
TOCCATA
CLASSICS
Steve ELCOCK
ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLUME TWO
HAVEN: FANTASIA ON A THEME OF J. S. BACH, OP. 4
SYMPHONY NO. 5, OP. 21
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Siberian Symphony Orchestra
Dmitry Vasiliev
FIRST RECORDINGS

STEVE ELCOCK, SYMPHONIST

by Francis Pott

The Anglo-French composer Steve Elcock, now in his sixties, has been known to introduce himself to concert audiences by telling them that he has never entered any competitions, has attracted no commissions and did not study with anybody. He did indeed grow up outside the musical mainstream. His website[1] offers 'A few words about me': 'I am a self-taught composer of classical music. I was born in Chesterfield, England, in 1957, and moved to France in 1981, where I have lived ever since'. He might have added that his only formal musical qualification is an A-Level in music, and that he had violin lessons for some seven years, but that doesn't appear to be important to him. Indeed, self-deprecation comes naturally to this modest and down-to-earth figure, but the tendency to define himself by what he is not may be partly the product of decades toiling in obscurity, away from the compositional rat-race and arts industry, beyond his native shores, fitting his creative life around a busy professional commitment working in language services for businesses. Elcock was already 56 when, in 2013, he sent some scores and sound files to Martin Anderson at Toccata Classics, acting on the friendly recommendation of his fellow composer Robin Walker, and the process of his discovery began. He had long since made the tacit assumption that nobody would be interested in his music, and so used technology to produce the most realistic synthetic 'performances' of his music that he could. They were powerful enough to come as a revelation to Anderson, as they have been to a growing number of others since.[2]

[1] https://steveelcock.fr

[2] Now mostly available via his website, these electronic realisations remain a valuable introduction for the newcomer to Elcock's work.

Just as Elcock may define himself in terms of what he is not, it may be helpful to new listeners to acknowledge areas of difference, as well as very generalised common ground, between him and other comparable figures. First, although it is natural to contextualise him by reference to other prolific British symphonists, notably Havergal Brian (1876–1972), Malcolm Arnold (1921–2006) and Robert Simpson (1921–97) in the generations before him, Elcock's powerful instinct for organically unfolding argument and symphonic logic aligns him in a general way with a number of Nordic composers. Elcock is passionately enthusiastic about the symphonic legacy of the Swedish composer Allan Pettersson (1911–80) – an outsider from the Swedish musical establishment rather as Elcock is an outsider from the British; it was the discovery of Pettersson's music in 1980 that impelled Elcock to start composing in earnest. Likewise, Elcock displays some intermittent kinship with the methods of the Danish composer Vagn Holmboe (1909–96) and those of his pupils Ib Nørholm (1931–2019) and Per Nørgård (b. 1932). Pettersson combines an underlying linearity with eruptive dislocations and switchbacks, and it is possible to see in this some likeness to the symphonic procedures of Malcolm Arnold; but Arnold's intentions bear a less organic stamp, seeming more concerned with the specific and immediate unsettling effect of dramatic interruptions as they occur. In the work of the Scandinavian symphonists mentioned and in that of Elcock, serialism remains a part of the compositional arsenal, yet is deployed only intermittently and selectively, its effect all the more vivid for co-existing with passages of tonal, sometimes stylistically retrospective, writing.

As with all truly original voices, the attempt to convey an adequate verbal impression of Elcock's musical language by reference to other composers is doomed to failure. Nonetheless, and whether coincidentally or not, there is also some common ground here with the driving, sometimes frenetic, rhythmic energy of the American symphonist Peter Mennin (1923–83), and the visceral dramatic impact of the orchestral music of the Czech Viktor Kalabis (1923–2006).

Elcock's First Symphony, Op. 6 (1995–96), originated as a concerto for clarinet and bassoon and was transformed into a symphony in 2001, with further revisions made to its orchestration in 2015, by which time the Fifth Symphony had already been

completed. Elcock has described his Second, Op. 14 (2003), as 'an attempt to "nail" the classical symphony before moving onto other things'.[3] Although this nailing outgrows Classical models by some margin (like its predecessor, the work lasts some 45 minutes in performance), the compositional results remain cogent and disciplined.

