



Arnold ROSNER

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLUME TWO

FIVE KO-ANS FOR ORCHESTRA, OP. 65

THE PARABLE OF THE LAW, OP. 97

UNRAVELING DANCES, OP. 122

Christopher Burchett, baritone
London Philharmonic Orchestra
Nick Palmer

FIRST RECORDINGS

ARNOLD ROSNER: ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLUME TWO

by Walter Simmons

During his fifty-year compositional career, the American composer Arnold Rosner (1945–2013) produced a body of work that combined diverse influences into a powerful, distinctly personal musical voice. His catalogue comprises compositions in nearly every genre, including three operas, eight symphonies, numerous works for orchestra and wind band, several large-scale choral works and many chamber, solo and vocal pieces.

Rosner's musical language was founded upon the harmonic and rhythmic devices of the polyphonic music of the Renaissance and early Baroque periods. These roots can be found, in varying degrees, in virtually all his music. To them he added a free triadicism and exotic modalities, intensified in some works by more contemporary harmonic dissonance, combining this language with the lavish orchestration and emotional drama of late-nineteenth-century Romanticism. What makes Rosner's music worthy of serious consideration, rather than being merely an integration of earlier styles, is the way he shaped his unusual language to embrace an enormous expressive range – far broader than one might imagine possible – from serene beauty to violent rage. The works featured on this recording reveal – more, perhaps, than any previous recording of his music – the vast range of expression achieved by his remarkable creative personality. And despite its fusion of these seemingly incongruous elements, most of his music is readily accessible even to untutored listeners.

Born in New York City on 8 November 1945, Rosner took piano lessons as a boy, and soon developed a voracious interest in classical music. Some sounds in particular appealed to him – juxtapositions of major and minor triads, as well as

modal melodies – and before long he was working these sounds into music of his own. His family, fully aware of the remote prospects of success offered by a career in the composition of classical music, encouraged him to pursue more practical endeavours, and so he attended the Bronx High School of Science, whence he graduated at the age of fifteen, and then New York University with a major in mathematics. But all the while he was composing: sonatas, symphonies, concertos and more – not that anyone was especially interested in hearing the fruits of his labours. His composer-heroes at the time were Hovhaness, Vaughan Williams and Nielsen, and their influence is evident in much of his earlier creative work.

Graduating from NYU before he turned twenty, Rosner then spent a year at the Belfer Graduate School of Science, continuing his studies in mathematics. But, no longer able to resist the inner drive to pursue musical composition as his primary activity, he entered the University of Buffalo the following September, with a major in composition. He took this step in 1966, when serialism was the dominant style in university music departments, and young composers were often coerced, directly or indirectly, into adopting it. Rosner often recounted how the Buffalo faculty dismissed his creative efforts with varying degrees of contempt. Later, in describing his educational experience there, he would say that he ‘learned almost nothing’ from these pedants. Although most of his peers capitulated to the pressure to embrace the style *du jour*, Rosner was adamantly opposed to serialism and stubbornly refused to accept a view of music that violated his most fervently held artistic values. And so, in response, his department repeatedly rejected the large orchestral work he had submitted as his dissertation. Realising that they would never accept the kind of music he considered meaningful, he gave up the notion of a doctorate in composition, and decided instead to pursue a degree in music theory, with a dissertation – the first ever – on the music of Alan Hovhaness. He completed this task successfully, and in the process became the first recipient of a doctorate in music granted by the State University of New York.

He devoted the rest of his life to writing the music that represented his personal aesthetic ideals, supporting himself through academic positions at colleges in and around the New York City area. His most enduring position was as Professor of Music

at Kingsborough Community College (of the City University of New York); he held it for thirty years, until his death. During the course of his compositional career, his musical language gradually expanded from its idiosyncratic and intuitive beginnings, as the mature works on this recording illustrate. Arnold Rosner died in Brooklyn, in 2013, on his 68th birthday.

