

## William WORDSWORTH

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLUME ONE SYMPHONY NO. 8, PAX HOMINIBUS, OP. 117 VARIATIONS ON A SCOTTISH THEME, OP. 72 SYMPHONY NO. 4 IN E FLAT, OP. 54 DIVERTIMENTO IN D, OP. 58

> Liepāja Symphony Orchestra John Gibbons

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLUME ONE

by Paul Conway

In a personal tribute to William Wordsworth (1908–88), the Rev. Campbell M. Maclean, a close friend of the composer, offered this character portrait:

Bill was a hard man to know. He was chronically shy, reticent and impenetrably private. His taciturnity was such as to inhibit conversation. The most he could contribute was a laconic phrase or, more likely, a curt adverb, the most characteristic of which was 'possibly'.'

The Rev. Maclean continues with a telling description of Wordsworth's reaction to the well-received premiere in March 1973 of his *Symposium*, for solo violin and orchestra, Op. 94, in Edinburgh, after which he was invited to join the performers on the platform and acknowledge an ovation:

If ever an event called for some additional celebration, say a jubilant carousal with a few select friends, here we had it. Conversation an hour later at my home:

SELF: 'I thought Leonard Friedman played the solo part superbly.'

W.W.: 'Did you?' in his dry, clipped tones.

SELF: 'There must surely be additional performances after such a convincing first.'

W.W.: 'Possibly' in his languid, posh accent.

Now is the time, I said to myself, to uncork the champagne bottle and toasts all round.

W.W.: 'Well, bed for me.'2

2 Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Rev. Campbell M. Maclean, 'William Wordsworth (1908–88)', Music Current, No. 1 (September 1988), p. 1.

This lack of self-indulgence is reflected in Wordsworth's compositions. Their distinction lies in an absence of empty rhetoric. Ironically, for someone so reticent in speech, he gave many of his works titles which suggest a form of discourse, such as *Conversation*, for two cellos and piano, Op. 74 (1962), *Dialogue*, for horn and piano, Op. 77 (1965), *Conversation Piece*, for viola and guitar, Op. 113 (1982), and the aforementioned *Symposium*. The 'discussion' involved in these scores is obviously of a musical nature, and in this sort of interaction he was a master, as evidenced most authentically by his cycle of eight symphonies and series of six string quartets.

William Brocklesby<sup>3</sup> Wordsworth, a great-great-grandson of the great Romantic poet's brother Christopher, was born in London on 17 December 1908. As he was considered too delicate a child to attend school, most of his non-musical education came from his father, a Church of England parson. His interest in music became all-consuming when he was about twelve years of age. At this time, he was receiving piano lessons from a Miss Sterry, a member of the Religious Arts Society, which used to meet at the Wordsworths' home in Hindhead, Surrey. She suggested he might enhance his musical training by studying with the composer George Oldroyd, who was choirmaster and organist at St Michael's, Croydon. Thus he became a chorister at St Michael's and, between 1921 and 1931, studied harmony, counterpoint, singing and three instruments (viola, piano and organ) with Oldroyd. At the end of this period, his first acknowledged piece, *Three Hymn Preludes* for organ, Op. 1 (1932), was published.

In 1934 he was invited to become a pupil of Sir Donald Tovey in Edinburgh. His three years of study with that eminent composer, teacher and musicologist were a result of sending his *Phantasy Sonata* for violin and piano, Op. 3 (1933), to Tovey, who, impressed by the talent displayed in the score by this young unknown, immediately agreed to receive him as a pupil. From Tovey, he acquired a respect for and command of traditional genres, though his approach to these forms was always deeply personal. Wordsworth wrote of his inspiring teacher: 'One felt one knew for the first time what words like "genius" and "greatness" really meant, when one had been in his company.'

<sup>3</sup> His mother's maiden name.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> W. B. Wordsworth, 'Tovey's Teaching', Music & Letters, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 60.

Much later, with characteristic hesitation, he was to dedicate his Symphony No. 2 'To the memory of Donald Tovey, whose understanding love of music has been an abiding inspiration'.