A distinguishing feature of Elcock's work is the clarity and economy of its scoring, which delineates the organic unfolding of ideas in a manner comparable with Robert Simpson's, despite underlying differences in the material on which it is brought to bear. Comparison with Simpson can be made in another, specific way: the lucidity with which Elcock writes about his own compositional processes recalls the older composer in its sheer lack of pretension, and in its forensically precise awareness of the evolution of a particular symphony at any given instant. Both men thrive on the inherent tension between the organic, metamorphic processes at work in their music on the one hand, and the dictates of Classical organisation on the other. Where they espouse elements of Classical recapitulation, both instinctively embrace a more Beethovenian notion: material may return in a new dress, having disguised itself by fresh orchestration, metamorphosed rhythm or accrued fingerprints of neighbouring motifs against which it has brushed on its journey through the symphonic landscape.

Elcock and Simpson proclaim varying degrees of creative indebtedness to the symphonic legacy of Beethoven; and in both cases the allusions, even where deliberate and explicitly acknowledged, are subtle. Even so, Elcock deserves to be defined more by his differences from Simpson than by areas of general kinship. First, there is the humanity audible in his music. One of the intriguing aspects of Simpson's character was the disparity between the gregarious, amiably unassuming persona of Simpson himself and the *im*personal, elemental dimension of his musical voice. Astronomy was one of Simpson's main interests (he had a telescope in his garden), and it often provided him with inspiration for his music – *The Penguin Guide to Compact Discs* found his Ninth Symphony to be 'concentrated, awesome, and as mysterious as some astronomical

[3] Unless stated otherwise, the comments from Steve Elcock quoted here are all taken from an exchange of e-mails in February 2020, in preparation for the writing of this essay. This phrase is taken from a commentary on Elcock's website.

phenomenon'.[4] Although Simpson often seemed to be extending a language rooted in the music of Carl Nielsen, he seldom embraced Nielsen's brand of benevolent humour;[5] still less does one encounter tenderness, a human luxury that would seem to be in short supply elsewhere in the cosmos.

Elcock's music frequently embraces titanic elemental force, and yet it wears a human face. His musical arguments are rooted in human experience and behaviour, in man's inhumanity to man, or in an anarchy that is essentially terrestrial. Even the title of a work like his orchestral triptych *Choses renversées par le temps ou la destruction*, Op. 20 (2013),[6] acknowledges human agency and a pathos in the contemplation of human folly. In the first of its three movements this pathos is articulated as a sort of ghostly palimpsest, in which 'footfalls in the memory'[7] from a lonely harpsichord playing Bach disappear repeatedly beneath or behind tragic and unsettling eruptions from the orchestra. The harpsichord resurfaces disorientatingly in the closing stages of the final movement, providing the anachronistic accompaniment to a banal solo-viola waltz. The waltz suggests ruins from which all the familiar landmarks of the past have been effaced or, by extension, totems of a culture or civilisation obliterated.

Elcock is also happy to let a music-hall song lurch startlingly into life in the midst of a reinvention of the Beethovenian scherzo and trio (Symphony No. 2), or to walk the most disconcerting of tightropes between pawky humour and sardonic menace, as in the central scherzo movement of Symphony No. 3, Op. 16 (2005–10),[8] entitled 'Ostinato', which is highly individual and yet takes its cue partly from the second and fourth movements of Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*. Mahler's comment that a symphony should contain the whole of life is applicable here, although in the unsparing, unblinking sense implied by Rodin when he said that to the artist nothing is uninteresting. But these gestures are not mere theatrical device: the music-hall intrusion quickly gains traction

[4] Ivan March, Edward Greenfield and Robert Layton, Allen Lane, London, annual.

[5] An exception to prove this rule is the first movement of Simpson's suite for brass band, *The Four Temperaments* (1983), portraying the sanguine temperament. Tellingly, Simpson's suite was inspired by Nielsen's Second Symphony, *De fire temperamenter* (1901–2).

[6] Recorded by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Paul Mann, on Toccata Classics TOCC 0400.

