Deryck Cooke, Bernard Keefe, Denis Matthews, and Robert Simpson, *Musicians Talking: The Symphony*, BBC Radio Three, 14 April 1983; originally broadcast in 1964; published in *Tonic* 11, 2001, p. 21.

gressive' mindset with which Schoenberg in particular is associated. Simpson's keenest paradox is that he has so much in common with a composer whom he publicly berated most fiercely, not least in their similar attitudes to composition itself. Both Schoenberg and Simpson saw the writing of music in moralistic terms – we may remember the calls for 'comprehensiveness' and for a return to symphonism's high 'principles' and 'standards' that Simpson issued in the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> The two composers held that one had no choice but to compose in an 'authentic' way, and to do otherwise was dishonest and morally indefensible; and both regarded what they were doing as 'the way forward,' the one genuine path into the future. The only real difference was that whereas Schoenberg's moral truth lay in facing up to the perceived challenges of the Austro-Germanic tradition through radical linguistic change, for Simpson, humanist that he was, those historical responsibilities were fulfilled by being true to oneself, to one's inner vision.<sup>7</sup>

Most immediately apparent as a sign of modernism in Simpson's music is the bleakness of much of it, the bitterness, the violence, and the seldom relenting harshness. There is never anything cosy about this music, which is often as challengingly dissonant as anything written in the twentieth century. The Seventh Symphony is one of Simpson's most desolate creations, not only excessively dissonant but also emotionally devastating in its suggestion of unattainable beauty, of a dislocated human essence in the slower music. The agonized close of the Second String Quintet is another such example, while the scherzo of the Ninth Symphony screws itself up into a horrifying image of urban mechanization, before collapsing into a series of nondirectional variations. Similarly unoptimistic music is heard in the later music of Mahler, and in much by Schoenberg and Berg, often associated with markedly 'psychological' programmes. Adorno sums up this pervasive aspect of early twentieth-century musical modernism:

<sup>6</sup> See Robert Simpson, ed., 'Introduction', in *The Symphony*, vol. 1, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966, p. 12; and idem, *Sibelius and Nielsen: A Centenary Essay*, London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1965, p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> Although he always claimed to dislike the music of Schoenberg, it is a telling coincidence that Simpson acknowledged the Viennese composer as the indirect inspiration for his First Symphony, claiming that Schoenberg's Piano Concerto gave him the idea of opposing tonalities within a musical structure. While this tonal idea is really nothing new, it is significant that it was an outwardly atonal composition that apparently suggested such a thing to Simpson. This story superficially suggests an epiphanic reaction on Simpson's part, against modernism and towards Classical tonality, yet the real 'inspiration' was surely located in the historical and aesthetic confrontation between Schoenberg's atonal style and the quasi-tonal structure Simpson perceived within the concerto.

Modern music ... has taken upon itself all the darkness and guilt of the world. Its fortune lies in the perception of misfortune; all of its beauty is in denying itself the illusion of beauty.... Modern music sees absolute oblivion as its goal. It is the surviving message of despair from the shipwrecked.<sup>8</sup>

One thinks immediately of *Wozzeck* or *Erwartung*, and of literary manifestations of the same twentieth-century nihilism, such as Becket's *Waiting for Godot*, Sartre's *Nausée*, and Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

Adorno explicitly characterizes this intrinsic bleakness as 'psychological' when, in his essay on Stravinsky, he talks of infantilism, of the 'aping of obsession,' and of 'schizophrenia'.<sup>9</sup> Just as Freud shattered the notion of the unified self, thereby overturning an entire tradition of humanist philosophy, and just as Einstein had revolutionized Newtonian physics with his conception of a relativistic universe, modernist art before the Second World War cannot be interpreted by means of any single, solid hermeneutic approach. It holds conflicting perspectives in mutual opposition, with an apparently secure and dependable past on the one hand, and the unstable, disruptive trends of its own time on the other. It is literally neither one thing nor the other, and so, within this context, any artistic attempt to view the world in absolute terms (as may be suggested musically by a conventional perfect cadence or a neo-Romantic melody) would probably seem intolerably simplistic and epistemologically naïve, and would therefore be consigned to the category of kitsch. 'The modernist decades were a time of epochal shift, like that of Shakespeare and Cervantes', writes Michael Bell, 'and the most summative works of that period were frequently those which, like them, owned a dual loyalty. Different world conceptions are held together in a mutually defining, mutually testing relation'.<sup>10</sup> Such a fearful balancing act is fundamental to Simpson's musical aesthetic, and to his own conflict-ridden attitude to history.

Simpson's later music, with its concentration on intervals as the basis for its material, has much in common with the 'atomizing' procedures of serialism. While for him the specific, precompositional ordering of such 'atoms' may not be so important, his method of limiting his musical material to a narrow array of 'proto-thematic' fragments is close to serial practice, and Simpson's manipulation of his intervals themselves, his treatment of inversions as equivalent, is similarly shared by serial composers such as Webern and late Stravinsky.

<sup>8</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. 133.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Bell, 'The Metaphysics of Modernism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 12.

Simpson's fascination with symmetry of all kinds clearly has much in common with Webern's structural interests, and the 'wedge' formation<sup>11</sup> that saturates Simpson's Ninth Symphony might even be considered a kind of series (if loose), in the manner of the intervallically symmetrical row Webern devised for his own Symphony, Op. 21. (The twelve-note row for Luigi Nono's *Il canto sospeso* is also wedge-shaped, and very like the pattern used by Simpson.) Symmetry is also a central concern of Bartók's music, of course, in the arch-like forms of his Fourth and Fifth String Quartets (reflected in Simpson's Fifth Symphony and his String Quintet No. 1), as well as that of Berg, whose Chamber Concerto reveals a shared interest in palindromes.

The musical means of modernism were absorbed by Simpson into his own compositional methods, and for all the talk of tonality and traditional formal processes, the material and motivic procedures of his most characteristic works are scarcely different in kind from those used by the principal composers of the pre-1945 modernist epoch. Absorbed too were aesthetic characteristics of pre-war modernist art in general, with Simpson's obsession with abstract musical forms and patterns being more a modernist trait, as a formalist reflection of the ethos of 'absolute music', than proof of a genuinely classical attitude to composition. Simpson often shares with Stravinsky the Cubist practice of presenting familiar musical objects, such as intervals or tonal progressions, in new contexts, divorced from conventional meaning; and such an abstract aesthetic is also reminiscent of the painter Cézanne's reduction of the world to the basic visual elements of cylinders, spheres, and cones. This might further be associated with the linguistic practice of defamiliarization found in French Symbolist poetry of the late nineteenth century; and furthermore, Simpson's brutalist melodic style strongly recalls the 'schizophrenic,' distorted images in the paintings of Picasso.<sup>12</sup>

For all this abstraction, however, Simpson's music is eminently physical, in its evocation of 'systaltic' bodily rhythms at all levels of rhythmic structure, and in the earthy quality it often acquires from the sheer physical effort involved in playing the notes. This projection of strife into the very act of musical performance is not only a

<sup>11</sup> 'Wedge' is Simpson's own term, referring to Bach's so-called 'Wedge' fugue, from the Prelude and Fugue in E minor, BWV 548. See Lionel Pike, 'Robert Simpson's Ninth Symphony', *Tempo* 170, 1989, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> The category of 'brutalism' is borrowed from the modernist architectural movement associated with Le Corbusier, Lasdun, and the Smithsons. The style involves the unadorned presentation of raw construction material, principally concrete and stark beams, openly revealing the structure of buildings. Rogers's famed designs for the Pompidou Centre in Paris and London's Lloyds Building are more post-modern in style, yet clearly derive from brutalism their unwillingness to conceal the buildings' structure and internal workings. Simpson's melodic style might often be described as brutalist, therefore, in that it presents the necessary building-blocks of conventional melody, while denying us the more openly expressive, essentially vocal, qualities we might expect to hear.