After leaving Edinburgh without taking a degree at the University, and being of independent means, he was able to follow his instincts and devote himself entirely to composition, producing his first large-scale works in the late 1930s. Pacifism was an essential part of his character and for several years before the outbreak of the Second World War, he was associated with the Peace Pledge Union and acted as secretary of the Hindhead Fellowship of Reconciliation Group. During this time he knew the pacifist writers Max Plowman (1883–1941) and John Middleton Murry (1889–1957) very well and also counted among his friends Nellie 'Kay' Gill, a professional violinist and musical patron who organised chamber concerts in her house next door to the Wordsworths. He always maintained that his long friendship with her much strengthened his development both as a composer and as a pacifist, and she was also perhaps something of a surrogate mother figure to him, his own mother having died when he was sixteen. It was inevitable that he should take his stand as a conscientious objector and when war came, he was consigned to work on the land, music giving way to agriculture as the primary claim on his time.

Nevertheless, after the day's farm work was done, he still took the opportunity to write music at night. In fact, the compositions dating from this period, such as the First and Second String Quartets, Opp. 16 and 20, and Symphony No. 1, Op. 23, were the first to attract critical attention, his earliest breakthrough arising when his String Quartet No. 1 won the Clements Memorial Prize in 1941. His vocal music met with less success: *The Houseless Dead*, Op. 14 (1939), a setting of D. H. Lawrence for baritone solo, chorus and orchestra, remains unperformed, and his largest work, the oratorio *Dies Domini*, Op. 18, for three soloists, chorus and large orchestra, written between 1942 and 1944 and praised by Vaughan Williams, is also still awaiting its first performance (it was rejected by the BBC for broadcast on the Third Programme and Home Service in 1960).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> In a letter dated 21 September 1960 from Harry Croft-Jackson, Chief Assistant, Music Programme Organisation, BBC, to William Wordsworth; ref. 38/M/HC-J (held in the Wordsworth archives at the Scottish Music Centre, Glasgow).

While working in Hampshire, he met Frieda Robson, also an ardent pacifist, and in 1945 they were married. After the War, he became even more prolific, and many of his earlier works were published for the first time. The next fifteen years or so were his most productive in terms of performances and recognition.

He served on the Executive Committee of the Composers' Guild of Great Britain for five years from 1955, and was elected Chairman four years later. Arising from his work with the Guild, in the spring of 1961, along with Thea Musgrave, he undertook a fortnight's tour of the Soviet Union at the invitation of the Union of Soviet Composers of Moscow, where he met, among other composers, Shostakovich and Khachaturian. During the tour he gave a speech, which began in a characteristically self-deprecating tone:

I believe I share with your most famous composer, Shostakovich, one characteristic – an extreme distaste for speaking in public. For an occasion such as this, I could wish that the floor would open and I could disappear. I could wish also that the resemblance between me and Shostakovich did not end there, but I cannot be so arrogant as to pretend that my compositions are on a level with his!

In 1961 he moved, with his family, from Hindhead to the Scottish Highlands to live at Kincraig in Inverness-shire. The view from his study window across the top of the pines to the mountains above Glen Feshie was a rich source of inspiration to him. During the course of a 'Composer's Portrait' broadcast by the BBC in July 1967, he confessed:

I have always had joy in the grander aspects of Nature – mountains, storms, spacious views, and in the ever-changing colours of the Scottish Highlands. I cannot say if there has been any change in my style of writing since we came to live in Scotland, but I would like to think that it is becoming clearer and less complicated, more direct in its expression. In fact, all the things it should not be, if one wants to be successful in the present musical fashions

In 1965 Wordsworth was appointed Regional Representative of the Composers' Guild for Scotland and (with Robert Crawford, his predecessor in that office) was largely responsible for the formation, in 1966, of a Scottish Branch of the Guild, of which he was Chairman until 1970. His social awkwardness did not extend to fellow composers, and he hosted weekends at his house for members of the Scottish Branch, among them Thomas Wilson (who became a good friend), John Maxwell Geddes, David Dorward, Robert Crawford and Shaun Dillon. As well as providing an opportunity for dealing with business matters of the Guild, they were also social affairs with walking, sightseeing, fishing and wine-making, as well as offering a chance to listen to tapes of one another's music and discuss it constructively in a supportive environment.

