NAXOS

DDD

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Sir Malcolm

ARNOLD

Symphonies
Nos. 3 and 4

National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland

Andrew Penny

Malcolm Arnold (b. 1921): Symphonies Nos. 3 and 4

Born, like Alwyn and Rubbra, in Northampton, Malcolm Arnold studied at the Royal College of Music, London. Here his teachers included the "wonderful" Ernest Hall, principal trumpet of Sir Adrian Boult's BBC Symphony Orchestra, and Gordon Jacob, an "inspiring" non-academic traditionalist from whom, he claims, he learnt not only all he knew but also how "to talk about my music without embarrassment."

Apart from a spell of voluntary military service from autumn 1944 to early 1945, Arnold's youth was spent as a professional orchestral player, mainly with the London Philharmonic (second trumpet 1942, principal trumpet 1943-44, 1946-48), but also for a brief post-war period with the BBC Symphony, second trumpet to his teacher, on contract from 23rd September 1945 to 16th January 1946. Comparatively glossed over by his biographer, Piers Burton-Page (*Philharmonic Concerto*, 1994), Arnold's time as a player in his mid-twenties on either side of the 1945 divide coincided with several of the greatest conducting legends of the century. He played Tchaikovsky's *Fifth Symphony* under Fistoulari and Bernstein, and recorded it with Celibidache. He appeared in Furtwängler's ten historic British come-back concerts, in February and March 1948, including a complete Brahms cycle, a Beethoven *Choral Symphony* at the Royal Albert Hall, and a recording of the *Second Symphony* of Brahms. He recorded Beethoven's *Eroïca Symphony* under de Sabata. He played not only for his friends Basil Cameron and Constant Lambert, but also under Erich Kleiber, Clemens Krauss, Bruno Walter, Richard Tauber (a Beethoven *Pastoral Symphony* in January 1944), Galliera, Martinon, Enescu, Coates, Beecham and Boult. He accompanied Casals in the Dvořák *Cello Concerto* and Menuhin in the London première of Bartók's *Second Violin Concerto* (BBC), as well as Heifetz in the British première of Walton's *Violin Concerto*. He took part in the first performance of Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*, conducted by Walter Goehr, of 19th March 1944, and under the Dutch conductor Eduard van Beinum, he both got to know the Mahler *Wunderhorn* symphonies, and lead the trumpets in the first "demonstration standard" recording of his own precocious *Beckus the Dandipratt Overture*. Much as William Schuman had used the Broadway musical, so he used the first trumpet desk to learn about the modern interactive orchestra in all its periods and styles, simplicity and virtuosity to "intensely dislike" Wagner and "detest" playing Elgar symphonies but not the *Enigma Variations*, "his masterpiece", and to acquire the skills of conducting: "if you don't pick up a few things from being principal trumpet of a great symphony orchestra, you're no use". His memories today are of having played in "a very good performance in Brighton of Beethoven's *Ninth* conducted by Carl Schuricht" (then in his late sixties); of a very "nervous" Furtwängler who "used to take his injections in the artist's room" and "was never rude to the orchestra"; of the bicycling van Beinum; of conducting Brahms's *Third Symphony* and Berlioz's *Romeo and Juliet* together with the original version of the *Symphonie Fantastique*. His regret is never to have directed a complete Beethoven symphony cycle "the one thing I always wanted to do."

Confirming his belief that one should "always think in terms of sound ... not only of notes on paper," the greatest musical influence of his life, Arnold claimed in an article for *Music & Musicians* in July 1956, "has

