

Bohuslav MARTINŮ

EARLY ORCHESTRAL WORKS, VOLUME THREE

BALLADE (AFTER BÖCKLIN'S PICTURE VILLA BY THE SEA)

VANISHING MIDNIGHT

DREAM OF THE PAST

Sinfonia Varsovia
Ian Hobson

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ: EARLY ORCHESTRAL WORKS, VOLUME THREE

by Michael Crump

The orchestral output of Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959) is dominated by the magnificent series of six symphonies he wrote after fleeing war-torn Europe for America in 1941. The first five, written at annual intervals from 1942 to 1946, are sometimes regarded as eloquent responses to the course of the Second World War and its aftermath. Martinů's biographer Miloš Šafránek, for instance, felt that the unconventional structure of the finale of the Third Symphony was a direct response to the recent D-Day landings,¹ whereas the jubilant Fourth anticipates the cessation of hostilities with exhilarating intensity. Nonetheless, each work is a disciplined and logical construction; Martinů was never tempted to make his message specific by naming any of his symphonies or incorporating sung texts, nor does he include programmatic elements (such as the duelling timpani of Nielsen's Fourth Symphony, *The Inextinguishable*,² or the extensive 'invasion' episode of Shostakovich's *Leningrad* Symphony). Martinů's symphonies are engaged but abstract: they are the sort of symphonies Sibelius might have written during that same war, had he not already fallen silent – compassionate but rigorous.

The Martinů symphonies have gained considerably in popularity in the last thirty years or so. Anyone considering acquiring a set of recordings can now choose from several outstanding cycles but will still lack a fully rounded view of his achievements as an orchestral composer. Apart from the symphonies, Martinů wrote around twenty works for large orchestra and although some are similarly abstract,³ extra-

¹ *Bohuslav Martinů: His Life and Works*, Allan Wingate, London, 1962, p. 236.

² Completed during the First World War.

³ For instance: *Inventions* from 1932, *Intermezzo* (1956) and his last orchestral work, *Estampes* from 1958.

musical influences play a role in most of them. This series begins in 1910, with two substantial symphonic poems – *The Death of Tintagiles* and *The Angel of Death* – based respectively on works by the Belgian symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck and the Polish novelist Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer. It concludes with two impressive orchestral cycles: *The Frescoes of Piero della Francesca* (1955, inspired by the impressive set of frescoes at the church of San Francesco in Arezzo, painted by Piero between 1452 and 1466) and *The Parables* (1958), each movement of which is prefaced by literary quotes from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry or Georges Neveux. This third volume in the Toccata Classics series of early Martinů orchestral works presents three further works which are all, to varying degrees, associated with extra-musical stimuli, offering a contrast to the non-programmatic selection which appeared on Volume One.⁴

***Ballada k Böcklinovu obrazu: Villa na moři* ('Ballade after Böcklin's picture: Villa by the Sea'), H97 (c. 1915)**

The *Ballade* [4] is the only surviving piece of a set of Symphonic Dances, composed probably in 1914–15; the title page declares it to be number four in the series. The only tangible evidence for the existence of the others is the title page of a piece entitled *Nocturne: Roses in the Night (after the Chansons de Bilitis by Pierre Louys)*. This piece was apparently the second in the cycle, but not a note of it has been preserved; nor is there any trace of the first and third dances.

The *Ballade* and the much later *Frescoes* are the only two orchestral works by Martinů to be inspired by the visual arts; in both instances, the striking appearance of the artwork is precisely mirrored by Martinů's orchestration. Piero's frescoes are noted for their mastery of the emerging art of perspective, and for their stunning interplay of light and shade; Martinů's late masterpiece glows with similarly refulgent and opulent textures. The painting 'Villa by the Sea' by Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901),

⁴ The *Prélude en forme de scherzo*, H181a (1929, orch. 1930), Symphonic movement, H90 (1913–14), *Posvícení*, H2 ('Village Feast'; 1907), *Nocturno I*, H91 (1914–15) and the *Little Dance Suite*, H123, released on TOCC 0156.

which inspired the *Ballade*, could hardly be more different.⁵ Although its title suggests a picturesque scene, the reality is somewhat different. ‘Villa by the Sea’ exists in five different versions, painted between 1863 and 1878. In most of them, it appears to be early evening – the colours are dark and sombre, and one has the impression that the classically styled villa has been abandoned. In most versions, trees on the shoreline are clearly straining against a fierce incoming wind. In the foreground, a young woman gazes pensively out to sea, her head covered by a shawl as protection from the elements. Has she come here to reflect on happier times spent at the villa? Perhaps she has newly inherited it and feels oppressed by the responsibility she now carries. The picture, though forlorn, is intriguing, and its sinister atmosphere is well captured by the young Martinů – the sombre orchestration fosters an air of trepidation, only partially alleviated by the unusual role given to the piano.