Apart from music, which was the focus of his life, Wordsworth enjoyed reading, especially poetry, and among his works may be numbered many settings of poems, by such writers as Walter de la Mare, William Blake and Gerald Manley Hopkins. His hobbies included gardening, golf, bee-keeping, fishing, chess and woodwork. He regarded himself as a 'handyman', making and putting up his own shelves and constructing a transistor radio with the aid of a soldering iron. He also made model steam engines in his workshop, equipped with a lathe. Gadgets were a particular passion, and one of his treasured possessions in later life was an electronic chess set.

Two deep sorrows darkened his last decades. In 1971, his elder son Tim, aged 23, was killed in a motor accident near Pitlochry on his way back to London. Though Wordsworth was devastated, he initially suffered in silence. His grief eventually found expression in two works. The first, *Adonais*, for mixed voices, Op. 97 (1974), is an imposing setting of words taken from Shelley's long poem written in memory of Keats and a moving evocation of the transience of life. The second, Symphony No. 6, *Elegiaca*, for mezzo-soprano, baritone, chorus and orchestra, Op. 102 (1977), is dedicated simply 'In memory, Tim'. This work also sets words from Shelley's 'Adonais', as well as John Donne's 'Meditation XVII' and Edna St Vincent Millais' 'Dirge without Music'; regrettably, it is still awaiting a first performance. The second blow came in 1982, when his wife Frieda died. According to Rev. Maclean, 'Bill was lost. Lovely, fresh, engaging Frieda spoke for him, managed him, decided for him. Without her, he became a bundle

of untidy clothes, a vagrant in search of dependency. In the same year as her death, Wordsworth wrote a work for string quartet, later rescored for string orchestra, which he called *Elegy for Frieda*, an eloquent love-song of enraptured, fond recollection and cherished intimacy. Ill health dogged his final years and his creativity all but dried up before his death in Kingussie on 10 March 1988, aged 79.

William Wordsworth's large and varied output embraces many forms, including orchestral, chamber and instrumental music, songs and music for radio. His scores are consummately well crafted and draw their inspiration from the wellsprings of the mainstream rather than any shallow side-channels. Both in inspiration and content, his music displays a rugged individuality mirroring his physical environment, and an integrity that isolated him from the influence of the latest musical trends. He was nonetheless a man of his time and if the music demanded it, he would unhesitatingly include quarter-tones and electronic tape, for example, in his works. There are no sensational tricks, no compromises to fashion, and his is generally a quieter, more contemplative voice than that of his contemporaries. Various influences such as Sibelius, Bartók, Nielsen and, to a lesser extent, Bax and Vaughan Williams may be detected fleetingly in some of his writing, but he went his own way and the best of his music, of which there is a significant amount, is passionate, tough, direct and sincere.

Of all the genres tackled by Wordsworth the symphony is the one he returned to most often and the one with which his name became most closely associated. For a first essay in the form, his Symphony No. 1 (1944)<sup>7</sup> is substantial and powerful; it was described by Michael Kennedy as having the 'overtones of war or spiritual strife.' Symphony No. 2, Op. 34 (1948), won first prize in the 1950 Edinburgh International Festival competition for a new symphony and was first performed at the opening concert of the Festival the following year by the London Philharmonic under Sir Adrian Boult. Symphony No. 3, Op. 48 (1951), made its debut at the 1953 Cheltenham Festival with the Hallé Orchestra

<sup>6</sup> Maclean, loc. cit., p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Recorded on Lyrita REAM.1121.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Michael Kennedy, 'William Wordsworth and his Contemporaries', *The Listener*, 20 June 1963, p. 1053.

and Sir John Barbirolli, who conducted it no fewer than eight times in its first year, including a first London performance at the Proms.<sup>9</sup>

Partly in recognition of this sustained advocacy of his music, Wordsworth dedicated his **Symphony No. 4 in E flat, Op. 54** (1953), 'in affectionate admiration' to Sir John Barbirolli and the Hallé Orchestra, who premiered the work at the Edinburgh Festival in September 1954. The forces required are two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, two tenor trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion (three or four players: gong, cymbal, bass drum, side-drum, tenor drum, xylophone) and strings.