Beethovenian inheritance, but also calls to mind other modernist works in which the physicality of the performer is emphasized as part of the semantic whole. Charles Ives's notoriously unplayable *Concord Sonata* is a famous example, and much of the music of Brian Ferneyhough demands the deliberately impossible from its players to give a physical dimension to an aesthetic of struggle and impenetrable complexity. The focus on the body, as a physiological element in music, is typical of a particular brand of modern humanism, which rejects the old universals, the 'stable ego', and invests more in the material qualities of human beings.<sup>13</sup>

But the energetic physicality of Simpson's music is not neutral in gender. It conveys a pronounced masculinity, which is in itself another defining characteristic of modernism. Writers such as Ezra Pound and Ernest Hemingway are renowned for their overtly masculine writing (the latter perpetuating the genre of the 'macho' adventure novel most famously), while the representation of women in modernist art tends to remain as essentially voyeuristic from a male viewpoint as it had been in the past, but for the replacement of the voluptuous curves of traditional female images by the hard lines and tough sinews of industrial modernity. Sex and femininity are thus 'controlled' by unarousing transformations, in such paintings as Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* and Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, leaving us with an image of 'what a woman is ... inhumanly, physiologically, materially'.<sup>14</sup> Marianne Dekoven has described how 'instances of modernist advocacy of firm, hard, dry, terse, classical masculinity, over against the messy, soft, vague, flowery, effusive, adjectival femininity of the late Victorians, abound, and instances of male modernist antifeminism and misogyny are legion'.<sup>15</sup> Dekoven's list of masculine attributions might well be applied to much of Simpson's music; it is clear that he favoured such qualities above any of those associated with femininity. Although Dekoven points out in her essay that there were many female contributors to modernist culture, and that many of the men involved (Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence) possessed strong 'feminine identification', albeit of a rather abject kind,<sup>16</sup> Simpson's particular musical aesthetic never once allows any suggestion of feminine characteristics or androgynous tendencies, locating its composer securely on the masculine side of modernism. In other words, he has more in common with the modernist aesthetics of Schoenberg, Ives, and Carter than with those of Debussy, Ravel, and Scriabin; he is more Kokoschka than Klimt, more Hemingway than Lawrence.

<sup>13</sup> Postmodernity has invested much in the body too, though one may sense a greater politicization of the body in recent decades, as testified by the feminist and gay musicology of Susan McClary and Philip Brett.

<sup>14</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. James T. Boulton and George J. Zytaruk, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, vol. 2, p. 182.

<sup>15</sup> Marianne Dekoven, 'Modernism and Gender', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, p. 176.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

The constructivist aspect of musical modernism, the concentration on the material substance of a work, was in part a continuation of the kind of motivic thinking developed in the late nineteenth century by composers such as Liszt, Brahms, and Wagner, in whose music the 'subject matter' is usually considered the theme or the motive, rather than the play of form and tonality associated with earlier symphonic music. Much analytical thinking about music remains embedded within this nineteenth-century idea of music as quasi-linguistic discourse. At the close of the eighteenth century, Friedrich Schlegel asked, 'Must not pure instrumental music itself create a text of its own? And does not a theme get developed, confirmed, varied, and contrasted like the object of meditation in a philosophical sequence of ideas?'<sup>17</sup> And Beethoven famously regarded himself as a *Tondichter*, a poet in sound. Simpson himself was closely involved with this traditional conception of the 'logic' of symphonic music, as can be seen in all his writings, yet his musical material often does not behave in quite the logical way described by Schlegel. The metaphor of linguistic discourse, which conceives of music as 'saying' rather than 'doing', is problematic when applied to much music composed during the twentieth century, symphonic or otherwise.

If nineteenth-century composition was often conceived in imitation of verbal discourse or literary forms, modernism saw a change towards a mimicry of the spatial qualities of the visual arts. But this shift of focus raises new problems. Contrasting the ontologies of music and painting, Adorno writes that 'the development of a spatial perspective in music is ... a testimony of a pseudomorphism of painting in music. At its innermost core, it is the abdication of music.... All painting – even abstract – has its pathos in that which it is; all music purports to becoming'.<sup>18</sup> For Adorno, indeed, such 'spatial' music is a no more than a 'parasite of painting'.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, he sees the neglect of this temporal dimension in so much modern music as a reflection of a wider historical crisis, considering that the 'suspension of musical time consciousness corresponds to the total consciousness of a bourgeoisie which – in that it no longer sees anything before it – denies the time process itself and finds its utopia in the withdrawals of time into space'.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the true meaning of Simpson's professed 'ferocious antipessimism' lies in his refusal to give in to this historical panic, granting his music not only a sense of time but a defiant sense of future.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 'Charakteristiken und Kritiken I', in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, ed. Hans Eichner, Munich: Schöningh, 1967, vol. 2, p. 254; quoted in Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 107.

<sup>18</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. 191.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

‘All music purports to becoming’, writes Adorno, referring above all to the instrumental music of the Central European tradition, and calling to mind much emphatically goal-driven (teleological) music by Beethoven, Bruckner, Wagner, and other symphonic composers. Such music, if not actually heard as a reflection of philosophical discourse, could perhaps be heard instead as a representation of Hegelian historicism, a metaphor in which Simpson was also prone to indulge in his analytical works; and given that this historical model of time relies on the concept of an end that is always held in suspense, Simpson’s teleological music might be said to share the historicist background of nineteenth-century symphonism. This historical idea, which is undeniably one of the conceptual problems facing traditional, goal-directed symphonism today, conceives of history as a succession of events, of causes and effects, and in music this conception is associated with the evolution of themes. But Simpson’s teleology differs crucially from that of Beethoven or Bruckner, of Sibelius or Nielsen. Linear time itself is the focus, not the discrete units which artificially fill that time in historical discourse. His musical structures predominantly engage our sense of the future, not in relation to a developing theme or motive, but in the abstract. It is this metaphysics of ‘futurity’ that most aptly summarizes Simpson’s aesthetic, and gives a special nuance to his relationship with modernism. So while his single-minded highlighting of a vital semiotic and structural characteristic of symphonism might further testify to this composer’s modernist attitude to tradition, at the same time such a quality of metaphysical temporality distances him both from the spatial and the materialistic aspects of the modernist aesthetic.

Hans Keller described Robert Simpson as ‘the perpetual striver, who thinks it is better to travel than to arrive – who suspects arrival as an illusion, an excuse for not continuing to strive’.<sup>21</sup> With these words Keller was paraphrasing Arthur Schopenhauer, who wrote what might seem to be a perfect description of Simpson’s entire aesthetic, in terms of the primal ‘will’, at the end of the second book of *The World as Will and Representation*: ‘Absence of all aim, of all limits, belongs to the essential nature of the will in itself, which is endless striving.... Every attained end is at the same time the beginning of a new course, and so on *ad infinitum*’.<sup>22</sup> Life is, for Schopenhauer (and like Simpson’s music), eternal ‘becoming,’ a state of onward-striving powered by the force of the inescapable ‘will-to-live’. Yet for Schopenhauer this state of affairs brings with it a painful condition of endless unfulfilment. ‘Life presents itself as a con-

<sup>21</sup> Hans Keller, ‘The Man and the Music’, in this volume p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Michael Tanner, *Schopenhauer: Metaphysics and Art*, ed. Ray Monk and Frederic Raphael, London: Phoenix, 1998 (The Great Philosophers, 24), p. 15.

tinual deception,' he writes, 'in small matters, as well as in great. If it has promised, it does not keep its word, unless to show how little desirable the desired object was; hence we are deluded now by hope, now by what was hoped for'.<sup>23</sup>

Such anguish of the ever-transient, never-ending process of 'becoming' is certainly reflected in Simpson's aesthetic, with its relentless drive, its harshness, and its refusal to concede to momentary beauty. In Simpson's music the meaning of teleological fulfilment lies in anticipation or reflection, not in the attainment of any specific 'moment' itself. Further describing the intrinsically abject nature of life, Schopenhauer writes:

From the original and unconditional nature of the will ... it is easy to explain that man loves above everything else an existence which is full of want, misery, trouble, pain, anxiety, and then again of boredom, and which, were it pondered over and considered purely objectively, he would of necessity abhor; and that he fears above everything else the end of this existence, which is nonetheless the one and only thing certain for him.... It is the blind will appearing as the tendency to life, the love of life, vital energy; it is the same thing that makes plants grow.<sup>24</sup>

These closing words are echoed explicitly by Friedrich Nietzsche's Zarathustra: 'Yes, something invulnerable, unburi-able is within me, something that rends rocks: it is called *my Will*'.<sup>25</sup> They also suggest something akin to Bergson's so-called 'vitalist' philosophy, which argued that biological evolution is impelled by an *élan vital* that drives life to overcome the 'entropic' (that is, inert or decaying) drift of matter. Bergson's metaphysical attitude to life forces, at odds with Darwin's theory of chance selections, is a positive revision of Schopenhauer's will-to-live, inspiring Nielsen in his *Inextinguishable* Symphony,<sup>26</sup> Heinrich Schenker in his 'kinetic-syntactic' theories of musical structure, and of course Simpson himself, who combines vitalism with a clear (conscious?) reference to Nietzsche when he observes that 'we are all familiar with the way a growing tree can split a rock'.<sup>27</sup> Yet in contrast to Nielsen, the specific qualities of Simpson's aesthetic might seem closer to the agonies of Scho-

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Tanner, *Schopenhauer*, pp. 18f.

