



David Hackbridge JOHNSON

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLUME THREE

SYMPHONY NO. 15, WHERE THE WIND IS BORN, OP. 361, NO. 3

TWO ELEGIES FOR STRINGS AND HARP, OP. 159

VALSE MÉROVINGIENNE, OP. 77A

ZIGGURATS, OP. 251

ASPENS, OP. 362

Liepāja Symphony Orchestra
Paul Mann

NATURE, POETRY, HISTORY – REFRACTIONS THROUGH MUSIC

by David Hackbridge Johnson

For this third volume of my orchestral music I have assembled a group of pieces that depart from the dark dramas of the symphonies recorded on Volumes One and Two.¹ In contrast with the abstract nature of those narratives, here are pieces that admit a variety of external influences: from nature, from poetry, from history – the personal refracted through experience of the external world, if you like.

Ziggurats, Op. 251

In a superficial sense *Aspens*, Op. 362 [1], and *Ziggurats*, Op. 251 [2], the two of them composed in 2017, are both nature or landscape pieces. The latter might be heard as a meditation on Shelley's *Ozymandias*, although, like the poet, I can't claim to have stood in the desert to witness 'the lone and level sands' stretching far away. A 'study of desolated sonority' could serve as a subtitle. Into the mental stew of composing went some of the quiet but chilling disquisitions on decay by the German writer W. G. Sebald, not least that which concludes *The Rings of Saturn*, part-novel, part-psychogeographical travelogue, where the souls of the dead dare not catch 'a last glimpse of the land being lost for ever', lest they become distracted from their journey to the afterlife.² Sebald's walking of landscapes, both actual and imaginary, has always interested me; he renders landscape in a way similar to Shelley, not only as an immediate experience but one that resonates

¹ Volume One, released on Toccata Classics TOCC 0393, features Symphony No. 9, Op. 295 (2012), the *Communion Antiphon* No. 14, Op. 359 (2016), and Motet No. 2, Op. 257, No. 2 (2009), and Volume Two, on TOCC 0452, the Symphony No. 10, Op. 312, No. 1 (2013), Symphony No. 13, Op. 361 No. 1 (2017), and Motet No. 6, Op. 337, No. 4 (2015); in the first Paul Mann conducted the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and in the second the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

² W. G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, The Harvill Press, London, 1998, p. 296.

with history. *Ziggurats* essays this approach in music: the massive raised structures, once the dominant buildings in Mesopotamian cities, are suggested by monolithic climaxes; the collapse of these buildings and the civilisations that raised them are made more chilling by the memory of former glories. The piece closes in muted and fading colours as if to suggest Sebald's 'land being lost forever' and the journeying of his souls of the dead. A superscription is appended to the score of *Ziggurats*, a poem I adapted somewhat freely from a description by Nebuchadnezzar II of the ziggurat in Babylon called Etemenanki:³

Raised high to heaven and brazen with metals and enamelled bricks,
raised high the coppered pine and fir that adorn the exalted gates;
the tower, the eternal house, the magnificence of the seven lights;
I set my hand to finish it.

Once nobly columned the porticos to echo the entry of immortal gods,
once finely wrought the coppered pine and fir of the eternal temple,
the summit kissed by the sun that ignites all tongues;
how did it come to dust?

The orchestra is smaller than for the other pieces recorded here (the woodwind section contains only an E flat clarinet and a bass clarinet, and the brass only three trombones and a tuba; there is a full complement of strings, timpani, a bass drum and a harp), but by means of texture the sound is very dense at times. The double basses provide pedal notes – two, in fact – like an unstable drone. The upper strings are locked in parallel sixths for much of their opening statement. These interval sets dominate the harmony. New structural points are heralded by the E flat clarinet – a lone voice in the wilderness. The pedal notes return to underpin a huge climax, with violins straining at the top of their register. The ending is a bleak landscape.