The challenge of producing a continuous symphonic work with constantly evolving material appears to have had a liberating effect on Wordsworth and he responded with one of his most dramatic and spontaneous-sounding pieces. Bold and colourful, the orchestral writing includes a number of key solo passages, notably for flute and bassoon. In the vigorous central section of the score Wordsworth emancipates the xylophone. One wonders whether the winding ostinato passages in strings and woodwind in the central section, which have a Sibelian breadth, constitute a gesture calculated to win favour with Barbirolli, a doughty champion of the Finnish master. If the nods to Elgar and Sibelius in the Symphony were included in the hope that Sir John would take the work into his repertoire, they were unsuccessful. In fact, according to Wordsworth, after the Edinburgh premiere Barbirolli never performed it again because he found a particular passage in  $\frac{10}{10}$  difficult to conduct. 10

The Symphony unfolds in a single, unbroken movement 4 which divides into clearly defined sections, a structure the composer would use again in his Seventh Symphony, *Cosmos*, Op. 107 (1980). In the *Poco adagio* slow introduction, an expressive rising and falling theme on flute is answered and expanded by the double bass. This idea foreshadows much that is to come; the chord of E flat clashing against the first phrase is also prophetic. Further material germane to the rest of the Symphony appears, including rhythmic figures, firstly on muted trombones and then on timpani. Wordsworth

 $<sup>^{\</sup>rm 9}$  Symphonies Nos. 2 and 3 have been recorded by Lyrita (srcd.207).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> John Dodds, 'William Wordsworth: A 75th Birthday Tribute', BMS Journal, Vol. 5, p. 74.

establishes his symphonic credentials in this brief prefatory section, setting out the material that fuels the rest of the work and, in the process, unifying the whole score. As he once remarked, 'I like the long-term, that is, doing something in one place that has consequences a long time later on.'11

Two crisp, sharply uttered chords emphasising the key of E flat announce the arrival of the main Allegro, which is composed of two contrasted main subjects. The first is a brisk, purposeful tune introduced by first violins and flutes derived from the inaugural flute theme. Eventually the contrasting second subject appears, introduced by strings and woodwind. In a rolling  $^6_4$  time, this memorable theme is characterful and yet gentler in mood than the first subject, and less tense in harmony. It sounds almost self-consciously Elgarian and perhaps, bearing in mind the dedication, fashioned specifically to appeal to Barbirolli, a passionate exponent of Elgar's music. A falling phrase a few bars further on is also significant. Shortly, through divided and widely spaced tremolando strings, a trumpet recalls the primary theme of the Symphony in the dominant key of B flat and the expository first section of the Symphony is ended.

There follows directly an extended march-like section. The insistent rhythm emanating from timpani and double basses consists of two longer beats followed by two shorter ones. Over them the xylophone gives out an insistent five-bar phrase, and the strings swing into an angular, long-limbed tune. This theme and the xylophone phrase are worked up to a powerful climax. Then, after the xylophone has repeated eight times a little three-note figure, the music goes into reverse. Two short beats are now followed by two long ones. The trombones, followed by the trumpets, give out an ascending five-note figure which is the back-to-front version of the xylophone phrase at the beginning of the section. Before long, under *tremolandi* in the upper strings, the cellos and basses deliver a back-to-front version of the angular theme first heard on strings. The music then quietens, the themes appearing to fragment, and the slow section begins.