Rosner composed his *Five Ko-ans for Orchestra*, Op. 65, in 1976, during what was probably the most fruitful period of his creative life, and it is one of his most important works. A note in the score, provided by Rosner, defines the Zen concept of *Ko-an* as a ‘riddle, action, remark, or dialogue not comprehensible by rational understanding but conducive to intense or prolonged meditation (literally, from Chinese Kung-an, “public statement”).’ The five movements that comprise the work may thus be viewed as musical statements, the meanings of which may be inferred and understood via intuitive perception – and they also serve as representations of five aspects of Rosner’s compositional personality. The first, ‘Music of Changes’ [1], acts as both an introduction to and a summary of the work, as its eight minutes feature a contrasting array of psychological and musical visions: an eerie evocation of abject terror, ethereal serenity, tightly interwoven polyphony of mediaeval martial cast, unearthly inscrutability, delicate folk-like simplicity, swirling gusts of chaos from which emerge a stern chorale, solemn reflection and an aggressive, frantic onslaught of vigorous activity, finally concluding in sombre mystery. ‘Ricercares’ [2] is based on a polyphonic style that flourished during the early 1600s. This movement, evocatively spiritual in character, is closest to the origins of Rosner’s style. ‘Ostinato’ (literally, ‘obstinate’) [3] is built around a consistent, percussively emphatic pattern of crotchets (quarter-notes) in quintuple metre. ‘Music of Stillness’ [4] is a remarkable oasis of mysterious tranquillity, centring on an enigmatic phrase that recurs throughout the movement, initially stated by the flute and vibraphone. ‘Isorhythmic Motet’ [5] is based on a technique used in mediaeval music which Rosner adapted to his aesthetic requirements in several works, such as his Fourth String Quartet, Op. 56 (1972), and his Second Cello Sonata, Op. 89 (1990).¹ In

¹ Rosner’s Cello Sonata No. 2 is recorded by Maxine Neuman, cello, and Margaret Kampmeier, piano, as part of an album of Rosner’s chamber music, released on Toccata Classics TOCC 0408.

essence, his adaptation of the isorhythmic motet comprises variations on a recurrent rhythmic pattern that embraces all the instruments. The rhythms remain unchanged, while the dynamics, pitches and resulting harmony are altered freely. In this movement the isorhythmic pattern is thirteen bars long, and is repeated seven times.

Unraveling Dances, Op. 122 [6], was Rosner's final orchestral work, composed in 2007. It is almost unique in his output – a high-spirited orchestral showpiece. The distinguished composer Carson Cooman, who was Rosner's chosen archivist, provided a note that appears in the score:

The inspiration for *Unraveling Dances* came from both the slow-tempo Spanish/Latin dance of the bolero and Rosner's own experience with heart arrhythmia. He initially conceived of the idea of an arrhythmic or 'mad' bolero in which the basic pulse is not kept completely steady but rather is subjected to a variety of transformations throughout. In the resulting work, the underlying pulse never changes, but the rhythmic groupings continue to get longer and longer, beginning in bars of $\frac{6}{8}$ and ending in bars of $\frac{7}{4}$.

That is, there are eleven variations of the theme, the metre of each successive variation one quaver (eighth-note) longer than the previous one. Through modal changes, the character of the variations embraces many of Rosner's favourite compositional inflections, including suggestions of the Renaissance and early Baroque and of Middle-Eastern music, finally introducing a fragment of Ravel's own *Bolero*. Much like that piece,

the overall progression of the work moves from the quiet stasis of the beginning to the fierce orchestral grandeur of the end. The title has several layers of meaning: 1) the music unravels with the extra 8th-notes added from one variation to the next; 2) any group of dancers would go crazy if trying to actually dance to it (the composer imagined them 'unraveling their clothes'); 3) the embedded reference to Ravel, composer of the most famous of orchestral boleros.

In 1993 Rosner composed a setting for baritone and orchestra of a portion of Franz Kafka's enigmatic 1915 novel, *The Trial*, known as 'Before the Law'. Rosner's work is entitled *The Parable of the Law*, Op. 97 [7], and depicts the quintessentially

'Kafka-esque' plight of a man who spends years in senseless futility, awaiting entry to 'the Law'. Though the entry door is intended only for him, he is never admitted, until it is finally closed forever. Rosner's setting captures the futile persistence displayed by the man as he attempts to overcome the senseless refusal of the doorkeeper. The baritone soloist recounts most of the story with the eerily impersonal detachment so characteristic of Kafka's terrifying tableaux. The work develops several motifs that are stated near the outset. Shortly after the beginning, the primary four-note motif is introduced with subtlety by the lower instruments, followed a few bars later by the horn, then by the clarinet. This motif dominates the work, which maintains a mood of ominous, grim foreboding throughout.

