



Emil TABAKOV

COMPLETE SYMPHONIES, VOLUME FIVE

SYMPHONY NO. 2
SYMPHONY NO. 6



Symphony Orchestra of Bulgarian National Radio
Plovdiv Philharmonic Orchestra
Emil Tabakov

EMIL TABAKOV: COMPLETE SYMPHONIES, VOLUME FIVE

by Paul Conway

The composer and conductor Emil Tabakov was born on 21 August 1947 in Ruse in northern Bulgaria. He first took to the podium at the age of seventeen and won the Nikolai Malko Young Conductors Competition in Copenhagen in 1977. At the Bulgarian State Academy of Music he studied double bass with Todor Toshev, conducting with Vladi Simeonov and composition with the distinguished Bulgarian composer Marin Goleminov. While still at music school, Tabakov founded a chamber orchestra made up of friends. He came to the attention of Ilija Temkov, the principal conductor of the Ruse Philharmonic, who invited the eighteen-year-old to conduct his orchestra. Among the works Tabakov chose to perform at this prestigious event was his *Two Improvisations* for string orchestra and timpani, his first orchestral piece, written at the age of fourteen. From 1975 to 1979 Tabakov conducted the Ruse Symphony Orchestra. He then directed the Sofia Soloists Chamber Ensemble, appearing internationally with them from 1980 to 1989. Appointed conductor of the Sofia Philharmonic in 1985, he was made its general music director three years later and held this post until 2000. At the same time (1994–99) he was chief conductor of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra. With the Sofia Philharmonic, and as guest conductor with several others, he has performed all over the world, enjoying particularly close associations with orchestras in Brazil, France, Germany, Italy, Macedonia, Russia and South Korea. Under his baton the Sofia Philharmonic has recorded a large amount of the Romantic repertoire. From 2002 to 2008 he was music director and chief conductor of the Bilkent Symphony Orchestra in Ankara and from 2008 to 2016 he was chief conductor and director of the Symphony Orchestra of Bulgarian National Radio.

From his earliest years as a creative artist, Tabakov has been drawn towards the big symphonic forms and counts Shostakovich, Brahms, Skryabin and Richard Strauss among his foremost influences. His output is dominated by two time-honoured orchestral genres. He has written ten symphonies (1982, 1984, 1988, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2009, 2015 and 2017) and an impressive series of solo concertos, for double bass (1975), percussion (1977), two flutes (2000), piano (2003), cello (2006), viola (2007) and violin (2019), as well as concertos for fifteen string instruments (1979), orchestra (1995), chorus, violin, vibraphone, marimba and bells (1996) and a concert piece for trumpet and strings (1985).¹ Other orchestral works include the *Variations for Symphony Orchestra* (1972) and the one-movement pieces *Astral Music* (1976) and *Ad Infinitum* (1989). His affinity for large-scale works has resulted in such compositions as the cantata *Tarnovgrad the Great – 1396* (1976) and a Requiem based on the Latin text of the Mass for soloists, chorus and orchestra (1992–93). There are also two early ballet scores, *Sashka* (1967) and *Helen of Pristis* (1969).

Complementing this predilection for big formal structures is a fastidious and inventive approach to orchestral colour and textural subtlety, especially in *concertante* works. During the 1990s his harmonic palette was refreshed and extended by a renewed interest in Bulgarian folklore; the enriched musical language which resulted is notable for its pictorial vividness, incisiveness and economy of means.

His chamber output includes *Lamento* for twelve double basses (1969), a sonata for viola and trombone (1971) and a sonata for viola and double bass (1972). Chief among his instrumental music may be numbered *Motivy* for solo double bass (1968), *Imagination* for solo flute (1968), a sonata for solo double bass (1969), a sonatina for piano (1974), *Monody* for solo clarinet (1977) and a *Prelude* for violin (1977). Several solo songs and choral works also feature in a modest but wide-ranging catalogue.