³ Etemenanki, once 91 metres in height, now a ruin, has been suggested as a possible source for the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis. The lines of my poem are derived from Nebuchadnezzar II and various other texts contained in R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Literature, Selected Translations*, D. Appleton and Company, New York, 1901.

Aspens, Op. 362

Aspens, Symphony No. 15 and a short piece not recorded here, *The Golden Valley*, form an informal trilogy inspired in different ways by the effects of light; light through trees, glinting on the horizon, illuminating shadow. Edward Thomas' poem 'Aspens' is a far-from-simple nature-poem about trees; the poet seems to find kinship with the aspen 'that ceaselessly, unreasonably grieves'. There is also a sense of an inhabited landscape and subsequent abandonment – except for the trees, which remain as grim memorials. The idea of being 'inspired by a poem' would not paint the whole picture of how the music came about. One night I dreamt a scene with trees swaying in the dusk as wind gathered and rattled fallen leaves. Glints of failing sun could be seen through branches; the whole scene was one of restlessness. There was music in the dream, too: D minor in mood but faulted, with melody and harmony bleeding into each other. As if to cap this *Gesamtkunsttraum*, a poem woven of these images and sounds was forming, one the words of which I failed to capture on waking. As the music was being written, I began casting around for the poem, not mine perhaps, but one that I knew existed in the *Collected Poems* of Edward Thomas. He 'gave' me the poem and the title; I've known 'Aspens' for years and perhaps it was Thomas' poem in my dream; I can't now know.⁴ During the recording sessions in Liepāja, on the Latvian coast, Martin Anderson, the founder of Toccata Classics, commented on a Sibelian quality to the music, particularly during a bleak stormy episode. In retrospect, I think perhaps both *Aspens* and *Ziggurats* show some reflection of the Finnish composer, less to do with specific sounds but rather the way that stillness and mobility act out in modes of musical expression, their antipodes being the desiccated world of *Ziggurats* and the fraught drama of *Aspens*. In *Ziggurats*, the wailing of the E flat clarinet over a bed of shifting trombones hints both at stasis and at slow but inexorable erosion; in *Aspens*, keening melodies set a sad seal on memory in an indifferent landscape.

Aspens shares with the Symphony D as a modal centre, hardly more equivocally stated in this 'forest nocturne' than it is in the Symphony. The same bleeding of textures

⁴ The full text of 'Aspens' can be found in Edward Thomas, *Collected Poems*, Faber and Faber, London, 2004, p. 84.

that tends to obscure obvious resolutions is present in both works; I prefer to keep definitive cadences in abeyance.

The leaves and night creatures of the accompaniment rustle around a yearning modal theme on violas and cellos (Ex. 1).

Ex. 1

Allegretto inquieto
♩ = 70
Violas and cellos
con sord.

The musical score for Ex. 1 consists of two staves, one for violas and one for cellos, both marked 'con sord.'. The tempo is 'Allegretto inquieto' with a quarter note equal to 70 beats per minute. The time signature is 2/2. The music is written in a modal style with a yearning quality. The first staff begins with a *ppp* dynamic and features a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure, followed by a *mp* dynamic and another triplet in the fourth measure, ending with a *p dim.* dynamic. The second staff begins with a *pp* dynamic and features a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure, followed by a *p* dynamic, a *mp* dynamic with a triplet in the third measure, and ends with a *p dim.* dynamic.

Bar 46 brings a rare thing: a strong D minor cadence (soon traduced by shifting harmonies) with a sighing phrase (prefigured in bar 16 – as in the third bar of the second line of Ex. 1) in the wind that will reappear throughout the piece (Ex. 2).

Ex. 2 gives a snapshot of my procedures (not only in this work but in many others):⁵ the harmony saturated with false relations, the fauxbourdon voicings (once heard in Dunstable, never forgotten), modal melodies, a fondness for *chiaroscuro* scoring – like painting but straight to canvas, each line coming in its own dress, not 'orchestrated' from a piano score.