The importance of the piano is made evident in a brief prologue: three subdued chords of E flat minor, G flat major and C minor on the full orchestra are succeeded by five bars for solo piano, playing gentle syncopated E flat major chords with only the bass drum for accompaniment. It is followed by the first of three themes which form the backbone of this piece. Emerging in the lower strings in the crestfallen key of E flat minor, its irregular rhythms and deliberately awkward intervals evoke intense disquiet and build to an impressive outburst of despair. A short linking passage from the cor anglais leads to the second theme. Like many of Martinů’s themes at this stage of his career, it is supported by an ostinato-like tread of even crotchets, presented by the lower strings and piano (other examples may be found in the untitled orchestral work H90, the *Nocturne*, H91, and many passages in his first ballet *Noc* (‘Night’, H89)). The new theme, in C minor, is initially given out by two solo violas in canon. Eventually, the first soloist has the field to himself, his plangent minstrelsy brought to an end by a sudden *fortissimo tremolando* in the upper strings, announcing the third and final theme.

⁵ It may be remembered that another painting by Böcklin, ‘The Isle of the Dead’, inspired Rachmaninov’s suitably gloomy tone-poem of the same name in 1908. ‘The Isle of the Dead’, indeed, is one of the four Böcklin paintings that lie behind Reger’s *Vier Tondichtungen nach A. Böcklin*, Op. 128 (1913).



'Villa by the Sea': the second (1865) version of Böcklin's painting

This last idea again emerges from the bass and remains in C minor, but is nobler and more heroic in character, despite its eventual incorporation of an angular phrase, based around a diminished fourth, from the viola melody. Progressing sequentially through E minor and G minor, the theme builds to another passionate outburst before subsiding to E flat and an immediate restoration of the first theme, now given to the woodwind over an unsettling triplet ostinato in the bass. Presently, the piano reasserts

its presence in several short-range exchanges with the full orchestra. The second theme duly re-appears; its melodic contours remain intact, but its originally placid nature is replaced by the brazen defiance of massed horns, the underlying ostinato transformed into a bed of nettles by the stinging *forte sul ponticello* of the strings. By contrast, the third theme proceeds as before, but a shock awaits the listener as it once more winds down to E flat major.

Suddenly, the piano is left all by itself, delivering six solo bars unrelated to anything heard so far. The strings, now muted and *pianissimo*, have the temerity to suggest that the diminished-fourth figure from the second and third themes might be a better idea. The piano ignores them – they advance another idea from the third theme, with no better luck. Only after a further fourteen bars does the piano take the hint and combine the two string suggestions into a single line. Meanwhile, the strings have become ever more timid – by this stage, they are playing *ppp* and *pizzicato*. The effect is a little like that achieved on a larger scale by Beethoven in the central movement of his Fourth Piano Concerto. The final bars of the *Ballade* reverse the roles of the opening – the piano solo plays the three chords of E flat minor, G flat major and C minor, after which the orchestra whispers the closing chord of E flat major.

Unlike many of the works in this recording project, the *Ballade* has a performance history. It was never performed during Martinů's lifetime, but was broadcast on Brno Radio on 8 December 1967 (which would have been his 77th birthday), along with the first *Nocturne* and *Little Dance Suite*. Recordings of the two smaller pieces survive, and it is interesting to note that, whereas the *Nocturne* was performed in full, the longer *Ballade* was subjected to several cuts, reducing its duration by around 20 per cent. Presumably a set of parts was made for that recording, and it would be interesting to find out what became of them. Only in 2007 did Baerenreiter Praha acquire the rights to this piece. Subsequently, they asked the Czech musicologist Sandra Bergmannová to prepare an authoritative score and a set of parts for performance. These materials became available in 2011, since when the *Ballade* has been performed in concert a number of times, not least by Ian Hobson and Sinfonia Varsovia.

Sen o minulosti ('Dream of the Past'), H124 (1920)

The orchestral movement entitled *Sen o minulosti* ('Dream of the Past') [5] dates from 1920 and occupies position 124 in Harry Halbreich's catalogue of Martinů's works.⁶ That makes it the immediate successor to the *Little Dance Suite*, featured on Volume One of this series, with which it has surprisingly little in common. Throughout Martinů's first compositional phase, a number of disparate influences compete for attention. Occasionally they share the limelight within a single work, suggesting the synthesis of opposing elements which was eventually to be critical in forming his distinctive style. The *Little Dance Suite*, for instance, happily employs elements of Martinů's Czech predecessors Dvořák and Smetana, yet without completely erasing all traces of his earlier enthusiasm for the music of Richard Strauss. Elsewhere, a single influence can reign unchallenged, denying the others any sustenance whatever. *Dream of the Past* illustrates this tendency well, finding Martinů more wholly absorbed in the Impressionist idiom than in perhaps any other work. Lavishly divided string textures and indolent woodwind arabesques are the order of the day, with no hint of Bohemian revelry or Straussian brashness to dispel the hazy mood of nostalgic wistfulness.