<sup>25</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961, p. 135.

<sup>26</sup> In the programme note for the first performance of his Fourth Symphony in Copenhagen, Nielsen wrote: 'With the use of the title "The Inextinguishable" the composer has sought with a single word to suggest what only the music itself has the power to express in full: the basic will to live'; quoted in Knud Ketting, 'The Nordic Countries', in *Modern Times: From World War I to the Present*, ed. Robert P. Morgan, London: Macmillan, 1993, 167.

<sup>27</sup> From a programme note by Simpson for his Sixth Symphony; quoted in Lionel Pike, [Symphonies Nos. 6 & 7], CD sleeve note for Hyperion CDA66280, 1987.

openhauer's conception of life, in which pleasure is taken to be the temporary absence of pain, and thus an artificial state of being. When images of relaxation or calm contentment are suggested by Simpson's music, we always know that they are temporary, always premised on the absence of strife, and that they represent a let-up in the essential condition of 'becoming'.

However, there is a limit to a Schopenhauerian interpretation of Simpson's will-like aesthetic. Just as history was characterized above as a narrative structure premised on completion, on the possibility of an end, Schopenhauer's will and its attendant quality of 'becoming' are premised on an ultimate state of 'being', of fixity, and the absence of individual consciousness. This condition exists at the level of Platonic Ideas, beyond space and time, as so-called pure 'representation'. It is here too that Schopenhauer locates music, conceptually removed from the pain of life's eternal illusions; and genius, for him as for Kant, is defined as the ability to maintain a view of the world at this exalted level. Far from occupying such a lofty position, those later works of Simpson's in which no attempt at unequivocal closure is made seem to find the idea of such a paradise beyond strife impossible to contemplate. As we have seen, definitive goals are unavailable, 'becoming' is the essence of the music's 'being'. In this respect, Simpson appears to be in sympathy with some modern existentialist philosophy, and with the work of Martin Heidegger in particular.

Rather than providing us with a glimpse of some transcendental realm, art for Heidegger is able to force us with extra power into the actual world of our existence, to bring us to a more intense awareness of our state of Being.<sup>28</sup> Such a depth of intuition should be the aim of human existence, according to Heidegger, who explains how *Dasein* (his term for the essential nature of human existence, meaning 'being-in-the-world') balances 'authentic' conceptions of Being and those that are 'inauthentic'. Heidegger defines *Dasein* as something for which time and temporality are fundamental, and the result is that we find ourselves in a state of eternal flux. 'As long as we live we can never achieve stable equilibrium, let alone a state of rest', writes Heidegger, in a vein reminiscent both of Schopenhauer's thinking and of Simpson's musical aesthetic. We are led to a conception of existence that requires us to comprehend the endless interpenetration of the past, the present, and the future as virtually simultaneous. Something of this complex temporal ontology is expressed in the famous opening lines of 'Burnt Norton,' the first of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*:

<sup>28</sup> See Martin Heidegger, '... Poetically Man Dwells ...', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Alfred Hofstadter, New York: Harper and Row, 1971, p. 213–229.

Time present and time past  
 Are both perhaps present in time future  
 And time future contained in time past.  
 If all time is eternally present  
 All time is unredeemable.  
 What might have been is an abstraction  
 Remaining a perpetual possibility  
 Only in a world of speculation.<sup>29</sup>

Time is not a force of nature, nor an externally objectifiable process that is ineluctably linear or teleological; only when understood ‘inauthentically,’ as clock time or historical time, does such a conception hold true. When time is conceived in this ‘inauthentic’ way, as it generally is, ‘what is “really” “actual” is, in each case, just that Experience which is present-at-hand “in the current ‘now”’, while those Experiences which have passed away or are only coming along, either are no longer or are not yet “actual”’.<sup>30</sup> Simpson’s music certainly represents time in this linear way, because it requires an ‘actual’ structure; as structured sound it cannot be other than a series of ‘nows’ (however materially undefined), it cannot entirely give itself up to Derridean ‘non-time’,<sup>31</sup> nor offer a sonorous image of an ‘authentic’ Heideggerian temporality without rendering up its existence as music. Yet in its projection away from the here-and-now, and in its concentration on end-directed, developmental processes, Simpson’s music does indeed come close to Stephen Mulhall’s summary of Heidegger’s conception of *Dasein*’s authentic temporality: ‘*Dasein* is transcendent in the sense that it is always more or other than its actual circumstances and form of life: it relates itself to possibility rather than actuality’.<sup>32</sup>

Simpson’s musical material exists in much the same state of constant possibility as Heidegger claims for *Dasein* itself, and might be heard as a projection into a musical future that is always ontologically present, as a kind of Being-towards-death. Heidegger points out that death, while its ever-present possibility has the power to awaken us to our authentic Being and thereby defines *Dasein*, is never in fact to be a moment in our lives: we shall experience dying, but not death itself. In this sense, as we shall never get to where we are going, so to speak, and as we shall never ‘be’ in a state of death, Being is ontologically inseparable from Becoming; temporality *is*

<sup>29</sup> T. S. Eliot, ‘Burnt Norton’, in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, London: Faber and Faber, 1969; reprint, Book Club Associates, 1977, p. 171. The page citation is to the reprint edition.

<sup>30</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford: Blackwell, 1962, p. 425.

<sup>31</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *L’écriture et la Différence*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*, London: Routledge, 1996, p. 157.

Being, rather than a mere aspect of it. And the same could be said of Simpson's later music, for in a similar way, the achievement of finality, of structural 'death,' as it were, is not genuinely available to it, yet as music it must nevertheless simulate an unfolding through time. The Ninth Symphony thematizes this ontological temporality, with its emphatic, often mechanistic teleology finding only a terrified shriek of anguish at its ostensible goal, and the closing pages of the work showing, as if from a perspective outside the music's temporal limits, that despite the powerful, often thrilling progression with which the symphony has been obsessed, we end where we began. We are still waiting for Godot. This symphony goes so far as to show up the whole illusory nature of symphonic teleology, suggesting a deeply modernist sense of the artist's disillusionment.

The modernism within which this discussion has tried to relocate Robert Simpson is essentially that of the earlier decades of the twentieth century, rather than the anti-historical form of modernism that developed after the Second World War, fetishizing the new as never before. It now remains for us to assess the significance, and indeed 'relevance,' of his music in today's so-called postmodern world, in which the effort of innovation and the earnest tone associated with modernism have given way to a different spirit. 'Since everything is already available,' points out Robert Morgan, 'creation is basically a matter of recombination. The tone is detached and ironic or, if serious, so exaggeratedly so as to suggest caricature'.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps such detachment befits a culture in which the idea of the unique, unreproducible work of art is hard to sustain; where consumerism has led to the possibility of mass production for every image, object, and all music; and where reality itself (including the reality of a musical performance) is often indistinguishable from the virtual reality of high-tech communication, mass-produced recordings, and cyberspace.

In attempting to argue that Simpson's music is relevant today, we might point out that, although for this composer the writing of large-scale symphonies was clearly more a defiant than an ironic gesture, there are some superficial ways in which Simpson does seem to have been in step with postmodern composition. While there is little outright humour in Simpson's strife-ridden music, there are indeed a few instances of a kind of postmodern irony: in the use of the Haydn quotation in the trio of the Fourth Symphony, the wild mix of movement types and musical styles in the Piano Concerto, the quaint tune that ends the First String Quartet, the dissolution of genre at the close of the Flute Concerto, and in the bizarre text of the choral work *Tempi*.

<sup>33</sup> Robert P. Morgan, 'The Modern Age', in *Modern Times: From World War I to the Present*, p. 30.

Moreover, postmodernity has seen an important change in attitudes to history. The drive of postwar avant-gardists, to compose music that looked only forwards, has given way to a rediscovering of the musical past, with many composers welcoming back not just traditional formal procedures, but in some cases actual musical material, a move that might seem in keeping with Simpson's own historical borrowings. Composers as diverse as Berio, Henze, Nono, Stockhausen, and Tippett have borrowed musical fragments from others, serving to highlight structural moments as well as sending the listener on a lively semiotic diversion. Shostakovich, never having had anything to do with explicitly avant-garde schools of thought, imported quotations from Rossini and Wagner into his Fifteenth Symphony (1971), and this practice was taken up, with similar ironic aplomb, by his compatriot Alfred Schnittke. In England, Peter Maxwell Davies has combined serial procedures with medieval and Renaissance techniques, while Robin Holloway has frequently borrowed from the past, either to write entire works in a historical idiom, as in his pastiche *Serenades*, or to generate a heady mix of old and new, as we find in his opera *Clarissa*.