In this *Poco adagio* passage a flute recalls the opening theme. A muted solo horn offers a variant but still with a clash of harmony behind. A few bars later it is the flute,

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

higher in its compass, which establishes against an unequivocal C major the new version of the theme that now takes charge, in  $\frac{5}{8}$  time. The texture becomes more complex, and the rolling secondary theme and the falling figure which succeeded it float back before two abrupt E flat chords announce the arrival of the closing section.

This final part is synoptic in nature, recapitulating all the main ideas of the Symphony. It begins with a scurrying version of the brisk theme which launched the main *Allegro* section. After a turbulent episode, partly reminiscent of the march, there is a broad climax through which the trumpet and others proclaim the principal theme in slow time. The second subject comes back emphatically in E flat minor. There is a reminder of the  $\frac{5}{8}$  slow section and then both principal themes are heard, propelling the music to its energetic, exultant conclusion.

The critical reception was generally very positive. Scott Goddard, music critic of *The Daily News* and later of *The News Chronicle*, described the Symphony as 'a work of real individuality and one that must be heard again soon'. Neville Cardus commented that 'First impressions are of a genuine talent and imagination, and of a gift for evocative orchestration'. The unnamed critic of *The Times* wrote, 'As with all Wordsworth's instrumental music, the symphony impresses by its directness of utterance and by the thought that informs it rather than by any assault upon the senses or emotions'. A review in *The New Statesman* summed up the piece: 'Beautifully crafted and rising to an intense yet unrhetorical climax, it contains some of the deepest and most personal music this composer has yet given us'. 15

Though Barbirolli did not become a long-term advocate for the Fourth Symphony, he did perform Wordsworth's next large-scale orchestral piece, the *Divertimento in D*, **Op. 58** (1954). This work was commissioned by Stewart Deas for the Jubilee concert of the University of Sheffield, where it was premiered by the Hallé Orchestra under Barbirolli on 18 March 1955. It is scored for two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Alfred Lengnick & Co., The Music of William Wordsworth, Lengnick, London, 1954, p. 5.

<sup>13 &#</sup>x27;William Wordsworth's New Symphony', The Manchester Guardian, 7 September 1954, p. 5.

 $<sup>^{14}</sup>$  'From Our Music Critic', 'A New Symphony', *The Times*, 6 September 1954, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Alfred Lengnick & Co., op. cit., p. 5.

oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, two tenor trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion (cymbal, side-drum, bass drum, gong, glockenspiel, triangle) and strings.

The main theme of the work consists of the notes D–E–A–S (or E flat), spelling out the surname of the then Professor of Music of Sheffield University, the dedicatee. The first movement (Overture 1) consists of a short, slow introduction setting out the main theme and leading into an *Allegro* starting with the first three notes of the theme on the trumpets. This germ grows into an extended tune which, with various subsidiary ideas, dominates the rest of the movement. The slow introduction recurs at the end in a fuller form.

The lyrical slow movement (Air 2) begins with the main theme inverted (D-C-G-C sharp). From the first three notes of this theme in a different key, an extended melody is derived, given out first by the oboe. This melody and a series of haunting, hushed chords given to the divided strings are the main elements of the movement. The critic of *The Times* commented on the 'sustained beauty and expanding horizons' of this movement.<sup>16</sup>

The finale (Gigue  $\boxed{3}$ ) starts with a lively  $\frac{12}{8}$  version of the main theme the right way up, given out by the flute, and taken up by the strings and brass. It is followed by a long tune on the strings, and a shorter, syncopated new theme first heard on the woodwind. The rest of the movement consists of an exploration of the potentialities of these ideas, leading to a jubilant end.