According to Miloš Šafránek,⁷ this twelve-minute *Lento* was originally planned as the central movement of an orchestral cycle with the overall title *Háj satyrů* ('The Grove of Satyrs', satyrs being mythological creatures, part man and part goat). The titles of the outer movements remain unknown. At the start of the *Dream*, the cellos, basses, harp and timpani quietly intone a descending perfect fourth; a solo flute latches onto the same interval, extending it into a short phrase, clearly indebted to the opening of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. Billowing phrases in the strings eventually settle down into an extended passage of *saltando* arpeggios,⁸ a feather bed upon which a languid oboe solo reclines. This texture persists throughout a lengthy introduction, giving way to a hymn-like passage on five solo strings – an element which will recur twice during the piece, acting as a kind of refrain, or at least a point of orientation in

⁶ Bohuslav Martinů: *Werkverzeichnis und Biografie*, Schott, Mainz, 2006.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 78.

⁸ *Saltando* (literally 'jumping') requires the player to bounce the bow lightly on the string.

a movement which is formally more rhapsodic and elusive than one normally expects from Martinů. When the refrain returns after a short orchestral outburst, it has gained in strength, now being delivered by full strings. The opening stages are imitated, the flute doing its best to remember its initial idea before surrendering to another lengthy oboe solo. Once more, the soloist sets out from a descending fourth and is supported by a dense undergrowth of divided strings, with no fewer than four solo first violins and three solo cellos. An arresting moment occurs after a complete break, as a solo cor anglais laments over dramatic *tremolando* strings before being lured by them into a third statement of the refrain. This reverie is shattered by a forceful and surprisingly dissonant outburst over a disorienting triplet rhythm in the timpani but subsides into an atmospheric epilogue once more delineated by *saltando* strings. In trying to recall the opening phrase one last time, the flute all but quotes the start of Debussy's postmeridian masterpiece before the strings fade to silence and the last sound is heard in the lowest register of the harp.

Dream of the Past is easily the most formally fluid of Martinů's early orchestral works, an extended improvisation which retains coherence thanks to the merest dash of formal and thematic discipline. Its unorthodox layout may take its cue from the title. Perhaps this short piece is the first manifestation of that 'dream-logic', that fascination for the intuitive and unplanned, to which Martinů gave full rein in his opera *Julietta* and the 'fantasy' pieces of his final decade. Although for many years a complete stranger to the concert hall, *Dream of the Past* has been easily available in full score since 1967. It has been recorded once before, in a performance with Jaromír Nohejl conducting the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra of Olomouc. That Panton LP is, however, extremely difficult to obtain these days, so that this new recording effectively re-plugs a substantial gap in the Martinů discography.

***Míjejíci půlnoc* ('Vanishing Midnight'), H131 (1922)**

Several commentators on the Martinů symphonies claim that the series is effectively extended to nine by the three orchestral triptychs (*Les Fresques de Piero della Francesca*,

Parables and *Estampes*) he wrote between 1955 and 1958.⁹ Martinů himself, on the other hand, quite possibly felt that his symphonic output ended with the Fifth Symphony. The work which is usually referred to as his Sixth Symphony is published by Boosey and Hawkes under the title *Fantaisies Symphoniques*, a title which recalls not only Berlioz's first startling contribution to the genre but also the final symphony of Jean Sibelius – the one-movement Seventh, similarly billed as *Fantasia Sinfonica* at its premiere in March 1924. Both Martinů and Sibelius wrestled with misgivings as to whether their respective works were truly symphonic. Their doubts were understandable but ill-founded: the apparent novelty of the new works had been achieved not by rejecting the essential qualities of their predecessors but by embracing them more fervently than ever. In Martinů's case, the principle of motivic development, usually allotted a key structural role in at least one movement of each symphony, is extended across all three and infuses not only their melodic and contrapuntal development but also the minute details of their astonishingly elaborate textures.