Whereas Simpson's use of tonality and historical genres was in part a polemical gesture, with these musical elements considered taboo by the avant garde of the mid-century, a greater freedom in the use of tonal elements and a relaxation of the moral force against them has characterized much recent music. In general, tonality now is of compositional interest more as a collection of sonorous objects than as a syntactical system, more valuable in creating a 'comfort zone' away from the rigours of the modernist avant garde. George Rochberg started out as a serialist, but found ways of introducing tonal sonorities into his compositions in the 1960s. American minimal music adopted the triads and cadential patterns of conventional tonality, as well as forms such as the chaconne and canon. With the boom in opera composition in the '80s and '90s, some composers, such as John Adams, Alexander Goehr, and Mark-Antony Turnage, have found that tonal practices and borrowed styles can have dramatic potential too. Furthermore, there has been a resurgence of interest in symphonic composition, accompanied by a similar return to quasi-tonal or otherwise traditional practices. Peter Maxwell Davies, for instance, formerly a leading figure in the British avant-garde scene, has composed a series of numbered symphonies since the mid-1970s, in which he has indulged his interest in Beethoven and Sibelius; Penderecki has moved away from experimental music to write five neo-Romantic symphonies; Lutosławski found ways of combining symphonic structures with more avant-garde techniques; while David Matthews, another symphonist, has gone so far as to call for 'the rediscovery of archetypes – singable melodies, dance

rhythms, tonal harmonies – which can be used in new ways while retaining their traditional resonance’.<sup>34</sup>

The common ground that Simpson shares with these various features of present-day composition is unmistakable, though it is clear that in his case elements of the musical past, tonality in particular, are not called upon to adorn his musical surfaces, by virtue of their mere availability within an eclectic mix of styles, but instead work their way into the rhythmic and rhetorical structure of the music. (The teleological essence of tonal harmony, for instance, finds an analogy in the structural rhythm of Simpson’s music, often without the use of any conventional triads on the surface.) Simpson’s importations from history involve a complex transaction, a decidedly modernist tension between the old and the new. By contrast, in the postmodern spirit of ‘anything goes’, such things are now more readily available to composers, with a far less strenuous historical dialectic involved; they are to be found in the general melting-pot of millennial culture, from which composers can take their pick. With the meteoric rise of recorded music over the last three decades, with the public and composers themselves becoming increasingly aware of Baroque, Medieval, and Renaissance music, as well as non-Western music of many kinds, culture has become homogenized, not only geographically but historically as well.

By rights this ought to provide a final answer to our question about Simpson’s relevance, for postmodernity would not claim to measure an artist’s status according to any moralistic arguments about ‘relevant’ musical content or compositional practice. Whatever he did, whatever he stood for or against, whatever his historical sympathies, his music ought now, surely, to find acceptance. Today, music of the world and of past centuries is thrown together, with styles and techniques once deemed extinct now very much alive and equally admissible in the spirit of postmodern relativism. But even if this proclaimed ‘spirit’ were indeed to herald the eventual rehabilitation of Simpson’s music, things are not so simple. Confusion remains about the extent to which Simpson’s output was genuinely tonal, or (somehow) classical. And there is still deep unease as to his relationship with modernism, let alone the experimental avant garde of the postwar years, among both Simpson enthusiasts and those less partial to his music. But an important, more general issue needs to be addressed: while relativism might signal a healthy freedom for composers, a desirable liberation from the narrow vision of avant-garde mentality, this paradigm shift (whether permanent or otherwise) raises serious questions about the

<sup>34</sup> David Matthews, ‘The Rehabilitation of the Vernacular’, in *Music and the Politics of Culture*, ed. Christopher Norris, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1989, p. 246f.

relevance of all new music, not only that of Robert Simpson, and requires a reappraisal of our prevalent notions of history.

History conceived as time-gone-by, the irretrievable past, has been subsumed within a culture in which all times and places are always available in a 'virtual' here-and-now. When all music is at hand on compact disc, and available to download and hear instantly with no effort on our part, when in a sense we 'play' it all ourselves, and when the technology of sound production is the same whatever the music, how can we speak of any actual distance between Tchaikovsky or Birtwistle? Attempts by champions of early-music performance practice to sharpen the historical perspective must ultimately collapse, as their performances are transmitted through the same ultra-modern recording techniques that disseminate all music. And if this is so, if music of centuries ago is virtually of the present moment, what is the actual status of new music? How are we to evaluate it? If history as a distinguishing tool is abandoned, is all music 'contemporary'? Indeed it appears that for many composers, jettisoning the priority of newness and borrowing from all musics as if they themselves were compiling a 'playlist', the creative process is conceived along these very lines.

But the question of originality in composition is less cut-and-dried than it might seem. For one thing, its apparent decline as a principal concern in new music should not perhaps be viewed negatively, as a result of postmodern rootlessness or 'the final fallout of the modern condition itself',<sup>35</sup> but instead as a return to an era when concepts such as 'art', the 'work', or 'originality' were of less central importance, or of no importance at all. This in itself is strongly reminiscent of Stravinsky's neoclassicism, suggesting that postmodern music has not really abandoned modernism but merely changed its focus, shifting away from the progressive mentality of Schoenberg and Boulez and looking towards such historically eclectic pieces as *Pulcinella* for inspiration. At the same time, it is surely impossible to do away with artistic individuality completely, so deeply rooted is it in Western culture – and composers do not come more individual than Stravinsky. They may assume an eclectic pose, they may openly parade their influences and musical cannibalism, but composers' rejection of the new can only be seen in itself as a form of novelty. Their denial of historical progressiveness or the return to earlier values constitutes a 'way forward', and, equally paradoxically, each composer finds his or her own way to *lose their individuality* within mass technoculture. In other words, today's eclectic composers celebrate a whole new way of not being original.

<sup>35</sup> Morgan, 'The Modern Age', p. 29.

That being said, today's music history risks falling short of the mark if it persists in concentrating on origins. A history of composition will be insufficient to deal with our contemporary musical environment, in which 'new music' – a historical category in itself, as Carl Dahlhaus explained – is mostly ignored by society in general. Composers no longer have the old concept of historical destiny guiding their choices, being only contributors to a vast cultural mix; and they can no longer emphasize the moral force of the pursuit of the new as the basis for their endeavours, and must find an alternative, probably less lofty motivation for their creativity. Perhaps 'discovering the kind of thing you enjoy most, feeling there ought to be more of it in the world, and going ahead and writing it'<sup>36</sup> is the only real justification for composing at all today, a fact that places composers and recording producers on the same footing.

But what of Simpson's place in all this? The panhistorical aspect of today's musical composition, production, and consumption might have granted him a stronger chance of recognition, yet in reality this remains elusive. The rhetoric of relativism and the gradual softening of modernist value judgements might have removed obstacles in the way of all claims to relevance, indeed the very idea of 'relevance' itself ought to have dissolved to nothing; yet the dissemination of Simpson's music remains at the mercy of residual avant-gardist habits of thought on the one hand, and of the widespread neglect faced by all contemporary music on the other. Simpson is not kept from acceptance now because he used 'old-fashioned' musical forms, because he had the effrontery to write triads and perfect cadences, or because he refused to toe the line laid down by the postwar avant garde, yet still his work is excluded. Most of his music has been recorded on compact disc, and is available on iTunes and YouTube, yet it is not granted the status that such technological promotion might accord; nor is it the subject of discourse, be it academic or otherwise, which would give Simpson a place within general musical consciousness. (This distinguishes Simpson from Schoenberg tellingly, for while Schoenberg's music is not heard much either, he remains a centrally important figure in discourse on music.) 'Conservationist', classicist, modernist, or even eclectic, Simpson's music still has to fight to prove its relevance.

The final irony is that, for Simpson and for modernist art in general, one could argue that this tense esotericism is exactly what is required. For this music to slide into the melting-pot of postmodernism, for Simpson's output to have such an easy time of

<sup>36</sup> Malcolm MacDonald, *Robert Simpson's symphonic appetite*, audio-recorded lecture produced under the auspices of the Robert Simpson Society, 1993; in this volume p. 42.

it, would remove its most striking characteristic. It would have nothing to strive against. Paradoxically, as long as his music avoids all-out popular success it can continue to appear in conflict with an external force, and thus to derive a dialectical ontology which Adorno saw as the basis for all musical meaning, to keep alive its own brand of modernism. Perhaps it is important that Simpson's music is not in the mainstream, that it is inherently subversive, that it always has battles to fight. Just as there are no real goals in Simpson's aesthetic of infinite 'becoming', neither is there any imaginable outcome to the cultural struggles in which his music engages. General, public acceptance would mean the end of strife, and the arrival at such a goal would surely render Simpson's musical aesthetic redundant and, indeed, irrelevant. Despite the polemics, Simpson's work is not engaged in a battle against modernism at all, but joins all modernist music in a struggle to find an audience.