At bar 119 triplets herald a storm-like section and at its climax the brass (all muted) give out flashes of frenzied movement of branch and leaf by means of semi-quaver runs. The recapitulation follows, and then Ex. 2 returns, *fortissimo*, and is sustained into a

⁵ I have to confess here that I rarely analyse my music in this way, and yet in having to do so here, I can't help but notice recurring methods which might constitute aspects of a style.

Ex. 2

Allegretto inquieto

Wind

mp *p* *mp*

Vlns. and viols.

p

Cellos (also muted trbns.)

p

4

p *mp* *p*

7

mp *p* *pp*

pp

pp

Detailed description: The score is in 3/2 time and consists of three systems. The first system (measures 1-3) features a Wind part with long, sustained notes and dynamic markings of *mp*, *p*, and *mp*. The Vlns. and viols. part plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a dynamic marking of *p*. The Cellos (also muted trbns.) part provides a steady bass accompaniment with a dynamic marking of *p*. The second system (measures 4-6) continues the Wind part with dynamics *p*, *mp*, and *p*. The Vlns. and viols. part continues its rhythmic pattern. The Cellos part continues with a dynamic marking of *p*. The third system (measures 7-9) shows the Wind part with dynamics *mp*, *p*, and *pp*. The Vlns. and viols. part has a dynamic marking of *pp*. The Cellos part has a dynamic marking of *pp*.

vision of blended light and shade – the whole orchestra like a kaleidoscope of revealed and then hidden shapes.⁶ The ending is suspense, followed by the door to the vision being emphatically shut. This work is my own favourite from among my pieces, the one where I came closest to realising in sound a confluence of many thoughts, feelings, words and landscapes.

Symphony No. 15, *Where the Wind is Born*, Op. 361, No. 3

My Symphony No. 15 follows many of the procedures of *Aspens*: the deliberate blurring of lines, the ‘hangover’ harmony from one phrase to the next, the orchestra used almost like a painter’s palette. I wrote the Symphony in 2017, shortly after coming back from Liepāja for the first time, having been captivated not only by its combination of Art Nouveau and industrial architecture but more especially by the quality of changing light, particularly near the coast, where the Baltic surges on a broad front against a tongue of white sand. On a free afternoon Paul Mann, Martin Anderson, my wife and I took a leisurely walk to the sea front, passing through Jūrmala Park on the way. I captured some of the sensations later in a journal entry (or lapsed prose-poem), giving at least a sense of what fed into the music that started up in my head more or less as we walked:

A slow walk through Jūrmala Park. Emerald grass but made mute by the shadows of trees more tightly planted than in English parks. Clouds drift – placid hands in the sky’s lap. The sun lazily masked by them so that light fills the pools of grass slowly. A cup of white wine tipped – the liquid cannot flow but pads like a bear that forgets what forest...

As we walk conversation is full of holes – the wind blows quietly to erase vital words. The wind is the verb that animates otherwise stranded nouns falling like footsteps, as if we are idly punting them along the path. This breeze forbids a sting even in the most waspish anecdotes of musicians. A solitary poet is momentarily seduced from satire. Speech is veiled to itself and listens only to the slide of feet on gravel.

⁶ In this context it might be worth mentioning those remarkable scores of Ronald Binge, made for Mantovani’s orchestra in the early 1950s; although my ‘cascading’ sound is rather more dissonant.

Freshness of serried flowers and suddenly salt. The manicured beds give way to clumps of gorse and the twisted fingers of cornus(?) and sea willow. An Aeolian harp of vigorous grasses, their greens saline-bleached. Spines arch at the sweep of a hand. Less cloud now as though parting company to show us a kaleidoscope of blues. Mediterranean sky thrown North – by ruffled stitches pinned to a darker sea. The Baltic at rest – a glass sheet that buries its roaring strength in a deceptive shimmer. Memory of storm and coastal assault.

What few tourists – and even these in a trance – games in slow motion, feet in an hourglass of sand, the dog hears its name but remains in doubt. Our first steps on the beach and we are at once, sifted. Comically faltering we give up and stare at the last clouds flying, and the vast bowl of water. A haunting of the azure.⁷ A blinding by white sand. Subsumed by the angles of a crystal landscape.