It is this absence of motivic rigour that, for me at least, separates the late triptychs from the acknowledged symphonies. The abandonment of abstraction in the *Frescoes* and *Parables* further removes them from the symphonies, at the same time forging a link with some of the orchestral music he had written over thirty years previously. Halbreich is almost alone in spotting this connection, claiming that the central movement of *Vanishing Midnight* could almost be seen as a preliminary study for the first movement of the *Frescoes*.¹⁰ If Martinů's early orchestral triptychs had both survived complete and become better known, perhaps more commentators would feel that the real antecedent of the *Frescoes* and *Parables* lies there, rather than in the symphonies.

Much had changed in the life of Bohuslav Martinů and the fortunes of his country in the years leading up to the writing of *Vanishing Midnight*. In 1918, in the aftermath of the First World War, Czechoslovakia broke free from Austro-Hungarian hegemony and became an independent republic. Martinů celebrated this event in his ardent *Czech Rhapsody* for mixed chorus, baritone soloist, organ and orchestra. It was performed

⁹ For instance, Halbreich, *op. cit.*, p. 263, or Brian Large, *Martinů*, Duckworth, London, 1975, p. 87.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 253.

to acclaim in January 1919, and finally put him on the map in his home country as a composer of substance. At the time, he was a regular presence in the second-violin section of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, the chief conductor of which was Václav Talich. It seemed that his stock could only rise further when the first performance of his *Little Dance Suite* was scheduled for performance by Talich and the orchestra in 1920, but Talich unexpectedly withdrew the work at the rehearsal stage. In 1922, Martinů, partly at the prompting of his close friend, the violinist Stanislav Novák, joined the composition class of Josef Suk when the latter (and his colleagues from the Bohemian Quartet) joined the teaching staff at the Prague Conservatoire. Šafránek implies¹¹ that Suk worked with Martinů to revise and perfect the manuscript of *Vanishing Midnight*, which abounds with corrections, often written on separate scraps of music paper pasted over the original. Although many errors remain, this degree of care is unusual for Martinů and contrasts with the shoddy state of manuscripts such as the ballets *Noc* and *Stin* (1916), which were submitted to the National Theatre in Prague while still chock-full of egregious errors. Evidently, proof-reading was normally a task which quickly exhausted his patience, and yet he was prepared to spend considerable time in an attempt to present *Vanishing Midnight* in the best possible light. Why?

Perhaps the answer may be found in the radical overhaul that Martinů's musical style was about to undergo. This change is graphically illustrated by two ballets he wrote in successive years. The three-act *Istar* was completed late in 1921 and is an extravagant Impressionist score. The next year, 1922, saw the completion of *Kdo je na světě nejmocnější?* ('Who is the most Powerful in the World?'; H133), a one-act ballet so markedly influenced by Stravinsky and jazz that reviewers of the first production in 1925 felt sure that it must have been written after Martinů's relocation to Paris in 1923. Whereas *Istar* is deeply serious in tone, *Who is the most Powerful in the World?* is witty and irreverent – when Martinů incorporates a lavish Straussian waltz, one senses that his intention is to parody an influence he has now outgrown. Talich was astonished by the change, describing it as 'a leap and not a step'.¹² *Vanishing Midnight* is the only

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 81.

major work which intervenes between the two ballets and is more closely allied to the world of *Istar*. In it, Martinů summarises his first compositional phase – it is basically an Impressionist work, which still finds room for the clean textures and parallel thirds and sixths of Dvořák or Smetana. He also bids farewell to one of his earliest musical influences, the music of Richard Strauss, with intoxicating waltz rhythms and adroitly disjointed harmonies suggesting *Der Rosenkavalier*, and a finale full of bold, virtuosic orchestral effects that would not be out of place in *Ein Heldenleben* or the *Alpine Symphony*. There is a strong impression that, with this work, Martinů was drawing a line in the sand and, rather like Beethoven at key points in his life, consciously setting himself upon a new path. As such, it is a fascinating milestone in his career as well as a fine work in its own right, although most of it has lain unperformed and unpublished for almost a century.

After the debacle of the *Little Dance Suite*, *Vanishing Midnight* became the first work of Martinů which Talich conducted, though not in its entirety. The conductor had decided to spotlight the work of Czech composers, concentrating on symphonies in the 1921–22 season and on symphonic poems (in one movement) the following year. The performance of the whole cycle was therefore out of the question, and so Talich conducted only the central movement, entitled ‘Modrá hodina’ (‘The Blue Hour’),¹³ on 18 February 1923. Sandra Bergmannová has found evidence of a second performance, on 25 April 1926 in Plzeň, Karel Kalík conducting a local orchestra, but apart from that, the work has not been heard since. For many years, *Vanishing Midnight* was thought not to have survived intact. In the first edition of his catalogue of Martinů’s works, Harry Halbreich listed only ‘Modrá hodina’, stating that the piece was the central movement of a larger triptych.¹⁴ He went on to state that the first movement, ‘Satyři v háji cypřišu’ (‘Satyrs in the Grove of Cypressess’), was lost, but that orchestral parts for the second movement and indeed the third (‘Stíny’ – ‘Shadows’) were housed in the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra archive in the Rudolfinum in Prague. I had the pleasure of examining these parts during my research for this project. The parts for the third

¹³ He had used this title once before, for the first song in the 1912 song-cycle *Nipponari*.