It is impossible currently to see how the future will treat Simpson's *œuvre*. No amount of ontological theorizing can make up for the problems his music faces in an unsympathetic market-place, and there can be no denying that for his extraordinary music to face extinction would be an appalling prospect. But strife against all odds is at the core of Simpson's music, and this need not be dismissed as a pathetic reflection of a pathetic state of contemporary affairs. The fascination lies in the vigour with which it persists in its efforts, with a commitment and energy, even optimism, that might appear to be refreshingly out of line with nihilistic modernity. In an age when history is considered either to be meaninglessly recycling itself or to be over entirely, when values collapse into relativistic equality, and when all creative efforts can seem ultimately futile, the sense in Simpson's music that the goal is not important provided the journey is exhilarating can be an inspiration to us all.

# Catalogue of Works

## I. ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

### 1. Symphonies

#### **Symphony No. 1** (1951)

Dedicated to Sir Adrian Boult

duration: 26'

instrumentation: 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contra-bassoon – 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba – timpani – strings

first (broadcast) performance: Danish State Radio Symphony Orchestra/Launy Grøndahl – Danish State Radio, 11 June 1953

first London (broadcast) performance: BBC Symphony Orchestra/Sir Adrian Boult – BBC, 24 September 1954

first concert performance: London Philharmonic Orchestra/Sir Adrian Boult – Royal Festival Hall, London, 8 June 1956

recordings: London Philharmonic Orchestra/Sir Adrian Boult – HMV BLP 1092(m), HQM 1010(m), 7243 5 75789 2 9 · Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Vernon Handley – Hyperion CDA66890, CDS44191/7

publication: Alfred Lengnick, 1956

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

With this symphony Simpson gained his Doctorate of Music at Durham University.

#### **Symphony No. 2** (1955-56)

Written for the London Chamber Orchestra and dedicated to Anthony and Mary Bernard

duration: 30'

instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons – 2 horns, 2 trumpets – timpani – strings

first performance: Hallé Orchestra/Sir John Barbirolli – Cheltenham Town Hall, 16 July 1957 (Cheltenham Festival)

first London performance: Philomusica of London/Robert Simpson – Victoria & Albert Museum, 11 July 1971

recording: Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra/Vernon Handley – Hyperion  
CDA66505, CDS44191/7

publication: Alfred Lengnick, 1958

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

### **Symphony No. 3 (1961-62)**

Commissioned by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and dedicated to  
Havergal Brian

duration: 32'

instrumentation: 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contra-bassoon – 4 horns,  
2 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba – timpani, percussion – strings

first performance: City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra/Hugo Rignold – Town  
Hall, Birmingham, 14 March 1963

first London performance: City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra/Hugo Rignold,  
Royal Festival Hall, 10 April 1963

recordings: London Symphony Orchestra/Jascha Horenstein – Unicom UNS 225,  
UNS 262, UKCD2028, NMC Ancora NMC D109; Intaglio INCD 7272 (rehearsal  
sequence) · Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Vernon Handley – Hyperion  
CDA66728, CDS44191/7

publication: Alfred Lengnick/CML, 1972

2 MSS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

### **Symphony No. 4 (1971-72, part-revised 1973)**

Dedicated to James Loughran

duration: 53', rev. 47'

instrumentation: 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contra-bassoon – 4 horns,  
4 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba – timpani, percussion (2 players) – strings

first performance: Hallé Orchestra/James Loughran – Free Trade Hall, Manchester,  
26 April 1973

first London performance: BBC Symphony Orchestra/Andrew Davis – Royal Festi-  
val Hall, 23 October 1974

recording: Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra/Vernon Handley – Hyperion  
CDA66505, CDS44191/7

publication: Alfred Lengnick, 1973

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

### **Symphony No. 5 (1972)**

Commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra

duration: 38'

instrumentation: 3 flutes, 3 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contra-bassoon – 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, 2 tubas – timpani (2 players), percussion (2 players) – strings

first (broadcast) performance: London Symphony Orchestra/Andrew Davis – Royal Festival Hall, London, 3 May 1973

recording: Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Vernon Handley – Hyperion CDA66728, CDS44191/7

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

### **Symphony No. 6 (1977)**

Commissioned by the London Philharmonic Orchestra and dedicated to the distinguished gynaecologist Ian Craft

duration: 30'

Instr: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contra-bassoon – 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba – timpani, percussion – strings

first performance: London Philharmonic Orchestra/Sir Charles Groves – Royal Festival Hall, London, 8 April 1980

recording: Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Vernon Handley – Hyperion CDA66280, CDS44191/7

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: Collection of Professor Ian Craft

MS (annotated photocopy): The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

### **Symphony No. 7 (1977)**

Originally written for a projected gramophone recording (which did not materialise) coupled with the Symphony No. 2 – dedicated to Milein and Hans Keller

duration: 28'

instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons – 2 horns, 2 trumpets – timpani – strings

first (broadcast) performance: Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Brian Wright – Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool, 3 October 1984

first London performance: Thames Sinfonia/Matthew Taylor – St. James, Piccadilly, 24 April 1988

recording: Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Vernon Handley – Hyperion CDA66280, CDS44191/7

publication: Faber Music

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Symphony No. 8 (1981)**

Commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Society with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain and dedicated to Daphne and Anthony Dorrell (the painter)

duration: 42'

instrumentation: 3 flutes, 2 oboes, cor anglais, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contra-bassoon – 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, 2 tubas – timpani (2 players), percussion (3 players) – strings

first performance: Royal Danish Orchestra/Jerzy Semkow – Royal Festival Hall, London, 10 November 1982

first broadcast performance: BBC Philharmonic Orchestra/Edward Downes – BBC, 2 September 1983

recording: Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Vernon Handley – Hyperion CDA66890, CDS44191/7

publication: Faber Music

MS (annotated photocopy): The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Symphony No. 9 (1985-87)**

Commissioned by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain and dedicated to Angela Simpson

duration: 50'

instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo flute, 2 oboes, cor anglais, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contra-bassoon – 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba – timpani – strings

first performance: Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra/Vernon Handley – Wessex Hall, Poole Arts Centre, Bournemouth, 8 April 1987

first broadcast performance: Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra/Robert Simpson – Guildhall, Southampton, 10 April 1987 (Vernon Handley was indisposed and the composer stepped in at the 'eleventh hour')

first London performance: London Philharmonic Orchestra/Simon Rattle – Royal Festival Hall, 12 February 1992.

recording: Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra/Vernon Handley – Hyperion CDA66299, CDS44191/7

publication: Faber Music

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Symphony No. 10 (1988)**

Written in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society and dedicated to Vernon Handley

duration: 51'

instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo flute, 2 oboes, cor anglais, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contra-bassoon – 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba – timpani (2 players) – strings

first performance: Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Vernon Handley – Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool, 16 January 1991

first London performance: Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Vernon Handley – Royal Festival Hall, 31 January 1991

recording: Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Vernon Handley – Hyperion CDA66510, CDS44191/7

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Symphony No. 11 (1990)**

Written for and dedicated to Matthew Taylor after the composer had heard him conduct the first London performance of his (Simpson's) Symphony No. 2

duration: 29'

instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons – 4 horns, 2 trumpets – timpani – strings

first (broadcast) performance: City of London Sinfonia/Matthew Taylor – Elgar Hall, Malvern, 23 May 1992 (Malvern Festival)

recording: City of London Sinfonia/Matthew Taylor – Hyperion CDA67500, CDS44191/7

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**2. other works**

**Allegro deciso** for string orchestra (1954)

duration: 11'

first performance: Twentieth Century Ensemble/Hans-Hubert Schönzeler – Cheltenham Town Hall, 11 July 1958 (Cheltenham Festival)

first continental European performance: Beromünster Radio Symphony Orchestra/St Stanley Pope – Zurich, Switzerland, 4 December 1958

publication: Alfred Lengnick, 1958

MS: whereabouts unknown

This is an arrangement of the second and final movements of String Quartet No. 3.

**Violin Concerto (1957-59)**

duration: 41'

instrumentation: 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons – 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba – timpani – strings

first performance: Ernest Element/City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra/Sir Adrian Boult – Birmingham, 25 February 1960

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

Withdrawn by the composer after the first performances.