Perhaps these words and the Symphony are transcriptions of sensations; be that as it may, when I was in the process of composing, musical considerations took precedence. Unlike Symphonies Nos. 9, 10 and 13, No. 15 is elusive: gone are the combative sonata principles, gone the sense of an inner struggle; here the music is projected outwards where its material blends and glints. The first movement, ‘Drift’ [5], is made of very simple gestures: a gently throbbing rhythm that outlines a three-note figure, with elements of harmony sustained to form a residue for successive phrases. The second movement, ‘Storm’ [6], is elemental rather than personal in drama. The last movement, ‘Chorales’ [7], sets chorale themes against clouds carried over from the first. As I was writing the work, I discussed its Liepāja connections with Martin Anderson, who suggested that I might include a Latvian folksong somewhere. I toyed half-heartedly with this idea until coming across the wedding song ‘Pūt, vējiņi’ (‘Blow, Wind’) about a man who implores the wind to speed his boat so that he can meet his beloved in Kurzeme. Still thinking it only a fanciful possibility, I put the folksong right at the end of the symphony, keeping on hold the coda I already had in mind. Living with this little

⁷ I find I’ve quoted this phrase from a conversation about Mallarmé between Christopher Middleton and Marius Kociejowski: cf. Middleton’s *Palavers and A Nocturnal Journal*, Shearsman, Exeter, 2004, p. 100. For Mallarmé’s haunting cf. the last line of his 1864 poem ‘L’Azur’: ‘Je suis hanté. L’Azur! l’Azur! l’Azur! l’Azur!’, in Anthony Hartley (ed.) *Mallarmé*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1965, p. 26.

pendant for a few days convinced me that this gesture seemed to fit better than what I had originally composed; it comes out of nowhere, like a parting gesture of the wind, the notes of the folksong caught in harmonies that hint at a glass harmonica. The subtitle, 'Where the Wind is Born', is taken from the epithet by which Liepāja is known in the rest of Latvia ('the place where the wind is born'), and having experienced its multi-faceted weather systems, this label seemed a suitable name for my piece. It seems now fitting to give the Symphony a double dedication; to Martin, for his unstinting support of me and my work, and to the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra, which gave such a memorable reading of the work. I must also add that, as ever, Paul Mann has fully understood my intentions and recreated the Symphony and, indeed, all the music in this album with full intensity.

Ex. 3 gives the three-note pattern on which the Symphony is based. The winds outline this pattern by taking notes from the throbbing string figuration at the start of the Symphony (Ex. 4). Most of the first movement and much of the subsequent movements follow this procedure of selecting notes from surrounding figurations. The modality at the start is D Lydian.

Ex. 3



Ex. 4

Musical score for Ex. 4, showing the beginning of the Symphony. The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo marking of quarter note = 100. The Wind part (top staff) starts with a rest, then plays a three-note pattern (D4, E4, D4) marked *pp*, followed by a melodic line marked *mf*. The Strings part (bottom staff) starts with a rest, then plays a rhythmic figuration marked *pp*, followed by a melodic line marked *mf*. The tempo marking is *Scorrevole dolcemente*.

An octave figure is easy to spot; this particular one might be considered related to Ex. 3 by displacement (Ex. 5).

Ex. 5

Musical score for Ex. 5, featuring Violins and Basses in 4/4 time. The Violins part is marked *ff* and shows a descending scale pattern. The Basses part shows a similar pattern, likely an octave displacement of the Violins part.

A flurry of descending scales on strings heralds a new section where Ex. 5 gets taken up by the bassoons. When the throbbing string pattern of Ex. 4 re-appears, it has gained the glinting light of two flutes.

The second movement alternates between violent arpeggios in the wind that attempt to swamp the strings playing another variant of Ex. 3, and a distorted trombone chorale, no less brutal in effect. The few bars of this chorale in Ex. 6 show all three trombones secured to the mast by Ex. 3 (Ex. 6).