¹⁴ Bohuslav Martinů: *Werkverzeichnis, Dokumentation und Biographie*, Atlantis, Zurich, 1968, p. 217.

movement have clearly never been used, whereas those for the second movement have plenty of additional markings from the pencils of the orchestral musicians, including one most intriguing find. The back of the seventh-desk part of the first violins carries a caricature of the composer. Although Martinů was himself a witty producer of such sketches and often drew his own likeness, this portrait seems to be by someone else. It contains the inscription 'Pavouk (autor)', but this has so far not helped with the identification of the artist.¹⁵

Although Talich performed only the central movement in his concert, the programme carried a detailed description by Martinů of the events which the whole cycle was meant to depict:

I am alone at home: the scent of blossoms rises from the garden through the open windows. The day is ending: only now do the thousands of events of the day desist, and it is as though the continuous flow of time itself rested for a moment and gained strength for the onward journey. In this imperceptible fraction of time the tragedy of the dying day fades away. And now I remember the many evenings which have passed during my life. Once, as another day was vanishing, fauns, nymphs and other fairy-tale beings were conjured up in my imagination. Through the very window, from which I am now looking into the silent night, I caught the distant sound of their celebrations amid the woods in the pale light of the moon. Their time had come, fate had found its fulfilment. And today the leaves are already starting to fall from the trees. The mild blue evening looks at me through the window and brings me the sounds of life. There below, far off, is the town, which is alive and the pulse of its life reaches me, as if inviting me to come closer. There in the distance, thousands of events are being hatched and thousands of interests are intertwining. Although I am here alone with my thoughts in the middle of the night, I am connected with that life in the distance by mysterious threads and I see how an implacable fate descends upon things and people. The day is dying. A chilly autumn wind has disturbed the dead calm of my room. The moon is hidden behind clouds and eerie shadows flicker on the walls: they fill the entire room. A motionless

¹⁵ 'Pavouk' means 'spider' in Czech. It might be a nickname, but possibly even a surname.



The caricature of Martinů by 'Pavouk'
(used by kind permission of the Music Archive of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra)

silence covers all life and weighs heavily upon the soul. Midnight passes. It fades away as inaudibly as a breath: everything hastens towards a final, unalterable resolution. I feel too alone against the vast sky, which peeps into my room by the light of the stars, too weak against the 'Unknown' which lurks in motionless expectation. Yet I defend myself. I cannot surrender. I cannot deny this life, whose voice entices me. Midnight has passed and a new day is dawning.

The first movement, 'Satyrs in the Grove of Cypresses' [1], was the most impressively sustained and vital orchestral composition which Martinů had written to date. The programme note describes it as a 'prologue' to the cycle, and it does indeed stand aside from its fellows, which share thematic material. Surprisingly 'Satyrs' has much in common with the recently completed *Dream of the Past*. In his later music, Martinů very often used small, memorable phrases of three or four notes which lend a strong family likeness to his melodic lines. He almost never, on the other hand, re-uses whole ideas. 'Satyrs' is exceptional in commandeering themes from an earlier work. Could it be that the earlier triptych *The Grove of Satyrs* was never in fact completed, but that Martinů instead chose to put the material of the sole completed movement to rather more invigorating use in the similarly titled 'Satyrs in the Grove of Cypresses'?

'Satyrs' begins in D flat major, the violas embellishing the seventh of the chord with trills above and below it. Muted horns sound in the distance, and a cloud of polytonal semiquavers issues from the violins and dispels in an instant, like 'the scent of blossoms rising from the garden'. Longer string lines emerge, each beginning with a descending perfect fourth, inherited from *Dream of the Past* and destined to head the majority of the important themes in *Vanishing Midnight*. Presently a solo violin delivers a languid theme, followed by a four-bar solo for trumpet, lifted from *Dream of the Past* with only minor rhythmic adjustments (compare [1] 3:12 with [5] 5:20). A brief reminiscence of the opening bars rounds out this introduction, setting a precedent for the entire movement: each new episode that arises during its course is fatally attracted and destroyed by the gravitational pull of the opening bars, like objects on an event-horizon succumbing to the irresistible strength of a black hole.