Although much in demand as a conductor, Tabakov has continued to compose steadily but, like Mahler before him, he writes mostly during the summer months:

¹ Symphony No. 8 and the *Five Bulgarian Dances* were released on Toccata Classics TOCC 0365, Symphony No. 1 and the Viola Concerto on TOCC 0410, Symphony No. 4 and the *Concert Piece for Orchestra* on TOCC 0467, and Symphony No. 5 and the Concerto for Double Bass and Orchestra on TOCC 0530.

during the concert season he is busy conducting. His most recent scores cover a characteristically broad range of genres. In 2016 he completed an *Adagio* for string orchestra, commissioned by Martin Anderson, who runs Toccata Classics, in memory of his partner, Yodit Tekle; *Vocalise* for mixed choir and vibraphone; and *Dedication* for solo viola and chamber orchestra, written for Yuri Bashmet and the Moscow Soloists Chamber Orchestra on the occasion of their 25th anniversary and premiered by them, conducted by the composer, during the 'March Music Days' International Music Festival in Ruse in March 2017. On the first night of this event, *Horo* for symphony orchestra (2017) was premiered by the Festival Symphony Orchestra, again conducted by Tabakov. Another work dating from 2017, a *Caprice* for solo double bass, was commissioned for the 2018 Sperger Competition in Germany. His *Concerto for Marimba, Vibraphone, Tapan and Chamber Orchestra* (the tapan is a Bulgarian traditional drum), which was written in 2015, was first performed on 29 November 2017 in Gabrovo, Bulgaria, with soloist Miroslav Dimov and the Gabrovo Chamber Orchestra under the composer's baton. On 16 March 2018, at the opening concert of the 2018 'March Music Days' in Ruse, Tabakov conducted the world premiere of his Ninth Symphony with the Sofia Philharmonic. In the summer of 2018 he wrote a concerto for an orchestra of double basses (there is also a version for a quartet of double basses). His Tenth Symphony was premiered on 14 March 2019 in Sofia by the Sofia Philharmonic conducted by the composer. His most recently completed work is a Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, written in the summer of 2019.

In all his pieces, whether for full symphony orchestra or chamber instruments, Tabakov is punctilious in matters of dynamics, timbre and thematic development. Most of his symphonic movements are assembled from several tiny but vivid ideas which are then worked out rigorously during the course of the piece. Due attention is paid to the effective use of bold contrasts, whether in terms of dynamism versus stasis or full orchestral statements counterbalancing instrumental solos.

Symphony No. 2 (1984)

Composed in 1984, Tabakov's Second Symphony was premiered the following year in Sofia by the Symphony Orchestra of Bulgarian National Opera, conducted by Dimitar Manolov, as part of the 1985 New Bulgarian Music festival. A large orchestra is required, consisting of piccolo, two flutes, three oboes, three clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (snare drum, bass drum, tam-tam, three tom-toms, three bongos) and strings. There are two substantial movements, both of which explore the melodic, rhythmic and harmonic implications of several important motifs introduced in their opening bars.

The first movement, *Adagio* [1], begins quietly. It is based entirely upon the material presented at the outset: a tenebrous, five-note, arch-like motif on middle strings followed by a muted exclamation on solo first violin sounding like a haunted, post-apocalyptic birdcall; it is soon extended into an undulating phrase and a rhythmic barrage of repeated sextuplets on flute. A dissenting voice is provided by the piccolo, second flute and first oboe, offering a dissonant fanfare that will be taken up by the full orchestra as the movement unfolds. The undulating phrase is transmuted into ominous-sounding murmurings that emanate from the contrabassoon and lower strings but soon surge up rapidly through the orchestra. Textures fill out as the movement gains momentum, and before long the full complement of players is employed in a powerful section in which all the main themes are heard in vigorous counterpoint. The basic tempo of the movement remains unchanged throughout, but the speed of the harmony is varied, so that the turbulent and intensely dramatic central section appears to be faster. A relaxation in pulse heralds the start of the hushed closing section in which all the component parts of the material are presented for the last time.