Ex. 6

Musical score for Ex. 6, featuring Trombones in 4/4 time. The tempo is marked *Allegro con fuoco* with a metronome marking of $\downarrow = 130$. The score is marked *ff* and shows a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and accents.

The archaic feel of the cadence suggests a parody of ancient contrapuntal techniques as practised by Ockeghem – a fascinating composer to me. The storm finally blows itself out, leaving wreckage.

In the third movement, nested among a skein of strings and trilling wind, Ex. 5 makes a return as a brass chorale. G sharp and G natural vie for modal clarification, G sharp pulling the music back into the orbit of D Lydian. At bar 38 another chorale starts, this time on four horns with subtle underpinning of bassoons and harp. The tune in the first horn seems new (Ex. 7) but its narrow set of intervals reveals Ex. 3, as if a lyrical theme is finally spun from the embryonic notes that so dominate the work.

Ex. 7

Lento
♩ = 60
1st horn (concert pitch)

p cantabile *p cantabile*

The horn tune is taken up by strings and then winds in ever-denser harmonic elaborations. Two dissonant climaxes by way of protest lead to a reprise of the brass chorale on Ex. 6 but in F, with B flat/B natural in conflict over the mode. The climax of the Symphony is in two parts: first, a full orchestral treatment of Ex. 8, and then, when this climax seems to have peaked, a further churning of ideas based on the opening material of the work; this climax caps the whole. All that appears left are wisps of figuration. The coda is a surprise: the ancient Livonian folksong known to Latvians as ‘Pūt, vējiņi’ (‘Blow, wind’) is heard in a glassy orchestration of wind, harp and cello harmonics. The words of the song are as follows, first in Livonian and then Latvian:

Pügõ, tül, ja ajā laijõ,
Ajā mīnda Kurāmõ!
Kurmõnikād minnõn tõitist
Enṡs tidarõd jovajst.

Tõitõs Tõitist, bet ist āndat,
Kitist mīnda jūojizõks,
Kitist mīnda sūr jūojizõks,
Ibiz ailijzõks ka.

Kīngan rō ma jarā jūond um,
Kīngan ibiz ailõn ma?
Īž enṡs rōdõ jūob ma krūogõs,
Īž enṡs ibīst ailõb ma.

Põlaks, pallõs, krūogõnikā,
Tūo sa vōltõ vōlga pāl!
Tulāb sigž ja kazāb vōddõrz,
Ma sin gūodig aizmaksāb.

Tulāb sigž, ma vōtāb nāista,
Kutsūb sinda kōznigiz,
Jūom kuolm pāuvõ kōznigidi,
Panūksnikād daṡtsõgõd.

*Pūt, vējiņi, dzen laiviņu,
Aizdzen mani Kurzemē.
Kurzemniece man solija
Sav' meitiņu malējiņ'.*

*Solīt sola, bet nedeva,
Teic man lielu dzērājiņ',
Teic man lielu dzērājiņu,
Kumeliņa skrējējiņ'.*

*Kuru krogu es izdzēru,
Kam noskrēju kumeliņ'?
Pats par savu naudu dzēru,
Pats skrēj' savu kumeliņ'.*

*Pats paņēmu līgaviņu,
Tēvam, mātei nezinot.
Pūt, vējiņi, nostājiesi,
Ļauj ievāmi noziedēt,*

*Jājat, tautas, pagaidati,
Ļauj at pūru pielocīt.
Pūt, vējiņi, dzen laiviņu,
Aizdzen mani Kurzemē.*

Blow, wind, push my boat:
Push me home to Kurzeme.
A woman from Kurzeme
promised to me
Her little daughter, the
milling girl.

She promised me, but did not
give her,
She told me that I was a big
drunk.
She told me that I was a big
drunk,
And also a pony racer.