The bulk of ‘Satyrs’ is devoted to the symphonic elaboration of a slow waltz delivered at first by solo flute and then clarinet. This melody has also been heard within *Dream of the Past*, somewhat concealed within the long oboe solo towards the start (the clearest resemblance is found between [1] 9:03 and [5] 1:59). In the earlier work, this phrase is a mere incident, but in ‘Satyrs’ its symphonic credentials are revealed and exploited at once; it is developed through a gradual *accelerando* by the oboe and then by full strings, capped by a thrilling *Maestoso* and a tumultuous chromatic descent. Once more, the textures of the opening return to absorb the energy of this impressive outburst, though now the distant sounds are all but drowned out by massive swells from the percussion.

A sudden turn to C major announces the second half of the movement, generally swifter in tempo and perhaps portraying the ‘distant celebrations’ of the programme. This section introduces a two-bar theme on the trumpet, another theme with a kinship to material from *Dream of the Past* (compare [1] 8:54 with [5] 7:36). Again, Martinů is keen to develop this old material in its new surroundings; the trumpet snippet alternates with snatches of the earlier waltz theme, later becoming the springboard for an idyll high in the strings as well as a more urgent sequel in the woodwind. A rather rhapsodic violin solo (which in form and function foreshadows a similar episode in the first movement of *Fantaisies Symphoniques*) leads to a modified return of several earlier episodes, building as before to an imposing tumult, the apotheosis of the trumpet theme supported by hammering timpani. At the crest of the wave, the opening horn chords sound again, no longer distant and poetic but *fortissimo* and menacing. The trumpets become fixated with a dissonant B natural while the orchestral texture collapses in on itself. Most of the forces leave the field, gradually revealing a soft timpani roll on D flat, and *tremolando* violins on a B flat almost four octaves above the drum-roll. The trilling violas, distant horns and billowing violins make one final appearance. Divided cellos and flutes exchange chords in D flat minor and major respectively, before leaving the timpani and violins to fade to inaudibility.

The second movement, ‘The Blue Hour’ [2], follows a rather similar plan to the first. It too divides into two sections, the second livelier than the first and culminating in an apparent catastrophe which leaves bitonal harmonies and misty textures in its wake. The

first half-dozen bars set the scene with material that is never to recur, but appended to them is a seemingly innocuous phrase in the upper violas which will recur three times across the last two movements. I shall refer to it as the ‘motto’, although at this stage it scarcely calls attention to itself. The early stages of this movement are remarkable for the fastidious nature of Martinů’s scoring, the strings often divided into as many as eleven parts. The billowing figurations with which they support themes in the woodwind are, once again, strikingly similar to briefer statements found towards the start of *Dream of the Past*. A short pause introduces the most important idea of this section, a graceful theme in the violins which, almost inevitably, begin with a falling fourth.

The livelier second section is permeated by a distinctive rhythm, first heard in the brass. This alternation of triplet and dotted rhythms is strongly reminiscent of ‘Fêtes’, the second movement of Debussy’s *Nocturnes*, as Halbreich pointed out.¹⁶ Martinů’s orchestration here is scintillating – rapid descending chromatic scales form a coruscating background to a lyrical outpouring of melody (which at one point proceeds in canon), while the ostinato rhythm wanders nomadically among the various orchestral sections. Ideas from the first part of the movement are soon recalled, now swollen and aggrandised almost to the point of unrecognisability, while the orchestral textures become piercingly, almost painfully, bright and incandescent, culminating in a daringly high G sharp in the first violins. The key turns to E minor, and the ‘motto’ announced so demurely towards the start appears monstrously transformed in the brass, rounded out by terrifying hammer blows on the bass drum. A mighty smash on the tam-tam (hitherto silent in this work) is succeeded by a murky combination of E minor and C minor in the lower strings, over which two trilling solo violins crawl ever upwards. ‘An implacable fate descends upon things and people’, as the programme note relates.

At the start of the finale, ‘Shadows’ [5], it is easy to hear that ‘a chilly autumn wind has disturbed the dead calm of my room’, since this movement contains perhaps the most frankly pictorial music that Martinů ever wrote. For his finale, he added a bass clarinet, a contrabassoon and an extra set of timpani to the orchestra, in the most virtuosic orchestral music he had ever composed – its very appearance on the page is

¹⁶ *Werkverzeichnis und Biografie*, op. cit., p. 253.

daunting. Every section of the orchestra is sternly tested in this fifteen-minute showpiece, which does not shy away from tortured chromaticism and tangled, sometimes ugly, counterpoint in order to deliver its message as faithfully as possible. Martinů was never to write anything remotely like it again.