been, and still is, the music of Berlioz." Interviewed by Murray Schafer (1963), he re-nailed his colours to the mast as a diatonic, tonal romantic, criticizing the incomprensibility of modern "insulated" composers with their concern for truth above beauty, adding the influences of Sibelius, formally the tritonic *Fourth Symphony* in particular, and his friend Walton "outwardly". Having stopped composing in 1990, after a lifetime of the most extraordinary application and variety ("I gave up... I have no urge to write... I've done enough"), Sibelius still inspires: he recollects Basil Cameron showing him the sketches of the rumoured *Eighth Symphony* before, "I suppose, they were just thrown away as rubbish – If I'd had any sense I should have copied them out." As a symphonist he believes himself Germanically rooted. "I don't see the symphony like Mahler, who said the whole world should be in it. A symphony should be classical in form, like Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms." He claims never to have been influenced by anyone. Yet equally confesses that "everything influences every composer who has ever lived" – events, writers, poets, artists: "all of them influenced me, oh yes." He is justifiably proud of the fact that, like Gordon Jacob, he was always a musician of rapid facility, who never outstayed his welcome and knew when to stop. ("It was Alan Rawsthorne who said Malcolm Arnold writes music quicker than it takes the ink to dry.") Just how quick, inventive and professionally accommodating he was, a man of alert ear and "quicksilver imagination" without need for keyboard ("if you compose at the piano you'll compose things like Liszt"), can be gathered from the fifteen film scores, sketches for an opera *Henri Christophe* (about the first black ruler of Haiti), *First Symphony* and *First Quartet* completed during the year after leaving the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Positively charged hyper-energy similarly resourced the ten pressurising days it took to write the Oscar-winning score for David Lean's *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) – "the worst job I ever had in my life." To see Arnold more as ephemeral journalist than enduring philosopher has always been a temptation: he remains one of the most critically crucified composers of the past fifty years. Yet, as his output shows, from nine symphonies (1949-86) to close on 120 feature and documentary film scores (1947-69), there is a darker, deeper, more intricately complex dimension to the man, counterpointing the jolly and the uproarious: behind the laughter lurks a disquietened, lonely spirit. Celebrant of "innocent lyricism" and emotional cliché, resistant to compromise, an entertainer responsive to the predicaments, joys and stresses of the human condition, he has been interestingly compared with Dickens, by Donald Mitchell, and with Betjeman by Adrian Williams.

The *Third Symphony* (1954-57), commisioned by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society "to take the place of one Sir William Walton couldn't finish," was first performed in the Royal Festival Hall, London, by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under John Pritchard on 2nd December 1957. In three movements, the score calls for piccolo, double woodwind, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and strings. According to the composer's own original programme note, "the first movement has two main subjects, the first of which is played by the violins, violas, flutes and bassoon at the very outset of the piece. Later on the second subject is first stated by the oboe accompanied by violins. Towards the end of the movement the tempo abruptly changes [from *Allegro* to *Vivace*] and the same material is developed as a *scherzo*. The [*passacaglia*] second

movement, elegiac in character, is a set of [twenty] variations based on a series of chords more than a melodic theme. The [Haydnesque] last movement is based on three main themes and could be loosely described as a *rondo*." The Sibelian sub-plot of the work Arnold attributes to the telescoped structure of the first movement, and the presence of "a recurrent *leitmotif*" redolent of Sibelius's *Fifth Symphony*, likewise the Franck *D minor Symphony* (both of which, within a fortnight, he played with the London Philharmonic Orchestra in February 1944).

Commissioned by William Glock and the BBC, the populist *Fourth Symphony*, completed in Thursley, a Surrey village between Godalming and the Devil's Punch Bowl on 13th July 1960, was first performed in the Royal Festival Hall by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under the composer on 2nd November1960. In four movements, with the *scherzo* placed second, the score calls for piccolo, double woodwind, contra-bassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, harp and strings "This symphony," wrote the Arnold in his programme note for the first performance, "is composed for a normal symphony orchestra [but with] extra percussion instruments which have been used for years in West Indian and South American popular music [including bongos, marimbaphones and tom-toms]. The first movement is based on three main ideas; the first one is the very simple idea of an ascending and descending scale in contrary motion, first heard as the accompaniment to the first subject, which is in the Lydian mode. The conflict between the Lydian mode, with its sharpened sub-dominant [fourth], and a scale which has no name, but has a sharpened sub-dominant [Lydian lower tetrachord] and a flattened leading-note [Phrygian upper tetrachord - coincidentally the combined tempered pitches of the 64th Carnatic *mela*, "Vachaspati"], plays an important part in the development of the movement. The second subject is in the major (Ionian) scale, and is accompanied by a rhythmic figure in 8/8 time where the quavers are divided into 3+2+3 (1--2-123, he now emphasizes). It should not be necessary to describe the design of this movement, which is in normal sonata form [and] tries to be as direct as possible at first hearing. The second movement is a *scherzo* which is more chromatic than is usual in my music, believing, as I do, that excessive chromaticism is the most devitalizing dead-end in the music of the last sixty years. This movement is not intended to arouse emotions that are necessarily pleasant. The third movement is... lyrical... based on two themes. The last... a *rondo*, the *rondo* subject being in the form of a fugal exposition in the Lydian mode, alternating with the nameless scale used in the first movement."