Which bar did I empty out?
Whose pony did I race?
I drank with my own money,
I raced my own pony.

I married my own bride,
Without father and mother
knowing.
Blow, wind, push my boat,
Push me home to Kurzeme.

Ex. 8 gives the melody as it would normally be sung.

Ex. 8



As I remarked above, the quotation of the song serves as an *envoi* that comes from nowhere; it sets a seal on one person's reaction (in music) to the atmosphere of the city. The presence of the sea in the folksong and the importance of the sea as a source of inspiration for me are a happy coincidence.

There's another coincidence, perhaps this time a less happy one, in the history behind the folksong, one of which I was entirely unaware when I was composing the work. The form in which modern-day Latvians know the song is, in fact, a translation from Livonian, one of several languages from the Baltic region that are now extinct.⁸ Historically, the Livonians inhabited the cape that extends north from a line between Liepāja and Riga, the present-day capital of Latvia; over the course of the centuries, their numbers dwindled from an estimated 30,000 in the Middle Ages to only a few hundred at the beginning of the twentieth century, and their final death-knell was sounded when the Soviets militarised the coastline after the Second World War, denying the few remaining Livonians – a sea people – access to their lands and their traditional livelihoods. The Latvian version of the song began to attract attention with an arrangement made in 1884 by the first Latvian classical composer, Andrejs Jurjāns (1856–1922), that was soon being sung in choral festivals and acquired the status of an unofficial national anthem during the periods of occupation in the following century.

I freely confess that this back-story is one that I discovered only serendipitously, some time after composing the Symphony, but I am happy to let the independence of spirit and sense of loss predicated in the words of the folksong resonate as a further layer of meaning in the music.

Two Elegies for Strings and Harp, Op. 159

The *Two Elegies for Strings and Harp*, Op. 159, was one of the first pieces I wrote (in 2005) after a long period of bereavement. The first, the austere 'Locrian Ground' [3], uses the mode from B to B, only departing from this note set as Purcellian dissonance suggested itself. 'Semper Dolens' [4], takes its name from 'Semper Dowland, semper

⁸ The last individual said to have grown up speaking Livonian monolingually died in 2013.

dolens,' the epithet given to John Dowland; there is more than a hint of his song 'Flow, my Tears' in the piece, which is in effect a small set of variations.

The Locrian ground itself is given in Ex. 9.

Ex. 9

Quite slow
♩ = 50

Harp

pp

The violins and violas build their melodies over this mournful step with increasing elaboration. Again, the provenance is early English music, Purcell especially.

In 'Semper Dolens' a seething chromaticism gets things under way. There then follows a melody that has as its incipit Dowland's song, 'Flow, my tears' (Ex. 10(a)), which is then modified (Ex. 10(b)).

Ex. 10

(a)

violins taking up the quavers as the violas play the melody; verse 4 puts the lower strings through a filter of flats to darken the mood; and verse 5 is a peroration. All that remains is the chromatic introduction which acts as a coda – but this time salted by being at a much higher pitch.

Valse Mérovingienne, Op. 77a

Valse Mérovingienne [8] is the only surviving material from a discarded ballet, *Childeric's Dream*, and dates from a period when I was fascinated by the Merovingian dynasty. Having been dethroned by Pope Zachery at the request of Pepin, Mayor of Paris, Childeric III, the last of the Merovingians, dreams of the long-gone glories of his lineage, only to awaken to a much harsher reality: his effective house-arrest in the monastery of Saint-Bertin. Other numbers of the ballet existed at one time but have been destroyed; they included a 'March of Papal Nuncios', 'Adage of the Ghost Kings' and 'The Scissors Dance' (a comic scene during which the hapless ex-monarch receives his tonsure). A different ballet on the Merovingians does exist, one that I wrote around the same time (2000): *Bistea Neptuni Quinotaurus Similis* ('The Beast of Neptune which Resembles a Quinotaur'¹⁰), Op. 77. This ballet seemed to 'cancel out' the classically conceived *Childeric's Dream*, its score being atonal and of an unusual instrumentation, including massed percussion, keyboards and three coloratura soloists. By contrast, the *Valse Mérovingienne* is in A minor with a trio in F sharp minor. The orchestra is quite standard, apart from a jarring moment near the end where a football rattle and a whistle rouse Childeric from his reverie of happier times. Although sketched in 2000, the full score of the *Valse* was made in 2017. The first theme (Ex. 11) gives a flavour of the whole. The many passing dissonances spice up a clear tonality.