The 50-bar introduction, with its faint echoes of the 'Dialogue du vent et de la mer' from Debussy's *La mer*, contains no genuine themes, but a *mélange* of agonised and fearful gestures which set the tone for what is to come. The main *Allegro* sets forth with an apparently cheerful theme, pitched precariously at the top of the range of the first violins. This theme (another devotee of the descending fourth) will be extensively developed later, but for now it is swept contemptuously aside by a violent orchestral storm. Upon its return, it is treated far more expansively (rather like the themes of the second movement) as a would-be waltz, with aspirations to carefree enjoyment which are undermined in every bar by an unsettling ostinato in the lower strings. Eventually, even this moderately brighter mood cannot be sustained; it is engulfed by an utterly extraordinary and preposterously imaginative passage. Sinuous chromatic ascents are exchanged by the strings and heavier brass, while the horns punctuate the texture with isolated whoops. The passage is in triple time, but is underpinned by an ostinato in quintuplet crotchets, entrusted to the cellos, basses and contrabassoon and divided between the two sets of timpani! As the anger boils over, the motto theme from the second movement returns in the brass – now even more imposing than ever before, and concluded by a shattering chord of C minor reinforced by cymbals, bass drum and a four-part chord in the timpani.

The heart of the movement explores a mood that has now become very familiar from countless horror films – that feeling of mounting dread when little is happening, when no discernible threat is present, but when every small noise, every unexpected event, is the cause of disproportionate alarm. The harp and *pizzicato* first violins emulate the anxious ticking of a clock while the bass clarinet and lower strings exchange menacing and yet still deliberately amorphous phrases. This material alternates twice with an ashen-faced march in $\frac{5}{4}$ in the woodwind, when from nowhere the timpani thunder in, as if to announce the advent of some new terror. The appearance of the score

here is extraordinary: the strings divide into eleven parts, the top eight of which play rapid descending semiquavers patterns. The eight parts enter successively, each either a major or minor second higher than the last, to produce an opaque and threatening gale of sound, almost devoid of conventional harmonic sense and fast approaching the status of a cluster. Meanwhile, the woodwind examine the bass-clarinets material while the two timpanists punctuate the texture at unpredictable intervals.

A lengthy development of these ideas ensues, to be halted abruptly at a point where the first violins have climbed so high that it seems unlikely they can venture any further. The thread is taken up again at the opposite end of the orchestra with about as gloomy a sonority as the orchestra can conjure: double basses, tuba, bassoons and bass clarinet. This diversion unexpectedly leads to a return of the would-be waltz, the harmonies of which momentarily brighten up in a way suggestive of the vaguely optimistic conclusion to Martinů's programme note: 'Midnight has passed and a new day is dawning'. A turn to F minor and menacing rolls from the two timpanists (shades, perhaps, of the final stages of Strauss' *Till Eulenspiegel*) deny the listener this satisfaction. One of the more harrowing passages from earlier on is repeated and slams into the final appearance of the motto, now replete with chromatic fragments rearing up Fafner-like from the bass. Two lengthy percussion rolls terminate in vehement chords of C minor, forming perhaps the most dramatically pessimistic conclusion to any work penned by Bohuslav Martinů.

Michael Crump is the author of Martinů and the Symphony (Toccata Press, London, 2010) and the editor, for Schott, Mainz, and Editio Bärenreiter Prague, of several of Martinů's early orchestral scores.

Ian Hobson, pianist and conductor, enjoys an international reputation, both for his performances of the Romantic repertoire and of neglected piano music old and new, and for his assured conducting from both the piano and the podium, renewing interest in the music of such lesser-known masters as Ignaz Moscheles and Johann Hummel. He is also an effective advocate of works written expressly for him by contemporary composers, among them John Gardner, Benjamin Lees, David Liptak, Alan Ridout and Roberto Sierra.

As guest soloist, Ian Hobson has appeared with the world's major orchestras; those in the United States include the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Philadelphia Orchestra, the symphony orchestras of Baltimore, Florida, Houston, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh and St Louis, the American Symphony Orchestra and the Orquesta Sinfónica de Puerto Rico. Elsewhere, he has been heard with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Hallé Orchestra in the UK, and the ORF-Vienna, Orchester der Beethovenhalle, Moscow Chopin Orchestra, Israeli Sinfonietta and New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

Born in Wolverhampton in 1952 and one of the youngest-ever graduates of the Royal Academy of Music, Ian Hobson subsequently pursued advanced studies at both Cambridge University and Yale University. He began his international career in 1981 when he won First Prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition, having previously earned silver medals at both the Arthur Rubinstein and Vienna Beethoven competitions. A professor in the Center for Advanced Study at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), Ian Hobson received the endowed chair of Swanlund Professor of Music in 2000 and is now the Swanlund Emeritus Professor.