Marked *Allegro moderato*, the second movement [2] taps into and ultimately releases the latent energy pent up in the first. The key building-blocks of this structure are the insistent rhythmic pattern first heard on trombone, an ascending scalic figure on clarinets, a repeated-note rhythmic figure on oboes and a gurgling, serpentine statement on upper strings. A lyrical theme with a descending arpeggiated closing phase is introduced by the horn. From these disparate elements, Tabakov constructs a

tightly knit and logically developed symphonic movement. There are moments when solo players are contrasted with the full orchestral forces, suggesting an individual pitted against the mob – but these episodes are fleeting. Tabakov is always concerned with the larger symphonic argument and the logical unfolding of his material rather than spotlighting specific players in extended solo passages. For him, the working-out of ideas is paramount. Thus, when he considers that the material has fulfilled its potential, he terminates the movement abruptly, rather than fashioning a contemplative epilogue in which to linger over and reflect upon any ramifications.

Symphony No. 6 (2001)

Tabakov's Sixth Symphony was written in 2001. The first performance was given by the Plovdiv Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of the composer on 25 January 2002 in Plovdiv, in southern Bulgaria; this recording was made immediately afterwards. Here, too, substantial forces are called for: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion (snare drum, bass drum, tom-tom) and strings. In common with Tabakov's Third, Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, the Sixth is a big-boned piece in four movements, conceived on a large scale.

Dispensing with an introduction, the opening *Allegro agitato* [3] immediately presents the principal ideas which fuel the rest of the movement: an insistent rhythmic fanfare for full orchestra hammering home the note E, followed by a forceful descending motif on brass and, after a restatement of the fanfare, a scurrying, ascending figure on strings. From these basic, disparate elements, the composer fashions a powerful and closely argued symphonic movement of epic proportions. Several measured and eloquent episodes bring to the fore different sections of the orchestra, contrasting effectively with the weighty *tutti* statements of the main *Allegro* passages. It is with one of these introspective spans that the movement ends, as an extended, lyrical soliloquy for viola is underpinned by a reminder on timpani and side drum of the rhythmic fanfare.

An explosive timpani roulade opens the following *Largo* [4]. The main thematic material is an expressive melody for high violins which unfolds steadily, arching over an implacable, sustained pedal D note in the lower strings. A descending scalic figure gradually emerges in counterpoint to the principal theme. The secondary material consists of a hushed, descending figure on viola, punctuated by ominous chords in the lower strings, and a quiet, oscillating figure first heard on brass. A poetic episode for divided strings leads to a restatement of the main melody interspersed with the oscillating figure on brass. The rest of the movement explores to the full the dramatic potential of its main ideas. An inexorable increase in intensity results in a shattering concluding climax.

The third movement is an *Allegro scherzo* [5]. Like the scherzo of Bruckner's Eighth Symphony, this monumental dance movement is conceived on a vast scale. A sense of onward propulsion inherent in the regularly repeated phrases of the main theme is accentuated further by a winding variant introduced by gurgling clarinets. Initiated by cellos, the trio-like central section takes the form of a steadily building *crescendo* based on a persistent rising figure. Throughout this episode, the timpani tenaciously give out the rhythm of the main material. At the climax of the central passage the principal theme returns. A sudden increase in tempo suggests a sprint to the finish line, but Tabakov puts the brakes on this careering juggernaut and the final bars are soft and introspective, as the lower strings recall the insouciant little phrase that lies behind this titanic scherzo.

The weighty *Allegro finale* [6] is a substantial statement based on the clearly defined ideas adumbrated in the opening bars: an imposing, heavily accented flourish on the brass, answered by a murmuring figure on hushed strings. From these basic ingredients Tabakov constructs a symphonic finale on an immense scale that develops logically and with impressive self-assurance. A brief moment of repose at the epicentre of the movement features an eloquent soliloquy for violin and it is with the sound of an isolated, but defiant solo violin, proclaiming in its highest register that the movement, and this towering symphony, comes to its conclusion.

Paul Conway is a freelance writer specialising in twentieth-century and contemporary British music. He has reviewed frequently for The Independent, Tempo and Musical Opinion, 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.