¹⁰ Perhaps this isn't the place to reflect at length on the Quinotaur (the bull with five horns) and yet, as Fredegar relates in his seventh-century Chronicle, it was this sea creature that raped the wife of the Frankish king, Chlodio, and the resulting child, Meroveus, gave his name to the ensuing dynasty; cf. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Fredegar and the History of France', in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, The John Rylands University Library*, Manchester, 1958, p. 540.

Ex. 11

Allegretto
♩ = 140

p cantabile
1st vlns.

2nd vlns./vlas. pizz.
Cello/bass pizz.

pp

mf *p arco* *mf*

mf *p* *mf*

The musical score is for a string ensemble. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a staff for the 1st violins (marked *p cantabile*) and a staff for the 2nd violins/violas and cello/bass (marked *pizz.*). The second system includes a staff for the 1st violins and a staff for the 2nd violins/violas and cello/bass. The tempo is *Allegretto* at 140 beats per minute. The score features various dynamics including *pp*, *mf*, and *p arco*.

Paul Mann is a regular guest conductor with many orchestras throughout Europe, the USA, Australia and the Far East. His work as chief conductor of the Odense Symphony Orchestra in Denmark achieved considerable critical success, particularly in the symphonies of Beethoven, Elgar, Mahler, Schumann and Shostakovich; with it he made numerous recordings of a wide range of repertoire, for such labels as Bridge, DaCapo and EMI.

He first came to international attention as winner of the first prize in the 1998 Donatella Flick Conducting Competition, as a result of which he was also appointed assistant conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra. He made his LSO debut shortly afterwards, and subsequently collaborated regularly with the Orchestra, both in the concert hall and recording studio. Special projects with the LSO included the Duke Ellington Centenary Concert at the Barbican Hall with Wynton Marsalis, and a famous collaboration with the legendary rock group Deep Purple in two widely acclaimed performances of Jon Lord's *Concerto for Group and Orchestra* at the Royal Albert Hall, the live DVD and CD of which remain international bestsellers. Among his more recent recordings is the first-ever studio account of Lord's *Concerto*, with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, in collaboration with Jon Lord himself and a star-studded

cast of soloists, and the live recording of *Celebrating Jon Lord*, a special concert which took place at the Royal Albert Hall in April 2014 with an all-star cast paying tribute to the late composer.

This is his fourteenth recording for Toccata Classics. The first featured the orchestral music of Leif Solberg (TOCC 0260) and the second, third and fifth (TOCC 0262, 0263 and 0299) presented the complete orchestral music of the Scottish Romantic Charles O'Brien (1882–1968). The first two volumes of the complete orchestral music of Henry Cotter Nixon (1842–1907) appeared on TOCC 0372 and 0373; a third and final volume is in preparation (TOCC 0374). An album of orchestral works by Josef Schelb was released on TOCC 0426.

Paul Mann is curating, as well as conducting, a series of new works for string orchestra, *Music for My Love*, all written in memory of Yodit Tekle, the partner of Martin Anderson, founder of Toccata Classics. The first volume (TOCC 0333) featured music by Brahms (arranged by Ragnar Söderlind), Maddalena Casulana (arr. Colin Matthews), Brett Dean, Steve Elcock, Andrew Ford, Robin Holloway, Mihkel Kerem, Jon Lord (arr. Paul Mann), John Pickard, Poul Ruders and Ragnar Söderlind himself. The second volume presented music by Nicolas Bacri, Ronald Corp, Wim Hautekiet, Sean Hickey, John Kinsella, David Matthews, Gerard Schurmann, Phillip Ramey, Gregory Rose, José Serebrier, Robin Walker and Richard Whilds (TOCC 0370). A third volume (TOCC 0504), with music by Michael Csányi-Wills, David Braid, Martin Georgiev, Adam Gorb, Raymond Head, Ian Hobson, David Hackbridge Johnson, Robert Matthew-Walker, Lloyd Moore, Rodney Newton and Dana Paul Perna, is in preparation.