He is in increasing demand as a conductor, particularly for performances in which he doubles as a pianist. He made his debut in this capacity in 1996 with the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, and has since appeared with the English Chamber Orchestra, the Fort Worth Chamber Orchestra, the Sinfonia Varsovia (at Carnegie Hall), the Pomeranian Philharmonic and the Kibbutz Chamber Orchestra of Israel, among others. He also performs extensively as pianist-conductor with Sinfonia da Camera, a group he formed in 1984 and which quickly gained international recognition through its recordings.

To date he has amassed a discography of some sixty releases, mostly on the Zephyr label, including the complete piano sonatas of Beethoven and Schumann, a complete edition of Brahms' piano variations and the complete piano works by Chopin. With the violinist Sherban Lupu he is recording, as pianist and conductor, the complete works of Ernst for Toccata Classics, for which label he has also recorded piano music by Edward and Kate Loder and Harold Truscott. He has also released two albums in this pioneering series of recordings of the early orchestral works by Martinů, also for Toccata Classics, in which he conducts the Sinfonia Varsovia.

His website can be found at www.ianhobson.net.

In 1984, at the invitation of Waldemar Dąbrowski, director of the Stanisław I. Witkiewicz Studio Centre for the Arts in Warsaw, and Franciszek Wybrańczyk, director of the Polish Chamber Orchestra, the violinist Yehudi Menuhin arrived in Poland to perform as a soloist and conductor. So as to meet the exigencies of the repertoire, the orchestra invited renowned Polish musicians from all over Poland to take part in the performances. The first concerts of the ensemble, conducted by Menuhin, were received enthusiastically by audiences and critics, and he accepted the invitation to become the first guest conductor of the newly established orchestra, now named **Sinfonia Varsovia**.

Sinfonia Varsovia performs at the world's most prestigious concert halls and festivals, working with world-renowned conductors and soloists. The orchestra has recorded a wide range of albums, radio and television performances, and boasts a discography of almost 300 albums, many of which have received prestigious prizes. In 1997 Krzysztof Penderecki became the musical director, and in 2003 also its artistic director. Sinfonia Varsovia is a municipal cultural institution co-ordinated by the City of Warsaw. In 2015, in the presence of the President of Warsaw, Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, the architect Thomas Pucher and Janusz Marynowski, director of Sinfonia Varsovia, signed a contract for the delivery of design documentation for

a new concert hall for the orchestra and for the development of the property at 272 Ulica Grochowska.

Its website can be found at www.sinfoniavarsovia.org.



Already released



'Ian Hobson proves a wholly sympathetic interpreter, securing fine, idiomatic performances throughout from Sinfonia Varsovia, in excellent sound. It may not be Martinů as we know it, but this is a hugely enjoyable, fascinating disc.'

Guy Rickards,
Klassisk Musikkmagasin

'It made me happy – it's an hour of sheer aural satisfaction, and it's downright bizarre that this music isn't better-known. Treat yourself!'

Brian Reinhart,
MusicWeb International



'So much of Martinů's mature voice is apparent here making this a real find worth adding to the Martinů recorded catalogue. Ian Hobson and Sinfonia Varsovia along with their soloists provide a really fine performance and receive an excellent recording from the Witold Lutosławski Concert Studio, Polish Radio, Warsaw. There are first rate booklet notes.'

Bruce Reader,
The Classical Reviewer

'[Martinů's] ability to get a rich sound from such a small ensemble is quite amazing. It anticipates later masterpieces like the *Fantasies symphoniques* [...]. Once again conductor Ian Hobson and the Sinfonia Varsovia [...] give us a groundbreaking account of another early Martinů discovery.'

Bob McQuiston, Classical Lost and Found



Recorded on 25 and 26 November 2014 (*Dream of the Past* and *Ballade*) and on 17 and 18 January 2017 (*Vanishing Midnight*) in the Witold Lutosławski Concert Studio (S1), Polish Radio, Warsaw

Recording engineers: Gabriela Blichartz and Lech Dudzik

Producer: Ian Hobson

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Booklet essay: Michael Crump

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BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ Early Orchestral Works, Volume Three

<i>Vanishing Midnight</i> (1922)*	45:02
❶ I Satyrs in the Grove of Cypresses	16:17
❷ II The Blue Hour	12:44
❸ III Shadows	16:01
❹ <i>Ballade (after Böcklin's picture Villa by the Sea)</i> (c. 1915)*	17:39
❺ <i>Dream of the Past</i> (1920)	13:29

TT: **76:12**

Sinfonia Varsovia

Agnieszka Kopacka, piano ❹

Ian Hobson, conductor

*FIRST RECORDINGS