

NAXOS

Sir Charles Villiers
STANFORD
Symphony No. 1
Clarinet Concerto

Robert Plane, Clarinet
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra
David Lloyd-Jones



Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924)

Symphony No. 1 • Clarinet Concerto

Of those British composers who preceded Elgar, the most significant are Hubert Parry and Charles Stanford. As composers and teachers, they laid the ground for the musical renaissance towards the end of the nineteenth century. Even more than Parry, Stanford was active across all musical genres. Born into an eminent Dublin legal family on 30th September 1852, he had already absorbed much of the 'canon' of Western classical music before entering Queens' College, Cambridge in 1870. Appointed organist at Trinity College in 1874, he spent much of the next three years studying in Germany. Returning to Cambridge, he galvanized the University Music Society with major British premières of such works as Brahms's *First Symphony* and *Alto Rhapsody*, and attracted such artists as the conductor Hans Richter and violinist Josef Joachim.

Appointed Professor of Music at Cambridge in 1887, Stanford overhauled the university's Bachelor of Music degree and oversaw the music society's silver jubilee celebration, when honorary doctorates were awarded to Tchaikovsky and Saint-Saëns. Relations with Cambridge were never wholly amicable, and his appointment in 1883 as Professor of Composition to the newly-founded Royal College of Music allowed him to focus increasingly on the latter institution, where he trained an impressive list of composers including Bridge, Butterworth, Moeran and Vaughan Williams. He enjoyed lengthy conducting stints with the Bach Choir and Leeds Philharmonic Society, was awarded numerous honorary doctorates and received a knighthood in 1902. He died, the much respected but largely out-of-touch 'grand old man' of British music, in London on 29th March 1924.

Early in his career Stanford had established a reputation for choral and church music. His *Evening Services* are central to the Anglican liturgy, while his part-songs remain in the repertoire of choral societies, above all his setting of Mary Coleridge's *The Bluebird*. Although he completed a dozen operas, none held the stage: a major disappointment for one who vigorously

espoused the cause of opera in Britain over his career. His orchestral music fared rather better, with several symphonies and concertos being taken up by leading conductors and soloists, though it was a mark of his declining reputation that many of his later works remained unpublished and even unperformed at the time of his death.

Central to Stanford's achievement is the series of seven symphonies that traverses the greater part of his output. These are marked by a compositional expertise matched only by his older contemporary (and his perceived rival) Parry, while seemingly content to remain within the stylistic ambit of Mendelssohn, Schumann and Brahms, an intimation of the retrogressive tendencies that caused him to indulge in increasingly bitter polemic during his last years. While he adhered to the classical design, his often subtle approach to standard movement-forms and resourceful orchestration make his symphonies well worth exploring.

When, in February 1876, Stanford entered his *First Symphony* into a competition sponsored by Alexandra Palace, there were few recent British symphonies as context, William Sterndale-Bennett's *G minor Symphony*, Arthur Sullivan's *Irish Symphony*, Frederick Cowen's *First Symphony*, Julius Benedict's *C minor Symphony* and Ebenezer Prout's *First Symphony* all having enjoyed passing success over the preceding decade. Placed second (after that by Francis Williams Davenport), Stanford's entry was not performed until 1879 (at the Crystal Palace in London) and was neither published nor played again in his lifetime.

Cast on a substantial scale, the *First Symphony* looks to Beethoven and Schumann in its formal and expressive profile. The first movement's slow introduction centres on an amiable theme for the strings, woodwind and horns. This then builds to an assertive climax, from where the *Allegro* is launched with a dexterous theme. Limpid and elegant, the second theme is initially given to woodwind and lower strings. After a

lively codetta, the development features intensive discussion of the material heard thus far. A resolute climax sees the heightened return of the first theme for a varied reprise in which its successor is heard soulfully on cellos. The music then heads into a coda that revisits the introduction, now a powerful chorale, as the movement reaches a decisive close.

Marked *In Ländler tempo*, the *Scherzo* is an intermezzo such as Schubert, Schumann and Brahms all made their own. The main theme, suave and ingratiating, finds ample contrast in its two trios - a *Presto* with deft contrapuntal interplay for strings, and an insinuating melody that brings various solo instruments into amicable accord - before being rounded off with a piquant coda.

The slow movement opens with expressive melodic writing for strings (violins and violas muted throughout), though a brief turn to the minor brings with it some felicitous woodwind contributions. The initial music is now heard in counterpoint between strings, then poetic solos from cello and clarinet lead to its sonorously-scored return. Prominent here is an elaborate passage for solo violin, after which the music heads into a ruminative coda. Launched by fanfaring brass, the *Finale* proceeds with a vigorous theme whose rhythmic impetus underpins much of what follows. A more delicate theme provides contrast (note the thoughtful brass motif in the codetta), before the exposition is repeated in full. The development fully confirms Stanford's contrapuntal skill, accruing momentum that carries into a tonally varied reprise. Powered by the brass motif, the coda drives the work to its effervescent conclusion.

As the leading proponent of Brahms's music in Britain, Stanford was well acquainted with the composer's inner circle, not least clarinettist Richard Mühlfeld, for whom Brahms had written several chamber works. Stanford's *Clarinet Concerto* was written for and initially dedicated to Mühlfeld, making the latter's rejection of it all the more surprising. The piece was duly given its première at Bournemouth in July 1903 and had its first London outing the following June, on both occasions with Charles Draper as soloist, and was later championed by Frederick Thurston. Revived almost half a century after the composer's death, it has since become the most frequently heard of Stanford's orchestral works.