With Toccata Classics he has embarked on a series devoted to the music of contemporary British symphonists, recording the Ninth (TOCC 0393) and Tenth and Thirteenth (TOCC 0452) Symphonies of David Hackbridge Johnson and the Third by Steve Elcock (TOCC 0400), each accompanied by smaller works, as well as the Symphonies Nos. 1 and 4 and tone-poem *Distant Nebulae* by Rodney Newton (TOCC 0459).



Photograph: Xiaowei Lin

The **Liepāja Symphony Orchestra** – formerly also known as The Amber Sound Orchestra – is the oldest symphonic ensemble in the Baltic States: it was founded in 1881 by Hanss Hohapfel, who also served as its conductor. The orchestral strength in those early days was 37 musicians, joined in the summers by guest players from Germany and Poland. With time both the structure and professionalism of the Orchestra grew, as did its standing in the eyes of the general public.

After World War II the LSO recommenced its activities in 1947, under the wings of the Liepāja Music School, and was conducted for the next forty years by the director of the School, Valdis Vikmanis. A new chapter in the life of the Orchestra began at the end of 1986, when it was granted the status of a professional symphony orchestra, becoming only the second in Latvia. That formal recognition was made possible by the efforts of two conductors, Laimonis Trubs (who worked with the LSO from 1986 to 1996) and Jekabs Ozolins (active with the LSO from 1987 to 2008).

The first artistic director of the LSO, as well as its first chief conductor, was the Leningrad-born Mikhail Orehov, who took the ensemble to a higher level of professionalism, during his years there (1988–91). Another important period for the LSO was 1992 to 2009, when Imants Resnis was artistic director and chief conductor. He expanded the range of activities considerably: in addition to regular concerts in Riga, Liepāja and other Latvian cities, the Orchestra also went on frequent tours abroad, playing in Germany, Great Britain, Malaysia, Spain, Sweden and elsewhere. During this period a number of important recordings were made, some of them during live appearances on Latvian radio and television.

In the early days of the LSO Valdis Vikmanis began a series of summer concerts, which always sold out, and so, in 2010, the festival ‘Liepāja Summer’ was launched, to renew that tradition of a century before. As well as orchestral performances (some of them in the open air), the festival includes sacred and chamber music.

The Liepāja Symphony Orchestra holds a special place in the national cultural life of Latvia. It received the highest national music award, the ‘Great Music Award’, in 2006, as well as the Latvian Recordings Award in the years 1998, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2006 and 2008. In 2010 the Liepāja Symphony Amber Sound Orchestra was granted the status of national orchestra.

This is the eighth of a series of recordings planned with Toccata Classics. The first featured Paul Mann conducting the orchestral music of the Norwegian composer Leif Solberg (TOCC 0260) and the next three brought Volumes One, Two and Three of the complete orchestral music of Charles O’Brien (TOCC 0262, 0263 and 0299). The fifth release featured music by the German composer Josef Schelb (TOCC 0426), conducted again by Paul Mann, and

the sixth brought the Symphonies Nos. 17 and 18 of the Finnish composer Frídrieh Bruk (rocc 0455), conducted by Maris Kupčs. The seventh album (rocc 0480), in which the LSO was conducted by John Gibbons, presented the Fourth and Eighth Symphonies, *Divertimento in D* and *Variations on a Scottish Theme* by the English-born, Scottish-based William Wordsworth, and a ninth project, also featuring Wordsworth's music, is now in preparation.





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