In one of his rare writings (*The Listener*, 14th October 1971), Arnold drew attention to the fact that the year of the *Fourth Symphony*, 1960, "was also the year of the [London] Notting Hill race riots... I was appalled that such a thing could happen in this country.... that racial ideas have become increasingly strong in this country dismays me even more. In my *Fourth Symphony* I have used very obvious West Indian and African percussion instruments and rhythms, in the hope, first, that its sounds well, and second, that it might help to spread the idea of racial integration. This of course is only a small part of the work, and is only useful for me to know as a composer." Lest anyone thinks it descriptively programmatic, however, he firmly insists otherwise: none of his symphonies is, he says, "there are no hidden messages," "there is nothing to give away." Even the meeting of "brown and coffee-

coloured musics" in the "culturally dissonant" finale was a matter of "musical and dramatic contrast, not social." Maybe, in Sir Malcolm's most recent words, there is indeed "no underlying intention" behind the paced B flat "big tune" of the first movement "It's just a bloody good second subject! If I'd been Elgar I'd have snapped it out of the air, but unfortunately I'm not." Yet, paradoxically, the eruptive alla marcia interlude just before the end of the finale he now reveals to be "the frustration of the artist. It's meant to be completely crazy - I hope it sounds crazy." Contemplating the *scherzo*, floating "insubstantially and horror-struck through a procession of nightmares" (*The Times*), Hugo Cole (1989) believed it to descend from Berlioz's *Queen Mab* or Holst's *Mercury*. Arnold himself points to the *Prelude* from Lambert's ballet *Tiresias* (Covent Garden 1951) as the inspiration of its palindromic procedure – "the most wonderful sound I've ever heard."

"The pursuit of happiness is not my aim. I just wanted to lead a useful life and occasionally write a piece of music. I'd have been quite happy to always remain a trumpet player."

Ateş Orga

These music notes incorporate an interview with Sir Malcolm Arnold on 25th September, 1997. With the author's grateful thanks to the composer, Anthony Day, and Fiona Southey, Novello & Co Ltd.

National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland

The Radio Telefís Éireann Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1947 as part of the Radio and Television service in Ireland. With its membership coming from France, Germany, Britain, Italy, Hungary, Poland and Russia, it drew together a rich blend of European culture. Apart from its many symphony concerts, the orchestra came to world-wide attention with its participation in the famous Wexford Opera Festival, an event broadcast in many parts of the world. The orchestra now enjoys the facilities of a fine new concert hall in central Dublin where it performs with the world's leading conductors and soloists. In 1990 the RTE Symphony Orchestra was augmented and renamed the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, quickly establishing itself as one of Europe's most adventurous orchestras with programmes featuring many twentieth century compositions. In 1992 the orchestra embarked upon an extensive recording project for the Naxos and Marco Polo labels, recording music by Nielsen, Tchaikovsky, Goldmark, Rachmaninov, Brian and Strauss as well as an Irish composers' series.

Andrew Penny

Andrew Penny was born in Hull and initially studied the clarinet at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, where he also worked as conductor of the Opera Unit. The newly established Rothschild Scholarship in conducting led to study with Sir Charles Groves and Timothy Reynish and work as assistant with Richard Hickox and Elgar Howarth. Winner of the prestigious Ricordi Prize, he achieved a major success with the Vaughan Williams opera *Riders to the Sea* at Sadlers Wells Theatre in London. Andrew Penny subsequently studied with Sir Edward Downes and made a number of radio recordings in Holland and Britain. He has conducted regularly for both the Naxos and Marco Polo CD labels, recording principally with the RTE Concert Orchestra and National Symphony Orchestra in Dublin. There have been other recording engagements in Australia and in Kiev, while in Dublin he is recording a cycle of symphonies by Malcolm Arnold. His recordings have won considerable critical acclaim both in Europe and America.

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ARNOLD: Symphonies Nos. 3 and 4

COMPACT disc DIGITAL AUDIO

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STEREO

Sir Malcolm ARNOLD

(b. 1921)

Symphonies Nos. 3 and 4

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Playing Time 69:07

National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland

Andrew Penny

Symphony No. 3, Op. 63 (31:13)

1	Allegro – Vivace	*11:07*
2	Lento	*12:56*
3	Allegro con brio – Presto	*7:04*

Symphony No. 4, Op. 71 (37:47)

4	Allegro – Poco più mosso – Tempo primo	*13:00*
5	Vivace ma non troppo	*5:01*
6	Andantino	*11:36*
7	Con fuoco – Alla marcia – Tempo primo – Maestoso – Allegro molto	*7:59*

Recorded at the National Concert Hall, Dublin, Ireland, on 13th and 14th June, 1996.
Producer: Chris Craker
Engineer: Chris Craker
Post production: Bill Sykes, Black Box Music
Music Notes: Ateş Orga

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