



Francis **CHAGRIN**

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Symphonies Nos. 1 and 2

BBC Symphony Orchestra • Martyn Brabbins



Francis Chagrin (1905-72): Symphonies Nos. 1 and 2

When Francis Chagrin arrived in Britain in 1936, he had already left his native Romania, for largely family reasons, and adopted France for political ones. However, he embraced his new found home totally, and became very much part of the British musical scene for the rest of his life, summing up his personality makeup as 'Romanian by birth, British by nationality, and cosmopolitan by inclination'.

He was born Alexander Paucker in Bucharest on November 15th 1905 to wealthy Jewish parents who expected their son to take his rightful place in the family business. Reluctantly he complied, if only initially, by reading for an engineering degree in Zurich, while secretly putting himself through the city's music conservatory. After graduating in 1928 and having 'done the right thing' by his parents, he expected his family to allow him to pursue his musical ambitions. When this failed to materialise, he left home and made for Paris. Although he was already married for the first time, the move was doubly precipitated by his wife's infidelities. He, ever the gentleman, saw his move to Paris as grounds for his wife to divorce him for desertion!

It was in Paris that he acquired his new name. He chose Chagrin to reflect his sadness at the divorce and being disinherited (although there was later some relaxation of this), but primarily to make a clean break from his past. Even though by now his family were willing to support him financially, he refused, preferring to make his own way by playing in night clubs and *cafés chantants* and writing popular songs. When he had saved enough, he enrolled in 1933 at the Ecole Normale for two years, where his teachers included Paul Dukas and Nadia Boulanger. He began writing modest film scores, but, sensing that war was not far away, he made a trip to Britain to see how the business worked there. He fell in love with the country immediately and made it his home permanently in 1936.

In London, he continued studies with his exact contemporary, Matyas Seiber. With the outbreak of war, he was appointed musical adviser and composer-in-chief to the BBC French Service and in particular the programme *Les Français Parlent Aux Français*, for which he was decorated 'Officier d'Académie' by the French government in 1948. He spoke elegant and fluent French, and was often taken for a Frenchman. In addition, he spoke perfect English, albeit with a French accent, was fluent in Roumanian and German, knew much Italian and Spanish, and, for a trip to the USSR in October 1966,

studied Russian.

Soon after his move to Britain he took an Irish bride who presented him with two sons, Julian and Nicolas, both of whom would make their mark in the acting profession – Julian most famously as the white-faced mime artist in the park in Antonioni's *Blow-Up*, and Nicolas as Puck in the first Covent Garden production of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. That he worked so hard to give his family the standard of living he knew as a boy, and which would have been his had he stayed in the family business, goes some way to explaining the huge quantity of commercial work he did – for films, television and commercials.

At the height of the war, and as a reaction to the plight of one young composer, Robert Gill, Chagrin founded the Committee (later Society) for the Promotion of New Music (SPNM) as a way of allowing composers to hear their own music played rather than have it unacknowledged and unplayed by the artists and organisations to whom they sent scores. The list of composers whose music was heard through the auspices of the Society reads like a veritable Who's Who of British composers. Britten, Tippett and Walton may not be there, but Alwyn, Arnold, Bennett, Birtwistle and Maxwell Davies certainly are. In 1973, in memory of its founder, who had died the previous year, the SPNM established the Francis Chagrin Fund for Young Composers.

His own concert music ranges over most genres. In the orchestral field, apart from the two symphonies heard here, there is a *Piano Concerto*, a *Prelude and Fugue*, and a *Romanian Fantasy*, written for harmonica virtuoso Larry Adler, and commercially recorded by him. He contributed to Gerard Hoffnung concerts with items such as *The Ballad of County Down*. In addition there is much chamber music, and songs in English and French. As well as conducting his own film scores, he frequently conducted orchestral concerts here and abroad, and in 1951 formed his own chamber ensemble which gave regular concerts and broadcasts of varied and unusual repertoire.

The sheer volume of his commercial work is staggering. It includes 200 films – including *An Inspector Calls*, *The Colditz Story* and *Greystrians Bobby* – television (including a series of *Dr Who* in 1964) and many commercials – for soap, hair shampoo, tooth brushes, chocolate bars, among others. In 1963 he was elected Film Composer of the Year in the Harriet Cohen International Awards.