**Piano Concerto (1967)**

Commissioned by the Cheltenham Festival of Contemporary Music and dedicated to John Ogdon

duration: 21'

instrumentation: 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contra-bassoon – 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba – timpani, percussion (2 players) – strings

first performance: John Ogdon/City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra/Hugo Rignold – Cheltenham Town Hall, 14 July 1967 (Cheltenham Festival)

first London performance: Raymond Clarke/Royal Holloway Orchestra/Matthew Taylor – St. John's, Smith Square, 6 March 1993

recording: John Ogdon/Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra/Constantin Silvestri – Carlton BBC Radio Classics 15656 91762

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Variations on a theme of Carl Nielsen\* for orchestra (1983)**

duration: 26'

instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo flute, 2 oboes, cor anglais, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contra-bassoon – 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba – timpani, percussion (2 players) – strings

first performance: Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Richard Hickox – Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool, 26 November 1986

recording: City of London Sinfoma/Matthew Taylor – Hyperion CDA67500, CDS44191/7

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

(\* from the incidental music to *Ebbe Skammelsen* FS 117)

**Flute Concerto (1989)**

Commissioned by and dedicated to Susan Milan

duration: 29'

instrumentation: piccolo flute, oboe, cor anglais, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, contra-bassoon – timpani – strings

first (broadcast) performance: Susan Milan/City of London Sinfonia/Richard Hickox – Elgar Hall, Malvern, 24 May 1992 (Malvern Festival)

publication: Rosehill Music, 1991

MS (score and solo part): The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

This concerto was programmed with the Nielsen Flute Concerto. Simpson, in fact, wrote the concerto with the same pencil Nielsen used for his: it had been presented to Simpson by Nielsen's daughter.

**Violoncello Concerto (1991)**

Commissioned by and written for Raphael Wallfisch

duration: 23'

instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons – 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones – timpani – strings

first (broadcast) performance: Raphael Wallfisch/BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra/Vernon Handley – Elgar Hall, Malvern, 17 May 1992 (Malvern Festival)

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS (score and solo part): The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Variations and Fugue on a theme of J. S. Bach\*** for string orchestra (1991)

duration: 27'

first (broadcast) performance: Goldberg Chamber Orchestra/Matthew Taylor – Elgar Hall, Malvern, 3 June 1995 (Malvern Festival)

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

(\*from the Sarabande from Bach's Fifth Cello Suite)

**Concerto for Violoncello, Piano and Orchestra**

unfinished

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

## II. MUSIC FOR BRASS BAND

### **Canzona** (1958)

Commissioned by the BBC

duration: 5'

instrumentation: 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba

first broadcast performance: Philip Jones Brass Ensemble – BBC Overseas Service, 27 March 1958

first concert performance: Wind Music Society/Bryan Fairfax – Cecil Sharp House, London, 15 June 1958

recordings: Locke Brass Ensemble/James Stobart – Chandos CHAN 6573 · Kensington Symphonic Brass – Dunelm Records (Divine Art) DRD0253 · Philip Jones Brass Ensemble – Decca SDD 274 · Cambridge University Brass Ensemble/Philip Walsh – Dunelm Records (Divine Art) DRD0226 · Corydon Brass Ensemble/Matthew Best – Hyperion CDA67016

publication: Alfred Lengnick, 1958

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

### **Energy: Symphonic Study** (1971)

Test piece for the 1971 World Brass Band Championship and dedicated to Eric Ball  
duration: 10'

first performance: GUS (Footwear) Band/St Stanley Boddington – Royal Albert Hall, London, 9 October 1971 (World Brass Band Championship Festival Concert)

recordings: GUS (Footwear) Band/St Stanley Boddington – EMI Studio 2 TWO 3 79 · Williams Fairey Band/James Gourlay – Chandos CHAN 4547 · Desford Colliery Caterpillar Band/James Watson – Hyperion CDA66449

publication: Boosey & Hawkes

MS: whereabouts unknown

### **Volcano** – symphonic study (1979)

Test piece for the 1979 National Brass Band Championship and dedicated to Edmund Rubbra

duration: 12'

first performance: Black Dyke Mills Band/Major Peter Parkes – Royal Albert Hall, London, 6 October 1979 (National Brass Band Championship Festival Concert)

recordings: Black Dyke Mills Band/Major Peter Parkes – Chandos CHAN 4522 · Desford Colliery Caterpillar Band/James Watson – Hyperion CDA66449

publication: Rosehill Music, 1979

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**The Four Temperaments: Suite (1982)**

Commissioned by the Yorkshire Imperial (Metals) Band

duration: 22'

first performance: Yorkshire Imperial Band/John Pryce-Jones – Prince Henry's Grammar School, Otley, Yorkshire, 15 October 1982

first broadcast performance: Yorkshire Imperial Band/John Pryce-Jones – 6 March 1983 (recorded in BBC's Manchester Studios, 24 October 1982)

recordings: Kensington Symphonic Brass/Russell Keable – Dunelm Records (Divine Art) DRD0254 · Desford Colliery Caterpillar Band/James Watson – Hyperion CDA66449

publication: Rosehill Music, 1982

MS (photocopy): The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

- version for orchestral brass

unpublished

MS: whereabouts unknown

Simpson re-scored this work for orchestral brass at the suggestion of the conductor, Howard Snell, for performance at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester.

**Introduction and Allegro on a bass by Max Reger\* (1986-87)**

duration: 16'

first performance: Desford Colliery Dowty Band/Torgny Hansen – Warwick Arts Centre, University of Warwick, 27 February 1988

?first broadcast performance: National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain – BBC, 24 September 1990

recording: Desford Colliery Caterpillar Band/James Watson – Hyperion CDA66449

publication: Rosehill Music, 1987

MS (photocopy): The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

(\*from the fugue of Max Reger's Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, op. 135b.)

**Vortex (1989)**

duration: 9'

first performance: IMI Yorkshire Imperial Band/Geoffrey Brand – Leeds Town Hall, 6 July 1990 (Leeds Music Festival)

first broadcast performance: Desford Colliery Caterpillar Band/James Watson – BBC, 17 May 1991 (BBC Festival of Brass)

recording: Desford Colliery Caterpillar Band/James Watson – Hyperion CDA66449

publication: Rosehill Music, 1989

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

### III. CHAMBER MUSIC

#### 1. String Quartets

##### **String Quartet in D (1945)**

duration: unknown

unperformed and unpublished

MS: Durham University Library, University Archives and Special Collections, Music

Exercise no. 609

Simpson's Bachelor of Music examination exercise at Durham University.

##### **String Quartet No. 1 (1951-52)**

Dedicated to Georges Enescu

duration: 25'

first performance: Element Quartet – Birmingham, 30 March 1953

first London performance: Element Quartet – Arts Council Drawing Room, 11 February 1955

recordings: Element Quartet – Pearl GEMM 0023 · Aeolian String Quartet – Unicorn UNS 234 · Delmé Quartet – Hyperion CDA66419

publication: Alfred Lengnick, 1954

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

##### **String Quartet No. 2 (1953)**

Dedicated to the Element Quartet

duration: 15'

first performance: Element Quartet – Birmingham, 11 June 1954

first London performance: Element Quartet – Arts Council Drawing Room, 11 February 1955

recordings: Element Quartet – Pearl GEMM 0023 · Delmé Quartet – Hyperion CDA66386

publication: Alfred Lengnick, 1956

MS: whereabouts unknown

##### **String Quartet No. 3 (1953-54)**

Dedicated to Dorothy Hemming

duration: 20'

first performance: Element Quartet – Arts Council Drawing Room, London, 11 February 1955

recordings: Element Quartet – Pearl GEMM 0023 · Delmé Quartet – Hyperion CDA66376

publication: Alfred Lengnick, 1957

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**String Quartet No. 4 (1973)**

Dedicated to Basil Lam

duration: 41'

first broadcast performance: Gabrieli Quartet – BBC, 27 January 1980 (recorded 6 November 1978)

first concert performance: Gabrieli Quartet – Wigmore Hall, London, 12 March 1980

recording: Delmé Quartet – Hyperion CDA66419

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS (photocopy): The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**String Quartet No. 5 (1974)**

Dedicated to Angela Musgrave

duration: 44'

first broadcast performance: Gabrieli Quartet – BBC, 15 December 1977

first concert performance: Gabrieli Quartet – Wigmore Hall, London, 2 April 1980

recording: Delmé Quartet – Hyperion CDA66386

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**String Quartet No. 6 (1975)**

Dedicated to Jamila and Barrie Gavin

duration: 38'

first broadcast performance: Gabrieli Quartet – BBC, 10 February 1980

first concert performance: Gabrieli Quartet – Wigmore Hall, London, March/April 1980

recording: Delmé Quartet – Hyperion CDA66376

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**String Quartet No. 7 (1977)**