Having heard a radio broadcast of the *Divertimento*, Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote a brief letter to Wordsworth to express his admiration of the work, declaring that it had 'originality without eccentricity' and concluding with a suggestion that it ought to be expanded into a four-movement symphony, as the existing movements were 'symphonic in size and character' <sup>17</sup> – a considerable compliment, and Wordsworth himself later referred to the *Divertimento* as a symphony in all but name: 'It is strange that with

<sup>16 &#</sup>x27;Our Music Critic', 'University Jubilee', The Times, 19 March 1955, p. 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Letter dated 28 June 1956, held in the Wordsworth archive of the Scottish Music Centre, Glasgow.

each symphony I composed we had another child, so I called the next Divertimento.¹¹8 Curiously, a 1955 catalogue produced by Wordsworth's publisher at the time states that 'Any movement can be performed separately', which suggests the score might be treated as a suite of discrete pieces rather than as an integrated symphonic work.¹¹9 Instead, the rigorous exploitation of the same material in all three movements surely indicates that the piece should be regarded as a single entity to be performed *in toto*.

Written in the spring of 1962, the *Variations on a Scottish Theme*, **Op. 72**, was one of the first pieces to emerge after Wordsworth's move to the Highlands of Inverness the previous year. It was commissioned for the opening of a new Music Room at Bryanston School in the summer of 1962. The work was originally scored for oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, percussion, string quartet and double bass. This unusual scoring is accounted for by the players who were available in the school 'orchestra' at the invitation concert for which the work was designed. Wordsworth suggested a few alterations in the scoring for the first performance of the full-orchestral version, given by the Perth Symphony Orchestra conducted by John McLeod in the City Hall, Perth, on 20 March 1966.

The Scottish theme of the title is 'The Hundred Pipers' [5], a song attributed to Carolina Oliphant, Lady Nairne, in the 1840s. It commemorates the fall of Carlisle to Bonnie Prince Charlie in November 1745, at the outset of the Second Jacobite Rebellion:

Wi' a hundred pipers, an' a', an' a',
Wi' a hundred pipers, an' a', an' a',
We'll up an' gie them a blaw, a blaw
Wi' a hundred pipers, an' a', an' a'.
O it's owre the border awa', awa'
It's owre the border awa', awa'
We'll on an' we'll march to Carlisle ha'
Wi' its yetts, its castle an' a', an a'.

<sup>18</sup> Dodds, loc. cit., p. 76.

<sup>19</sup> Alfred Lengnick & Co., op. cit., p. 5.

Wordsworth provides nine variations on this popular song. The first two 6 7 adhere closely to the theme, though the second is more ornate. The third 8 and fourth 9 are fragmentary, breaking the tune into its melodic and rhythmic components. The fifth, marked *Adagio espressivo* 10, is a lyrical slow movement for the oboe, clarinet and solo cello in turn against a background of murmuring, muted strings. The sixth variation 11 returns to the original tempo, but places the theme in the minor; in the seventh 12 the outline of the theme is shared by the bassoons and horn, the other instruments lacing it with scalic figures. The measured eighth 13 is in the minor and features the glockenspiel. The ninth and last variation 4 starts off fugally on the strings and reaches a climax with the re-entry of the first phrase of the theme, with which the work ends.

Symphony No. 8, *Pax Hominibus*, Op. 117 (1986), was Wordsworth's last completed score. It was written in response to a commission from BBC Scotland and dedicated to fellow composer Martin Dalby, 'who persuaded me that life could be worth living again after a heart attack, by arranging for the BBC to commission this piece.'<sup>20</sup> The first performance was given by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra under Jerzy Maksymiuk in Stirling on 28 October 1986. The instrumentation consists of two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, percussion (cymbal, bass drum, triangle, tambourine) and strings.

Wordsworth was, as mentioned, an ardent, lifelong pacifist. In a letter to *The Times*, dated two days after Britain declared war on Nazi Germany, he pleaded for a strategy of refusing unconditionally to bomb any but the most strictly military objectives<sup>21</sup> and, four-and-a-half decades later, he wrote to *The Scotsman* urging for the cancellation of Trident and Cruise missiles as a matter of policy.<sup>22</sup> This long-term involvement with the peace movement is reflected in the subtitle of his Eighth Symphony, and the work literally begins peacefully 15 with a gentle, serene passage for two horns, succeeded by a more expressive phrase for strings: these two elements form the basis of the first

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Composer's dedication, prefacing the printed score.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Letter to the Editor of *The Times*, published 7 September 1939.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Letter to the Editor of *The Scotsman*, published 17 May 1986.