His friends remember him as incredibly industrious, but selfless, resourceful, urbane, and with a great generosity of heart. His fellow composer, Benjamin Frankel, who wrote several obituaries of him, struck the right tone when he wrote that Chagrin was 'always able to see the lighter aspect of serious effort'. I met him just once when I was a student. He had come to an inner-city Arts Centre to talk about writing for films. It was an inclement night and only twenty or so people had turned up. When he came onto the stage, I felt somewhat ashamed at the meagre audience and embarrassed for him, but he turned the situation in a second, inviting us all to sit in a semicircle on stage with him. It was a truly memorable evening and instead of it being a case of lecturer and class, it became instead an intimate 'at home' with a living, working composer and invited friends. This was 1971; during the last two or three years of his life he had suffered a series of heart attacks – they had started as early as 1955 – the fourth of which he succumbed to on November 10th 1972. Years before, conducting for Antonio's Spanish Ballet, he had suffered an attack during the first act of a production, but remained at his post until the interval. The true professional to the last!

Symphony No. 1 was composed during the period 1946-59, in between more commercial work; the first two movements by 1955, the remaining two in 1959, and revised twice, the final version being finished in December 1965. It is dedicated to Jo and Lawrence Leonard. It was he who played through an earlier version of the symphony for the composer, with the Morley College Orchestra. Its first broadcast in November 1965 was given by the BBC Northern (now Philharmonic) Orchestra under Stanford Robinson. The first public performance was given by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under the composer's direction, at the Odeon Theatre, Swiss Cottage, London on March 15th 1966. In four movements, it is dominated by a theme that recurs in various guises throughout, in addition to their own thematic material; and each movement has an inner section in sharp contrast to its individual mood and tempo.

The first movement, apart from a short *Largo* introduction, is an *Allegro* almost throughout, except for an *Andantino* section, and illuminates a more lyrical aspect of one of the themes. Similarly the second movement, a *Largo*, has a sudden burst into a short *Allegro*, and then resumes its slow pace. The same happens with the third and fourth movements.

In addition to the inner contrasts *within* the movements, the contrasts *between* movements are

particularly marked. The first is violent and passionate with echoes of the recent hostilities, the second, slow and very lyrical, while the third is a *Presto scherzando* that has a reflective section and also a quasi-Viennese waltz passage, brutally interrupted by discordant brass – maybe the war was not yet so far from the memory. The fourth movement, *Allegro*, in addition to its own new material, contains and develops the *Largo* section of the first movement and further develops the main theme.

The *Second Symphony* was written between November 1965 and March 1971, and premièred by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, conducted by the composer, in the Winter Gardens, Bournemouth on May 20th 1971. Apart from the normal forces of a major symphony orchestra, there is a call for seven percussionists, including two players at one celeste. The first movement, *Allegro*, is dramatic, agitated, searching and full of contrasts. In addition to clearly defined harmonic and textural elements, it has a set of themes, some of which are used in various guises in the other movements.

The second movement, *Molto lento*, is in complete contrast – calm and romantic, at times impassioned and very simple in form, rhythm and texture. The third movement, *Scherzo (Presto)* is extrovert, exuberant, revelling in variety of tone colour and virtuosity. It consists, in the main, of two contrasting themes, one flowing, the other angular with a more reflective middle part, in which what Chagrin calls 'a melodic contour' is described by the clarinet with the 'ghost' of sound sustained by sixteen solo violins. Later the melody is played on the glockenspiel and two vibraphones sustained by woodwind.

The fourth movement, *Andante*, has a chorale-like opening. The chorale appears a number of times, always altered, developed, intensified, but with the same harmonic basis and slow, dignified pace forming the pillars of the movement's architecture. Between these 'pillars' there are new facets of the thematic material of other movements, most of which is briefly recalled, commented upon or combined with new material. The whole work ends in a reassertive fanfare-like flourish.

Philip Lane

(Partly based on Chagrin's own programme notes, which can be accessed at www.naxos.com/notes/571371.htm. Used with kind permission of the Chagrin Estate.)