Commissioned by Susi Jeans for the centenary of the Astronomer Sir James Jeans F.R.A.S. and dedicated to Susi Jeans

duration: 19'

first private performance: Gabrieli Quartet – Cleveland Lodge (Lady Jeans's home), Dorking, Surrey, 11 September 1977 (during a concert celebrating the centenary)

first broadcast performance: Gabrieli Quartet – BBC, 23 September 1977

first public performance: Gabrieli Quartet – University of Essex, February 1981

recording: Delmé Quartet – Hyperion CDA66117

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: Susi Jeans Collection, MS Mus. Ms 94

**String Quartet No. 8 (1979)**

Commissioned by Brunel Philharmonic Society with funds provided by the G.L.A.A. and dedicated to Irena and David Gillett, Professor of Biological Sciences at Brunel University

duration: 31'

first performance: Delmé Quartet – Brunel University, Uxbridge, 21 June 1980

recording: Delmé Quartet – Hyperion CDA66117

publication: Faber Music

MS (photocopy): The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Bach's The Art of Fugue – Contrapunctus 1-13 arr. for string quartet**

duration: 75'

first performance: Delmé Quartet, 1980?

recording: Delmé Quartet – Hyperion CDA67138

unpublished

MS: Delmé Quartet

Contrapunctus 13, which had remained unfinished by Bach, is used as elaborated by Donald Francis Tovey

**String Quartet No. 9 (32 Variations and Fugue on a theme by Haydn\*) (1982)**

Commissioned by the Delmé String Quartet for the 250th anniversary of the birth of Haydn and the 20th anniversary of the Delmé Quartet, and dedicated to the Delmé Quartet "in affection and admiration"

duration: 56'

first (broadcast) performance: Delmé Quartet – Wigmore Hall, London, 6 October 1982

recording: Delmé Quartet – Hyperion A 66127, CDA 66127(CD)

publication: Faber Music

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

(\*from the Minuet from the Symphony in G major Hob. I:47 – the same theme as used in the Variations and Finale for piano solo.)

**String Quartet No. 10 "For Peace" (1983)**

Commissioned by the Coull String Quartet for their tenth anniversary celebrations in 1984

duration: 27'

first performance: Coull String Quartet – Hazlemere, Bucks., 22 September 1984 (at a concert in aid of the Peace movement)

first London performance: Coull String Quartet – Wigmore Hall, 26 September 1984

recording: Coull String Quartet – Hyperion CDA66225

publication: Roberton

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**String Quartet No. 11 (1984)**

Commissioned by Alfreton Adult Education Centre, Derbyshire and dedicated to Michael George

duration: 25'

first performance: Coull String Quartet – Alfreton Hall, Derbyshire, 30 March 1985

first London performance: Coull String Quartet – Imperial College, 16 January 1986

recording: Coull String Quartet – Hyperion CDA66225

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**String Quartet No. 12 (1987)**

Commissioned by the Nottingham Festival and dedicated to Lionel Pike

duration: 31'

first performance: Coull String Quartet – Newstead Abbey, 6 June 1988 (Nottingham Festival)

first London performance: Coull String Quartet – Wigmore Hall, 9 March 1991  
(Robert Simpson's 70th Birthday Concert)

recording: Coull String Quartet – Hyperion CDA66503

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**String Quartet No. 13 (1989)**

Commissioned by the Cardiff Festival and dedicated to Lionel Pike and Graham Melville-Mason

duration: 18'

first performance: Delmé Quartet – Cardiff, 2 October 1990 (Cardiff Festival)

first London performance: Vellinger Quartet – Purcell Room, 13 July 1991

recording: Delmé Quartet – Hyperion CDA66905

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**String Quartet No. 14 (1990)**

Commissioned by and written for the R.T.E. Vanbrugh Quartet, dedicated to John Young

duration: 30'

first (broadcast) performance: Vanbrugh Quartet – Bank of Ireland, Dublin, 14 May 1991

first London performance: Vanbrugh Quartet – Ranger's House, Blackheath, 25 May

1991

recording: Vanbrugh Quartet – Hyperion CDA66626

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

### **String Quartet No. 15** (1991)

Written for and dedicated to the Vanbrugh Quartet

duration: 18'

first performance: Vanbrugh Quartet – The Downs School, Colwall, 22 May 1992  
(Malvern Festival)

first broadcast performance: Vanbrugh Quartet – BBC, 26 July 1992

recording: Vanbrugh Quartet – Hyperion CDA66626

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

### **String Quartet No. 16** (1996-)

unfinished

MS (computer typescript only): The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

## **2. other works**

### **Variations and Fugue** for recorder and string quartet (1959)

Written in memory of Horace Dann

duration: 13'

first (broadcast) performance: Carl Dolmetsch/Martin String Quartet – Wigmore Hall,  
London, 9 February 1959

recording: John Turner/Camerata Ensemble – Olympia OCD 710

publication: Peacock Press, 2010

MS (parts): Dolmetsch Archive, Haslemere

### **Trio** for clarinet, cello and piano (1967)

Commissioned by Gervase de Peyer

duration: 24'

first performance: Gervase de Peyer/William Pleeth/Peter Wallfisch – Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, 18 June 1968

first broadcast performance: Music Group of London: Bernard Walton/Eileen Croxford/David Parkhouse – 2 December 1968

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Clarinet Quintet** (1968)

duration: 32'

instrumentation: clarinet, string quartet

first performance: Melos Ensemble – BBC, 30 January 1969

recordings: Bernard Walton/Aeolian String Quartet – Unicorn UNS 234, UKCD 2028, NMC Ancora NMC D109 · Thea King/Delmé Quartet – Hyperion CDA66905

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Quartet** for horn, violin, cello and piano (1976)

Commissioned by and written for the Music Group of London to play on their foreign tour

duration: 31'

first performance: Alan Civil/Music Group of London: Hugh Bean/Eileen Croxford/David Parkhouse – Hong Kong c1976

first broadcast performance: Alan Civil/Music Group of London: Hugh Bean/Eileen Croxford/David Parkhouse – BBC, 2 December 1976

recording: Richard Watkins/Pauline Lowbury/Caroline Dearnley/Christopher Green-Armytage – Hyperion CDA66695

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Sonata** for two pianos (1980, rev. 1990)

Written for Bracha Eden and Alexander Tamir

duration: 26'

first broadcast performance: Bracha Eden/Alexander Tamir – BBC, 6 January 1982 (recorded at BBC's Birmingham Studios, 2 December 1981)

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS (both versions, 2nd only in photocopy): The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Quintet** (1981)

Written for and dedicated to Gerald Drucker

duration: 17

instrumentation: clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 double-basses

alternative instrumentation: clarinet, bass clarinet, string trio

first performance: Jack Brymer/Stephen Trier/members of the London Double-Bass Ensemble – Wigmore Hall, London, 27 April 1981

recording: (alternative instrumentation) Joy Farrell/Fiona Cross/members of the Vanbrugh Quartet – Hyperion CDA66626

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS (both versions): The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Trio** for horn, violin and piano (1984)

Commissioned by the Festival Trio of London.

duration: 18'

first performance: Festival Trio of London – University of Essex, 8 May 1985

recording: Richard Watkins/Pauline Lowbury/Christopher Green-Armytage – Hyperion CDA66695

unpublished

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Violin Sonata** (1984)

Commissioned by and dedicated to Pauline Lowbury

duration: 27'

first private performance: Pauline Lowbury/Christopher Green-Armytage – Baptist Church, South Croydon, 4 January 1986 (in conjunction with St. Augustine's Arts Society)

first public performance: Pauline Lowbury/Christopher Green-Armytage – Wigmore Hall, London, 3 February 1986

recording: Pauline Lowbury/Christopher Green-Armytage – Hyperion CDA66737

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**String Trio** (Prelude, Adagio and Fugue) (1987)

Dedicated to Jillian White (BBC Bristol)

duration: 14'

instrumentation: violin, viola, violoncello

first performance: 5 October 1989 (BBC Bristol Lunchtime Concert)

recording: members of the Delmé Quartet – Hyperion CDA66376

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**String Quintet No. 1** (1987)

duration: 34'

instrumentation: string quartet, viola

first performance: Coull String Quartet/Roger Bigley – St. John's, Smith Square, London, 17 April 1989

recording: Coull String Quartet/Roger Bigley – Hyperion CDA66503

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Piano Trio (1988-89)**

Commissioned by the Da Vinci Ensemble

duration: 38'

instrumentation: violin, violoncello, piano

first performance: Da Vinci Ensemble – University of Southampton, 13 February 1990

first London performance: Lowbury Piano Trio – Wigmore Hall, 13 September 1993

recording: Lowbury Piano Trio – Hyperion CDA66737

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Brass Quintet (1989)**

Commissioned by the Cambrian Brass Quintet with funds from the Holst Foundation and dedicated to Peter and Nancy Keane

duration: 17'

instrumentation: 2 trumpets, horn, trombone, tuba

first performance: Cambrian Brass Quintet – Pittville Pump Room, Cheltenham, 19 July 1990 (Cheltenham Festival)

first London performance: Albion Brass Consort – Purcell Room, 10 January 1992 (Park Lane Group – Young Artists Series)

publication: Rosehill Music, 1989

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**String Quintet No. 2 (1991-95)**