The Parable of the Law **Franz Kafka²**

Before the Law there stands a doorkeeper. To this doorkeeper there comes a man from the country who begs for admittance unto the Law. But then the doorkeeper says that he cannot admit the man at the present time. The man, on reflection, asks if he will be allowed, then, to enter later on. 'It is possible,' says the doorkeeper, 'but not at the present time.' Since the door leading into the Law stands open as usual and the doorkeeper steps to one side the man bends down to look; the man bends down to peer into the entrance and when the doorkeeper sees that he laughs and says: 'If you're so strongly tempted, just try to get inside without permission. But note that I am powerful. And I am only the lowliest doorkeeper! From hall to hall, keepers stand at every door, one more powerful than the other. And the sight of the third man is already more than even I can stand.' These are difficulties which the man from the country has not expected to meet. The Law he thinks should be accessible to any man and at all times, but when he looks more closely at the doorkeeper he decides that he had better wait until he gets permission to enter. The doorkeeper gives him a stool and lets him sit down at the side of the door. There he sits waiting for days and years. He makes many attempts to be allowed to enter and wearies the doorkeeper with his importunity. The doorkeeper often engages him in brief conversation asking him

² The translator is unknown: the text is reproduced here as given in Rosner's score.

about his home and other matters but these questions are put quite impersonally as great men put questions, and they always conclude with the statement that the man cannot be allowed to enter yet. The man, who has equipped himself with many things for his journey, parts with everything he has, however valuable, in the hope of bribing the doorkeeper. The doorkeeper accepts it all, saying, however, as he takes each gift, 'I take this only to keep you from feeling that you've left something undone.' During all these long years the man watches the doorkeeper almost incessantly. He forgets about all the other doorkeepers and this one seems to him the only barrier between himself and the Law. In the first years he curses his evil fate aloud; later, as he grows older and as he grows childish, he only mutters to himself. Finally his eyes grow dim, and he does not know whether the world is really darkening around him or whether his eyes are only deceiving him. But in the darkness he can now perceive a radiance streaming inextinguishably out from the door of the Law. Now his life is drawing to a close. Before he dies, all that he has experienced during the whole time of his sojourn condenses into one question which he has never yet put to the doorkeeper. He beckons the doorkeeper, since he can no longer raise his stiffening body. The doorkeeper has to bend down so as to hear him, for the difference in size between them has increased very much to the man's disadvantage. 'What do you want to know now?' asks the doorkeeper. 'You are insatiable.' 'Everyone strives to attain the Law,' answers the man. 'How does it come about then that in all these years no one has come, no one has come seeking admittance but me?' The doorkeeper perceives that the man is nearing his end and that his hearing is failing, and so he bellows in his ear: 'No one but you could gain admittance through this door, since this door was intended for you, and only for you. I am now going to shut it.'

Walter Simmons, musicologist and critic, has written extensively on American composers who maintained an allegiance to traditional musical values. He is the editor of a series of books, 'Twentieth-Century Traditionalists', published by Rowman and Littlefield. He wrote the first two volumes himself (under the Scarecrow Press imprint): Voices in the Wilderness: Six American Neo-Romantic Composers (2004), which treated the lives and works of Barber, Bloch, Creston, Flagello, Giannini and Hanson, and Voices of Stone and Steel: The Music of William Schuman, Vincent Persichetti, and Peter Mennin (2011). As a staunch advocate of the music of Arnold Rosner, he is deeply familiar with much of his output; he and Rosner were close associates for more than forty years.

Christopher Burchett's rich, no-holds-barred voice and committed stagecraft have earned him a place on the stages of opera companies throughout the United States and Europe, including New York City Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, the Estates Theatre, The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Fort Worth Opera, The Holland Festival, Palm Beach Opera, Beth Morrison Projects, Chicago Opera Theater, Opera Orchestra of New York, Virginia Opera, Prototype Festival, Opera Omaha, Opera Saratoga, Eugene Opera, Indianapolis Opera, Kentucky Opera, Glimmerglass Opera and Opera Theatre of St Louis; concert performances include an appearance with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican Centre in London. *Opera News* has described him as a 'fearlessly vulnerable' performer, 'who gave an unflinchingly, heroically human performance that will linger long in the memory'. He has been a champion of new music, having created roles in fourteen world premieres to date and has also participated in the revival of several 21st-century works. His website can be found at www.christopherburchett.com.