[7] T. S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', section I, from *Four Quartets*.

[8] Also recorded on TOCC 0400.

and is absorbed into the advancing motivic fabric of the symphonic tapestry. It is both unexpected at the time and, in hindsight, entirely inevitable. Slightly more concentrated than its predecessors, the Third Symphony follows the example of the First by including a passacaglia, though no longer as a conventionally placed slow movement: here, the unfinished business of a compressed first movement and the aforementioned 'Ostinato' is balanced in length by an escalating passacaglia finale.

Of the half-hour Fourth Symphony, Op. 19 (2012–13), Elcock offers the comment that the work is

> a recycling plant for dodecaphonic waste. Change-ringing series spit out unwanted semitones and these are left hanging in the air like so much pollution. A fragment of chorale, a half-remembered line from a carol, a short descending phrase on the cor anglais: these are the building blocks of this one-movement work. Of its title, I will only say that you must make of it what you can.[9]

That title is *A golden rose fallen from the flat sea of time*. Per Nørgård's Fourth Symphony bore the title *Indian Rose Garden and Chinese Witch's Lake*, but the sound-worlds of these two works differ markedly – and the rose increasingly seems motivically related to an ancient carol tune, 'There is no Rose of such Virtue', fragments of which make tangential appearances before dominating the final climax. Elcock's Fourth Symphony is highly enigmatic, generating lean, astringent *ostinato* passages in its fast music, kaleidoscopic but alienating dreamscapes in the slow material and a memorably eerie massed but de-synchronised string *glissando* upwards toward the final chord. The 'distorting mirror' quality here is reminiscent of the disfigured, worm-in-the-apple triumphalism at the end of Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony.

Symphony No. 5, Op. 21 (2014)

Whereas Symphonies Nos. 3 and 4 turned their backs on the Classical symphonic concept 'nailed' in No. 2, in No. 5 Elcock directed his attention to Beethoven, this time making overt reference to a Fifth which has remained one of the cornerstones of the

[9] https://steveelcock.fr

symphonic repertoire ever since its first performance in December 1808. Elcock was struck by the tonal ambivalence of the opening of that earlier Fifth Symphony: at the outset, he commented,

> C minor is only one of several possible keys: on the strength of the first two bars alone, the symphony could equally well be in B flat, in E flat or in G minor. I asked myself, 'what if Beethoven's Fifth were in G minor?'[10]

Elcock's idea was consequently to start and ultimately finish his new symphony on G, but to locate much of the intervening symphonic argument in the neighbourhood of C. In doing so, he was reversing the plan of Nielsen's First Symphony (1892), designated as being 'in G minor' but beginning and ending on an unrepentant chord of C major, its surging optimism tempered ultimately by the unresolved tonal ambivalence that serves as its fulcrum.

The first bar of Elcock's opening movement (which he has characterised in conversation as a 'trumpet signal') 3 dispenses with the iconic rhythm of Beethoven's first four bars, but still plays upon their general melodic contour of a pair of interlocking thirds moving sequentially downwards; the notes are also the same (G, E flat, F, D). The notes falling directly onto the beat in Elcock's initial motif happen also to outline a simple four-note descending scale, soon picked up by other departments of the orchestra and proving as germane to the musical argument as the recurrent interlocking thirds. Also present in the fast music are rhythmically displaced echoes of Beethoven's initial three-note group – but presented so that the third note, not the first, falls on the beat.

The seismic energy unleashed here seems to recall Nielsen again – this time, the turbulent opening of his Fourth Symphony, *The Inextinguishable* (its neuter case in Danish – *Det uudslukkelige* – denoting 'that which is inextinguishable', rather than an 'inextinguishable symphony'). The stage seems set for an expansive and sustained allegro movement on a grand scale. But Elcock has in mind the truncated, terse first-movement model which in Beethoven's hands serves as 'unfinished business' – as the catalyst for a