The Symphony Orchestra of Bulgarian National Radio has acquired a leading position in Bulgarian musical culture and among the community of radio formations of Europe. The musicians are graduates of prestigious music academies in Sofia, Moscow, St Petersburg and New York.

The extensive development of the Orchestra to reach the standards of a prominent professional ensemble began under the major Bulgarian conductor Vassil Stefanov (1913–91), who took up his position in 1954 and worked with the Orchestra for over thirty years, during which time the SOBNR turned into one of the leading cultural institutions of Bulgaria. Further contributions to its artistic growth were made by the conductors Vassil Kazandjiev, Alexander Vladigerov, Milen Nachev and Rossen Milanov. From late 2008 until early 2016 the principal conductor was Emil Tabakov. Since then the position was occupied first by Rossen Gergov and now by Mark Kadin.

The SOBNR has toured extensively in Bulgaria and abroad. Making recordings is among its main activities. Besides those for the sound archive of Bulgarian National Radio, the Orchestra has made recordings for many international labels. This album marks its fifth appearance on Toccata Classics, the first being in a recording of Emil Tabakov's Eighth Symphony and *Five Bulgarian Dances* (TOCC 0365), the second in the First Symphony and Viola Concerto (TOCC 0410), the third in the Fourth Symphony and *Concert Piece for Orchestra* (TOCC 0467) and the fourth in the Symphony No. 5 and Concerto for Double Bass and Orchestra (TOCC 0530).

The **Plovdiv Philharmonic Orchestra** was founded in 1945, at the end of the Second World War, although it emerged from a century of Thracian orchestral traditions; it was the first Bulgarian orchestra outside the capital. First called the State Symphony Orchestra, and later renamed the State Philharmonic Orchestra, it became part of the Opera and Philharmonic Society Plovdiv in 1999, and has been part of the State Opera of Plovdiv since 2010. A large orchestra, with over 100 musicians on its roster and a repertoire that embraced both the standard classics and contemporary music, it also provided a training ground for young Bulgarian players who went on to make their mark around the world – one such is Elmira Darvarova, concertmaster of the Metropolitan Opera orchestra in New York. Its Bulgarian conductors included Dobrin Petkov, Rouslan Raichev and Vladi Simeonov and among the guests from abroad were Karel Ančerl from Czechoslovakia, Enrique Bátiz from Mexico, Carlo Cecchi from Italy, János Ferencsik from Hungary, Arnold Katz and Kirill Kondrashin from the Soviet Union, Jan Krenz from Poland and Michel Plasson from France. Ivan Spassov and Vassil Kazandzhiev were among numerous Bulgarian composers who conducted their own compositions in Plovdiv; Alan Bush came from the United Kingdom, and Shostakovich appeared as piano soloist in his own music. Other soloists appearing with the Orchestra included prominent Bulgarian musicians, such as Ludmil Angelov, Nikolay Ghiaourov and Stoika Milanova; visiting stars were of the rank of Igor Oistrakh, Ruggiero Ricci, Sviatoslav Richter, Mstislav Rostropovich, Daniil Shafran and Henryk Szering. The Plovdiv Philharmonic Orchestra toured to Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and Switzerland, and was active in the recording studio.



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Symphony No. 2

Recorded on 5 and 6 October 1985 in Studio No. 1 of Bulgarian National Radio, Sofia

Engineer: Stefka Majdrakova

Editor: Nikola Tasev

ADD/DDD

Symphony No. 6

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EMIL TABAKOV Complete Symphonies, Volume Five

Symphony No. 2 (1984)

① I *Adagio*

② II *Allegro moderato*

24:02

13:00

11:04

Symphony No. 6 (2001)

③ I *Allegro agitato*

④ II *Largo*

⑤ III *Allegro*

⑥ IV *Allegro*

51:01

11:34

14:17

10:29

14:41

Symphony Orchestra of Bulgarian National Radio ①–②

TT 75:07

Plovdiv Philharmonic Orchestra ③–⑥

FIRST RECORDINGS

Emil Tabakov, conductor