The opening section commences with a vigorous orchestral tutti, the soloist alternating with its spirited first theme. Against closely-derived comments from woodwind, this leads into the more leisurely second theme replete with attractive orchestral contributions. After a brief climax that alludes to the opening, the work heads into a central section whose main theme, first heard on strings and horns, is one of Stanford's most appealing. There is an occasional darkening of mood, but the genially expressive nature of the theme is seldom absent and returns to steer the music through to a mellifluous repose. The final section is launched with the most vigorous orchestral writing so far, providing impetus for the soloist's main theme which draws on elements previously heard and imbues them with the spirit of Irish dance often favoured by Stanford. There is a more relaxed theme for contrast, and a quotation of that from the central section, before the coda sees the work home with an ample measure of high spirits.

Richard Whitehouse

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra



Photo: Chris Zuijdyk

in Birmingham and the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester. The BSO is known internationally through over three hundred recordings, and continues to release numerous CDs each year with Naxos. Recent critically acclaimed recordings have included CDs of Bernstein, Bartók, Sibelius, Glass, Adams and Elgar, and three discs featuring arrangements of Mussorgsky, Bach and Wagner by Stokowski were nominated for GRAMMY awards in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

Robert Plane

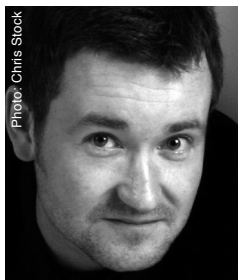
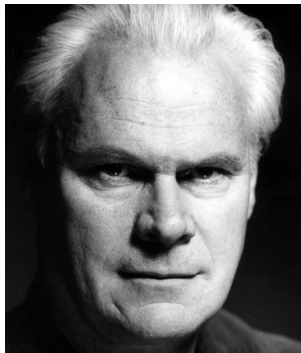


Photo: Chris Stock

Winner of the Royal Overseas League Competition and Principal Clarinet of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Robert Plane has appeared as soloist with the City of London Sinfonia, Northern Sinfonia, Ulster Orchestra, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Sinfonietta and Zurich Chamber Orchestra in major concert halls across Europe from the Zurich Tonhalle to Madrid's Auditorio Nacional de Música. He has recorded major works of the clarinet repertoire by Weber, Brahms and Messiaen and has a particular passion for British music, with his interpretations on disc of Finzi, Bax, Stanford and Howells for Naxos winning a number of prestigious awards and nominations, including a shortlisting for a Gramophone Award, two Editor's Choice nominations, Classic CD's 'Best Concerto Recording' Award and a BBC Radio 3 'Building a Library' top recommendation (Finzi *Clarinet Concerto*, Naxos 8.553566). He performs with pianist Sophia Rahman and enjoys a close relationship with the Gould Piano Trio, together with which he founded and directs the Corbridge Chamber Music Festival in the northern English county of Northumberland.

David Lloyd-Jones



David Lloyd-Jones began his career in 1959 on the music staff of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, followed by conducting engagements for orchestral and choral concerts, opera, broadcasts and television studio opera productions. He has appeared at the Royal Opera House, Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera and the Wexford, Cheltenham, Edinburgh and Leeds Festivals, and with the major British orchestras. In 1972 he was appointed Assistant Music Director at English National Opera, and there conducted an extensive repertory. In 1978 he founded a new opera company, Opera North, with its orchestra, the English Northern Philharmonia, of which he became Artistic Director and Principal Conductor. During twelve seasons with the company he conducted fifty different new productions, with numerous orchestral concerts, and festival appearances in France and Germany. He has made many successful recordings, and has an extensive career in the concert-hall and opera-house that takes him to leading musical centres throughout the world. His highly acclaimed cycle of Bax's symphonies and tone poems for Naxos (*The Gramophone Award*) was completed in the autumn of 2003. In 2007 he was made an Honorary Member of the Royal Philharmonic Society.

**Sir Charles Villiers
STANFORD
(1852-1924)
Symphonies • 4**

Symphony No. 1 in B flat major 48:36

- | | | |
|----------|-------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I Larghetto – Allegro vivace | 18:17 |
| 2 | II Scherzo – In Ländler Tempo | 8:53 |
| 3 | III Andante tranquillo | 10:08 |
| 4 | IV Allegro molto | 11:18 |

Clarinet Concerto Op. 80 22:03

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|----------|----------------------|-------|
| 5 | I Allegro moderato | 5:48 |
| 6 | II Andante con moto | 10:02 |
| 7 | III Allegro moderato | 6:13 |

**Robert Plane, Clarinet
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra (Leader: Duncan Riddell)
David Lloyd-Jones**

‘In memory of Thea King, an inspirational teacher whose love of British music nurtured my own’
(Robert Plane)

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Playing Time
70:39

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This final volume of the Naxos cycle of the complete Stanford Symphonies features the substantial *First Symphony*, whose first movement, with its spacious introduction and exposition repeat, is a remarkably broad structure and, at something a little over 18 minutes, must surely be the longest instrumental movement ever written by a British composer until the opening movement of Elgar's *First Symphony* some thirty years later. The use of stopped horns is most unusual for a symphony written in the late 1870s. Stanford's tuneful late romantic *Clarinet Concerto* has become the most frequently heard and recorded of the composer's orchestral works.

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Please see inside booklet for full details

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