[10] https://steveelcock.fr

symphonic process spreading across the terrain of all the ensuing movements, allowing the Scherzo to expand open-endedly towards the explosive onset of his finale; there the upward-moving transitional material seems to reverse the downward thrust of the opening of the work. As Elcock wryly puts it: 'Many symphonies begin with a slow introduction to a fast movement, but I think I have achieved the dubious distinction of writing the first first movement that has a fast introduction to a slow movement'.[11] This slow movement is far from terse or truncated, and yet the unassuaged sorrow of its closing stages signals a long road ahead. It is the mark of an innate symphonist that the wisdom of such a decision takes much of the rest of the work to reveal itself, according with Kierkegaard's observation that the problem with life is living it forwards in order to understand it backwards. Be that as it may, in retrospect one sees that both the first and the second movements of Elcock's conception are suddenly halted in their tracks, and that this repeated, implacable denial of headlong onward momentum serves cumulatively to 'tighten the spring' which is released finally with explosive pent-up energy in the opening bars of the finale. Seen in this light, both the initial fury and the ensuing stasis of the first movement are foretastes of later music, with the slow music of the first movement expanded to memorable effect in the unexpected, stylistically retrospective tenderness of the third.

Elcock speaks of the prolonged G minor chord that ends the initial *Allegro* as 'paralysed with fear', though this moment is soon followed by a more positive, aspiring idea (*Moderato*) from the cellos and cor anglais. But then, he writes, 'as it rises it starts to leak round the edges till it spreads like a stain over the score'. It is worth emphasising not only the point being made here, but also the terms in which the composer does so: Elcock sees the players in the orchestra as the *dramatis personae* of the whole human tragicomedy. The gestures and processes permeating his symphonic thinking arise directly from images of the human condition and of fallible, fractured humanity, and it is entirely natural therefore for him verbally to articulate sequences of musical events in terms of misbehaviour, misadventure or things going wantonly, sometimes

[11] Email from Steve Elcock to the author, 16 December 2019.

uncontrollably awry. 'Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made', said Kant, and here Elcock seems to aim paradoxically at the perfect representation of an inherently imperfect world.

A fleeting return to fast tempo recalls the opening of the Symphony, but as a pale shadow only, and the music drains away into the depths. Over solemn trombone chords, a cello solo 'refers to something as yet unknown', destined to be explained only in the lyrically tender main theme of the third movement. Woodwinds intone the slow version of the opening 'trumpet signal'. Eventually there follows a recapitulation of the more flowing music. It leads directly into the *Moderato* second theme, which rises to a bleak climax as the music returns to its fundamental slow tempo, in which a bass-drum rhythm is 'hammered out like a death knell'. The music ultimately undergoes a parting of the ways, expiring with ethereal first violins hovering far above the implied abyss of a dissenting triad from cellos and low woodwinds. This is stark, raw music of rare nobility and eloquence, often string-dominated in a fashion obliquely reminiscent of Mahler. Gradual harmonic transformations are achieved by deploying the ascending or descending scale material between alternating parts, so that the onset of one note overlays the ending of the one before it, creating an unfolding landscape of grief which is all the more affecting for its glacier-like, impersonal slowness.

The composition of the Fifth Symphony began with the obsessively insistent rhythm which dominates its second movement [4] and confers upon it the title 'Ostinato' – used already as a 'scherzo substitute' in the Third Symphony. Unlike Beethoven with his scherzo, Elcock places his 'Ostinato' before the slow movement, allowing it to function not as a conduit into the finale but as a rising tide of menace, comparable eventually with the furious scherzo in Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony (allegedly a portrait of Stalin) – until it spontaneously combusts, leaving only the protracted dying echoes of an eerily sinister tam-tam (gong) to act as a force-field between it and the second half of the Symphony.