Written for the Maggini Quartet and planned for performance at the 1992 Malvern Festival. However the composer suffered a paralysing stroke in September 1991 and the work was not finally completed until 31 October 1995.

duration: 15'

instrumentation: string quartet, violoncello

first performance: Maggini Quartet (augmented) – Cheltenham, 11 July 1996 (Cheltenham Festival)

first broadcast performance: Maggini Quartet (augmented) – BBC, 20 January 1997

recording: Delmé Quartet/Christopher van Kampen – Hyperion CDA66905

unpublished

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Carl Nielsen: Commotio Op. 58**, arr. for piano four hands (undated)

duration: 21'

unpublished

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**IV. INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC****Piano Sonata** (1946)

Written for Harold Truscott and dedicated to the composer's first wife, Bessie Fraser

duration: 22'

first performance: Harold Truscott – London, 1947 (Exploratory Concerts Society)

recordings: Peter Jacobs – Phoenix DGS 1021 (unpublished) · Raymond Clarke – Hyperion CDA66827

publication: Alfred Lengnick, 1959

MS (photocopy): The Harold Truscott Estate

**Variations and Finale on a theme of Haydn\*** for piano (1948)

Dedicated to Harold Truscott

duration: 22'

first broadcast performance: Lamar Crowson – BBC, 14 December 1955

first concert performance: (?) Eric Parkin – Arts Council Drawing Room, 23 January 1959 (Macnaghten Concert)

recordings: Peter Jacobs – Phoenix DGS 1021 (unpublished) · Raymond Clarke – Hyperion CDA66827

publication: Alfred Lengnick, 1956

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

(\*from the Minuet from the Symphony in G major Hob. I:47.)

**Michael Tippett, his mystery** for piano (1984)

Written for a Tippett symposium

duration: 1'30

first performance: Raymond Clarke – Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, 23 January 1993 (Robert Simpson Society Concert)

recording: Raymond Clarke – Hyperion CDA66827

publication: in the book Michael Tippett, O.M., A Celebration ed. Geraint Lewis. Baton Press Pub. 1985

**Eppur si muove\*** – Ricercar e Passacaglia for organ (1985)

Written for the Danish organist Svend Aage Spange and dedicated to Annalise and Svend Aage Spange.

duration: 31'

first performance: Christopher Bowers-Broadbent – Marylebone Parish Church, London, 25 May 1988

recording: Iain Quinn at the organ of Winchester Cathedral – Hyperion CDA67016

publication: Alfred Lengnik

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

(\*The phrase Galileo is said to have muttered after the Church authorities had forced him to recant on his insistence that the Earth moved round the Sun.)

**Variations and Finale on a theme by Beethoven\*** for piano (1990)

Written for and dedicated to Raymond Clarke (after Simpson had heard “an impressive performance by him of Beethoven’s Op. 111”)

duration: 18'

first performance: Raymond Clarke – Purcell Room, London, 11 September 1991 (Robert Simpson Society Concert)

recording: Raymond Clarke – Hyperion CDA66827

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

(\*from the Bagatelle in G minor WoO 61a.)

**V. VOCAL MUSIC****Trocknet nicht, Tränen** – solo song (23 December 1942)

text by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (“Wonnen der Wehmut”)

unpublished

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**The Cherry Tree** – song for high voice and piano (1946?)

text by A. E. Housman (“Loveliest of trees”)

unpublished

MS (photocopy): The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Media morte in vita sumus** – motet for SATB chorus, brass and timpani (1975)

Dedicated to Charles Pope

text by Robert Simpson, translated into Latin by David Nightingale

duration: 14'30

instrumentation: 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones – timpani

first performance: Aylesbury Choral Society/Charles Pope – Aylesbury, Bucks, 3 April 1976

recording: Corydon Singers, Matthew Best – Hyperion CDA67016

publication: Alfred Lengnick

MS: whereabouts unknown

**Tempi** – for unaccompanied SATB chorus (1987)

duration: 17'30

first performance: Cork, 28 April 1988

recording: Corydon Singers, Matthew Best – Hyperion CDA67016

publication: Robertson

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

## **VI. INCIDENTAL MUSIC**

**The Pretenders** (1965)

[Henrik Ibsen]

Commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

instrumentation: 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contra-bassoon – 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba – timpani, side drum

first broadcast performance: CBC, 1966

first British performance: (Entr'acte only) BBC, 18 April 1971

unpublished

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

**Samson Agonistes** (1974)

[John Milton, adapted by Basil Ashmore]

Written for the Chalfont St. Giles Festival in honour of the Tercentenary of Milton's birth

instrumentation: brass ensemble

first performance: Kneller Hall Brass Players – Chalfont St. Giles, November 1974 (Tercentenary Festival Concert); producer: Basil Ashmore

unpublished

MS: The British Library, London: MS Mus. 1738

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Robert Simpson (1921-1997) was a composer whose thinking was sometimes alarmingly uncompromising. In times when 'avant-garde' forms were considered to be of central importance to the progress of music, he continued his beliefs of a continuous tradition unwaveringly. He was undoubtedly one of the core figures in the creation of both symphonies and string quartets during the second half of the 20th century, his œuvre still offers ample opportunity for musicians, audience and scholars alike to uncover hitherto hardly known treasures.

The present book offers contributions by some of the most eminent Simpsonians, including Ed Green, Hans Keller, Malcolm MacDonald, John McCabe, Simon Phillippo, John Pickard, Lionel Pike, Martin Ratcliffe, Jürgen Schaarwächter and Harold Truscott. In their various approaches they cover most areas of Robert Simpson's compositional activities, with special focus on some of the Symphonies and String Quartets.

*Jürgen Schaarwächter*, obtained his doctorate at the University of Köln in 1995 with his award-winning thesis »Die britische Sinfonie 1914-1945«. He was Honorary Research Fellow of the University of Birmingham and researched in 1997-8 British symphonism from its beginnings to 1914 as research scholar of the German Research Foundation. Since 1999 he has been research fellow at the Max Reger Institute, Karlsruhe. He has published extensively both on Reger and related topics, on music from the 18th to the 20th century with special emphasis on British music. He is European Contact for the Havergal Brian Society since 1999, German representative of the British Music Society since 2001 and Chairman of the Robert Simpson Society since 2007.

*Robert Simpson (1921-1997) war ein Komponist mit gelegentlich kompromissloser Denkweise. In den Zeiten, als ‚Avantgarde-Formen‘ als zentral für den Fortschritt in der Musik galten, blieb er standhaft bei seinen Überzeugungen einer ungebrochenen Tradition. Wie sein Œuvre zeigt, war er nicht nur eine der Zentralfiguren des Musikschaßens der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts, die sowohl Sinfonien als auch Streichquartette komponierten, sondern bietet reichlich Gelegenheit für Musiker, Zuhörer und Wissenschaftler, bisher ungehobene Schätze zu entdecken.*

*Das vorliegende Buch enthält Beiträge einiger der bedeutendsten »Simpsonianen«, wie Ed Green, Hans Keller, Malcolm MacDonald, John McCabe, Simon Phillippo, John Pickard, Lionel Pike, Martin Ratcliffe, Jürgen Schaarwächter und Harold Truscott. Durch ihren jeweils unterschiedlichen Zugang decken sie einen großen Teil von Simpsons kompositorischem Schaffen ab, wobei der Schwerpunkt auf einigen seiner Sinfonien und Streichquartette liegt.*

*Jürgen Schaarwächter, Promotion a. d. Univ. Köln 1995 mit einer Arbeit über die britische Sinfonie zwischen 1914 und 1945; Honorary Research Fellow der Universität Birmingham; 1997/98 Forschungen über die britische Sinfonie von ihren Anfängen bis 1914 als Stipendiat der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft. Seit 1999 Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter des Max Reger Instituts Karlsruhe. Zahlreiche Publikationen über Reger und die angrenzende Thematik sowie über die Musik des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts mit Schwerpunkt auf britischer Musik. Seit 1999 europäischer Ansprechpartner der Havergal Brian Society, ferner seit 2001 deutscher Repräsentant der British Music Society und seit 2007 Vorsitzender der Robert Simpson Society.*