BBC Symphony Orchestra

Photo: Sim Canetty-Clark



The BBC Symphony Orchestra has played a central rôle at the heart of British musical life since it was founded in 1930. It provides the backbone of the BBC Proms, performing around a dozen concerts in the festival each year. Highlights of the 2015 Proms season included celebrations of Sibelius and Nielsen in their 150th anniversary years and the First and Last Nights, conducted by Sakari Oramo and Marin Alsop respectively. The BBC SO has a strong commitment to twentieth-century and contemporary music, with recent performances including commissions and premières from

Unsuk Chin, Brett Dean, Wolfgang Rihm, Christopher Rouse, Albert Schnelzer and Ryan Wigglesworth. It performs an annual season of concerts at the Barbican, where it is Associate Orchestra. The Chief Conductor is Sakari Oramo and the orchestra also works regularly with Semyon Bychkov, who holds the Günter Wand Conducting Chair, and Conductors Laureate Sir Andrew Davis and Jiří Bělohlávek. Brett Dean is the orchestra's Artist in Association. Central to the orchestra's life are studio recordings for BBC Radio 3 at its Maida Vale home, some of which are free for the public to attend and the BBC SO also performs throughout the world. The vast majority of concerts are broadcast on BBC Radio 3, streamed online and available for thirty days after broadcast via BBC iPlayer. The BBC SO is committed to innovative education work and ongoing projects include the BBC's Ten Pieces, BBC SO Plus Family scheme, which introduces families to classical music with pre-concert workshops and discounted tickets, and the BBC SO Family Orchestra and Chorus.

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In addition the Society produces a Journal, *British Music*, packed full of scholarly articles and reviews, as well as a regular e-newsletter for members. Our website lists forthcoming BMS events as well as performances of British music, and also provides a forum for discussion and debate.

www.britishmusicsociety.com

Martyn Brabbins



Photo: Benjamin Ealovega

Martyn Brabbins is Chief Conductor of the Nagoya Philharmonic, Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Flemish Philharmonic and Music Director to the Huddersfield Choral Society. He was Artistic Director of the Cheltenham International Festival of Music from 2005 to 2007 and Associate Principal Conductor of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra from 1994 to 2005. He studied composition in London and conducting with Ilya Musin in Leningrad, winning first prize at the 1988 Leeds Competition. Since then Brabbins has become a frequent guest with leading orchestras across the globe. He is known for his affinity with music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly British music. He has made around 120 recordings, has conducted

hundreds of world premières and has close links with many of today's foremost composers. In 2014/15, Brabbins notably led the Tokyo Metropolitan Orchestra in rare performances of both Walton's symphonies, conducted the first ever performance in Antwerp of Elgar's *The Kingdom*, and performed with the Deutsche Sinfonieorchester in the Berlin Philharmonic. Recent appearances have also included débuts with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra and at La Scala Milan, and at the First Night of the BBC Proms. Opera productions include *The Rake's Progress* in Budapest and *Tristan und Isolde* for Grange Park Opera, following on from performances in 2014-15 of Strauss' *Die schweigsame Frau* in Essen and *Boris Godunov* with Sir John Tomlinson in the title rôle. He is a regular visitor to the opera houses of Amsterdam, Lyon, Antwerp and Frankfurt, and made his Bavarian State Opera début in 2013. Martyn Brabbins is represented by Intermusica.



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Francis Chagrín described himself as ‘Romanian by birth, British by nationality and cosmopolitan by inclination’. A student of Paul Dukas and Nadia Boulanger, Chagrín wrote prolifically for films but composed for most genres. The two symphonies are among his most important orchestral works. Both are dramatic, even passionate – not least in the beautiful slow movements – and full of contrasts, both within and between movements. Undeservedly neglected, they reveal Chagrín’s mastery of form and colour.

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Francis
CHAGRIN
(1905-72)

SO BBC
Symphony
Orchestra

Symphony No. 1 (1946-59, rev. 1965) 28:01

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| 1 I. Largo – Allegro | 6:01 |
| 2 II. Largo | 8:16 |
| 3 III. Presto scherzando | 6:29 |
| 4 IV. Allegro | 7:15 |

Symphony No. 2 (1965-71) 28:01

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------|
| 5 I. Allegro | 9:47 |
| 6 II. Molto lento | 7:30 |
| 7 III. Scherzo (Presto) | 3:34 |
| 8 IV. Andante | 7:11 |

WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

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