movement, which has a natural symphonic breadth and a poised elegance. The second of its two movements is quicker. A peculiar, 'clucking' idea, heard at the outset, though clearly descended from other dislocated, hesitant initial statements in Wordworth's output, such as the start of the central movement of the Fifth Symphony, Op. 68 (1960), and the opening movement of the Sixth String Quartet, Op. 75 (1964), is disorientating in effect. It swiftly generates a crescendo of enormous energy, culminating in a brass cadence as glorious as it is short-lived. The lightly accompanied, song-like theme that follows sounds like a pastiche of a nineteenth-century bel canto operatic aria: there is something infinitely sad about this fragile, keening melody, entombed within such grotesque surroundings. After a brief recurrence of the opening bars of the Symphony, the movement is marked to be repeated and the principal material of the first movement then follows. Finally, the work ends with a short coda containing material from both movements.

In its original form, this brief closing section ends quietly with the last chord on clarinets dying away to nothing. But Wordsworth included an alternative ending in the score with the instruction 'for use at conductors' discretion if it suits the occasion better – i.e. size of hall or the rest of the programme'. This substitute coda (included on this release [17]) contains a crescendo leading to a forthright conclusion capped by a cymbal clash. Some listeners may prefer a decisive denouement to an open-ended finish, but to my ears Wordsworth's original thoughts are more convincing. This elusive late utterance has a hard-won eloquence, and a scenario which returns the piece to the silence from which it originally emerged seems more fitting than a last-minute, whipped-up peroration.

Wordsworth's last symphony is also his most enigmatic; the second movement contains some of the quirkiest, most unfathomable material he ever penned. In his review of the third performance Michael Tumelty, writing in *The Glasgow Herald*, described it as an 'odd piece'. Nevertheless, he singled out the first movement for its 'impressive breadth' and 'well-poised elegance'.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23 18</sup> March 1987.

It is to be hoped that this release will renew interest in the music of a composer whose body of work is still a largely untapped resource. His scores must be performed to give them life. In his own words, 'Music is what you hear. It is not a set of dots and lines on a piece of paper; it does not exist until the written symbols are translated into an aural experience which matches that imagined by the composer in the first place.'<sup>24</sup>

Though Wordsworth was socially diffident, he had no false modesty regarding his compositions and was fully aware of what he perceived to be their lasting value. In a forthright letter to the Controller, Music at the BBC in 1957 about the decline in the number of broadcasts of his symphonic works, he wrote:

I am quite convinced that I have something to say, and an individual way of saying it which the ordinary music-lover is capable of responding to if he is given sufficient opportunities. I would not go through the labour of creation were I not so convinced.<sup>25</sup>

In articles about Wordsworth and his music, commentators and journalists have quoted the following lines from his ancestral namesake: 'Enough, if something from our hands have power to live, and act, and serve the future hour'.'<sup>26</sup> These words apply aptly enough to the composer William Wordsworth, dedicated, serious-minded and reserved.

Paul Conway is a freelance writer specialising in twentieth-century and contemporary British music. He has reviewed regularly for The Independent and Tempo, provided programme notes for The Proms and the Edinburgh, Spitalfields and Three Choirs Festivals and contributed chapters to books on John McCabe and Robert Simpson.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> William Wordsworth, 'Music in the Dark', The Times, 6 March 1961, p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Letter from William Wordsworth to R. J. F. Howgill, Controller, Music, BBC, dated 4 December 1957.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> From the 'After-Thought' to Wordsworth's lyric sequence *The River Duddon, A Series of Sonnets* (1804–20).

John Gibbons has conducted most of the major British orchestras, including the BBC Symphony, London Philharmonic, City of Birmingham, Bournemouth, BBC Concert, Ulster and, most regularly, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. He has recorded Skalkottas with the Philharmonia Orchestra, the string concertos of Arthur Benjamin with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (Dutton Epoch), Mozart piano concertos with Idil Biret and the London Mozart Players, and Bruckner's Ninth Symphony, including a completion of the finale by Nors Josephson, with the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra (Danacord).