Nick Palmer is the distinguished recipient of the Helen M. Thompson Award as America's most outstanding young music director. He is currently the music director of the Lafayette Symphony in Indiana, North Charleston Pops in South Carolina and the 'Evening under the Stars' music festival in Massachusetts; the principal pops conductor of the Altoona Symphony in Philadelphia; and the distinguished conductor in residence at Kentucky Wesleyan College. In addition, he has conducted the Detroit, Greenville, Huntsville, Jacksonville, Nashville, Salt Lake, Santa Barbara, Springfield, Tucson and Virginia Symphonies, the Boulder and Naples Philharmonics, the Chicago Sinfonietta, the Louisville Orchestra and other orchestras across the USA. Nick Palmer has also been



active in Europe, where he has conducted the Europa Philharmonie, the Milano Classico Orchestra and the West Bohemia and Lausanne Symphony Orchestras, and in South America and Mexico, where he has conducted the San Remo Symphony, the National Orchestra of Bolivia, the Sophia Symphony, Sinaloa (OSSLA), the Monterrey (UANL) Symphony in Mexico and the Medellín (EAFIT) Symphony in Colombia.

Recognised today as one of the finest orchestras on the international stage, the **London Philharmonic Orchestra** was founded in 1932 by Sir Thomas Beecham. Since then, its Principal Conductors have included Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. In 2017 Vladimir Jurowski celebrated his tenth anniversary as the Orchestra's Principal Conductor.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra has been performing at the Royal Festival Hall in the Southbank Centre since it opened in 1951, becoming Resident Orchestra in 1992. It also has flourishing residencies in Brighton and Eastbourne, and performs regularly around the UK. Each summer it plays for Glyndebourne Festival Opera, where it has been Resident Symphony Orchestra for over 50 years. The Orchestra also regularly tours abroad.

In summer 2012 the Orchestra performed as part of The Queen's Diamond Jubilee Pageant on the River Thames, and was also chosen to record all the world's national anthems for the London 2012 Olympics.

The Orchestra broadcasts regularly on television and radio, and has recorded soundtracks for numerous blockbuster films, including the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. It has made many distinguished recordings over the past eight decades and in 2005 began releasing live, studio and archive recordings on its own CD label.

Its website can be found at lpo.org.uk; its Facebook page is at facebook.com/londonphilharmonicorchestra; and its Twitter feed is twitter.com/LPOrchestra

First violins

Kevin Lin
Vesselin Gellef
Ji-Hyun Lee
Geoffrey Lynn
Sarah Streatfeild
Catherine Craig

Yang Zhang
Rebecca Shorrock
Non Peters
Jeff Moore
Lasma Taimina
Alice Hall
Jacqueline Roche

Rasa Zukauskaitė
Eleanor Bartlett

Second violins

Alison Kelly
Joseph Maher
Fiona Higham

Harry Kerr
Sheila Law
Alison Strange
Rebecca Dinning
Kate Cole
Alberto Vidal
John Dickinson
Sioni Williams
Kalliopi Mitropoulou
Violas
David Quiggle
Laura Vallejo
Richard Cookson
Daniel Cornford
Stanislav Popov
Naomi Holt
Martin Fenn
Susanne Martens
Isabel Pereira
Fay Sweet
Cellos
Josephine Knight
Elisabeth Wiklander
Santiago Carvalho
David Lale
Sue Sutherley
Jane Lindsay
Leo Melvin
Alex Barnes
Helen Rathbone
Philip Taylor
Tom Roff

Double basses
Tom Martin
Laurence Lovelle
Charlotte Kerbegian
Laura Murphy
Jakub Cywinski
Samuel Rice
Flutes
Joshua Batty
Ian Mullin
Stewart McIlwham
Piccolo
Stewart McIlwham
Oboes
Alun Darbyshire
Jennifer Brittlebank
Cor anglais
Ilid Jones
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Anthony Pike
Thomas Watmough
Tom Lessels
Bassoons
Simon Estell
Emma Harding
Angharad Thomas
Horns
David Pyatt
Martin Hobbs
Stephen Nicholls
Gareth Mollison

Adam Howcroft
Trumpets
Philippe Schartz
Anne McAneney
David Hilton
Paul Beniston
Trombone
Mark Templeton
David Whitehouse
Bass trombone
Lyndon Meredith
Tuba
Lee Tsarmaklis
Timpani
Simon Carrington
Percussion
Andrew Barclay
Oliver Yates
Keith Millar
Karen Hutt
Feargus Brennan
Harp
Sue Blair
Stephanie Beck
Piano
Catherine Edwards



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Producer: Walter Simmons

All music available from the Estate of Arnold Rosner; for further information,
visit www.ArnoldRosnerMusic.com.

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ARNOLD ROSNER Orchestral Music, Volume Two

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