John Gibbons has been Principal Conductor of the Worthing Symphony Orchestra – the professional orchestra of West Sussex – for over twenty years and, in addition to its regular concert season, they have appeared at the annual Malcolm



Arnold Festival in Northampton. Renowned for his adventurous programming, he has given many world premieres of neglected works, among them the *Third Orchestral Set* by Charles Ives, the Violin Concerto by Robert Still and both the Second Piano Concerto and Violin Concerto by William Alwyn. He recorded Laura Rossi's film score *The Battle of Ancre* (Pinewood Studios) and conducted the BBC Concert Orchestra in her score to *The Battle of the Somme* at the live screening in the Royal Festival Hall to commemorate the centenary of the ending of this battle.

Overseas work includes Walton's First Symphony with the George Enescu Philharmonic, as well as concerts with the Macedonian Philharmonic, the Çukurova Symphony in Turkey, the Portuguese Symphony Orchestra, and performances of Malcolm Arnold's Fourth Symphony in Latvia and Vaughan Williams' A Sea Symphony in Worms, Germany.

John Gibbons studied music at Queens' College, Cambridge, the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music, winning numerous awards as conductor, pianist and accompanist. He assisted John Eliot Gardiner on the 'Leonore' project – semi-staged concert performances with the Monteverdi Choir of Beethoven's *Leonore*, the first version of *Fidelio*, in Europe and New York, including the BBC Proms – and the Monteverdi Choir recording of music by Percy Grainger on Philips; he was also Leonard Slatkin's second conductor for a performance of Ives' Fourth Symphony with the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam.

He has conducted numerous opera productions at Opera Holland Park, with particular emphasis on Verdi, Puccini and the *verismo* composers, including Mascagni's *Iris* and Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur*. He conducted *La bohème* for the Spier Festival in South Africa, toured *Hansel and Gretel* around Ireland with Opera Northern Ireland and Opera Theatre Company and conducted a number of productions for English Touring Opera. His orchestral reductions include Walton's *Troilus and Cressida* for Opera St Louis, Missouri, and Karl Jenkins' *Stabat Mater*.

A renowned communicator with audiences, John Gibbons is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, vice-chairman of the British Music Society, and choral director at Clifton Cathedral. His own music has been performed in various abbeys and cathedrals as well as on the South Bank, London.

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 Leningradborn 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 Liepāja Symphony Amber Sound Orchestra was granted the status of national orchestra. The current chief conductor, Atvars Lakstigala, made his debut with the LSO in 2010 and received the 'Great Music Award' at the end of the same year.

This is the seventh of a series of recordings 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 Fridrich Bruk (TOCC 0455), conducted by Maris Kupčs.



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## **WILLIAM WORDSWORTH Orchestral Music, Volume One**

Divertimento in D, Op. 58 (1954)  1 Overture 2 II Air 3 III Gigue	<b>20:24</b> 6:22 7:32 6:30
Symphony No. 4 in E flat, Op. 54 (1953)  • Poco adagio – Allegro	23:07
Variations on a Scottish Theme, Op. 72 (1962)  ⑤ Theme: Allegretto ( J. = c. 72)  ⑥ Variation 1  ⑦ Variation 2: J. = c. 72 or may be poco meno mosso  ⑧ Variation 3: J = 108?  ⑨ Variation 4: L'istesso tempo  ⑩ Variation 5: Adagio espressivo  ⑪ Variation 6: Tempo I (72)  ⑫ Variation 7: J = 108  ⑤ Variation 8: Andante espressivo  ⑭ Variation 9: Tempo I	10:07 0:48 0:47 0:46 0:34 0:36 1:57 0:56 1:03 1:00
Symphony No. 8,  Pax Hominibus, Op. 117 (1986)  □	<b>17:45/18:21</b> 8:59 8:46 9:22

TT 80:38

Liepāja Symphony Orchestra John Gibbons, conductor FIRST RECORDINGS