The 'Ostinato' embodies a different rhythmic 'take' on Beethoven's opening motif, acknowledging its grouping of three quavers but doing so within an unbroken, obsessive alternation of quavers and semiquavers. Elcock observes that 'this rhythm is rarely allowed to sound in focus, but is almost always in counterpoint with itself on divided

strings, the entries coming in on different beats'. Repeatedly, the rhythmic ostinato fans out from a monotone to a dense chord before falling back to begin again from a slightly raised pitch. Set against this process, slower repeating notes maintain a constant syncopated rhythm, adding to the sense of mental displacement. The opening material (aptly characterised by Elcock as 'slippery') has been largely forgotten, but soon it, too, is thrown into the mix, in the form of upward-slithering scale fragments. Elcock describes the movement as

> a steamroller out of control and heading for catastrophe. Tension […] finally explodes, leaving fortissimo timpani and trombones alone on the ostinato rhythm. Horns, then trumpets, enter too with the counter-rhythm, and the entire mass of strings joins forces with the side drum, tenor drum, timpani and third trumpet, at last all in agreement on the ostinato rhythm, while woodwind and xylophone shriek out like birds of prey flying over a war zone. A crescendo roll on the tam-tam obliterates everything.

Although the ensuing slow movement [5] prefigures the finale, it is no mere introduction: drawing upon material written some time earlier for a work which sets lines from Ecclesiastes for soloists, chorus and orchestra, Elcock fashions a contrast so extreme that a dreamlike aura descends on this rapt but unsettling music – an indication that the beating heart of the work has been reached. Whereas the slow movement of Beethoven's Fifth starts by solidly inhabiting the key of A flat major but then drags it continually towards C major (the key of his finale), Elcock's begins as if a door had been opened onto music already in progress, and then ends poised irresolutely where it started. The opening clarinet solo sounds and feels transitional, its deliberately obvious harmonic references to Beethoven and his successors later tempered by a more elliptical, ambient approach to changes of key. The upward sequential nature of this clarinet material also hints at secondary material in the final movement of the Beethoven – as well as anticipating its appearance in Elcock's finale, where it will make repeated appearances at double speed, often in rhythmic canon with itself (a device already mentioned by Elcock in connection with the 'Ostinato').

Beethoven's familiar chord of the dominant seventh leads on into fully expected harmonic resolution and triumphant C major at the onset of his finale. Throughout Elcock's slow movement, by contrast, this same formulation is continually denied its conventional destination, instead being deflected in any number of alternative directions. Moreover, a more dissonant, dreamlike central passage casts doubt on the veracity of what is being heard: this beatific interlude may be only a chimera, and the long shadows of the 'Ostinato' persist. The diminutive title 'Canzonetta' reflects the vocal origins of the music, but it entirely belies the emotional depth, resonance and luminosity of this remarkable, daring movement.

The finale [6] is a grandly scaled sonata construction, with an opening chord – easily recognisable whenever it recurs – which exactly quotes the one beginning the finale of Beethoven's Fifth, but here it is always succeeded by a complete denial of Beethovenian harmonic direction. At last unleashed without let or hindrance, the energy in the irregular $\frac{7}{8}$ rhythm generates much subsidiary material. (It is here that *aficionados* of Peter Mennin's symphonies are likely to be tangentially reminded of his propulsive rhythmic thinking.) A powerful climax leads into a secondary subject – a variant of the main theme in the 'Canzonetta'.

Development fuses the transformations of the 'Canzonetta' theme to three repeated crotchets (or quarter-notes – an 'augmented' rhythmic version of Beethoven's opening three quavers). After further exploration of the second subject, the central stages of the movement are concerned mainly with quiet developments of the three opening chords. The recapitulation begins with a combination of two of the ideas from the first subject in a vastly expanded paragraph, now firmly inhabiting the key of G minor. This time, the second subject ends with raucous brass entries, presented canonically above menacing percussion. The coda begins with trombones appropriating the characteristic rhythm of the second subject, at the same time as the strings begin a climbing scale from the first movement, in increasingly brief note-values. Above them, woodwinds declaim overlapping entries of the main theme from the first movement. In Elcock's words, 'the time is ripe for the unfinished business of the symphony's opening to be addressed, which it is in extended fashion, reaching a mighty triple forte climax and leading to a

chaotic ending'. It should be added that, when a composer of this unusual stamp declares anything as 'chaotic', the disparity between ends and means is extreme: this movement is a magnificent contrapuntal achievement, its motivic raw materials judiciously brief and malleable and its inexhaustible fecundity of invention controlled by the hand of a master of symphonic organisation.

The Fifth Symphony bears a dedication to Martin Anderson, in acknowledgement of his role in bringing Elcock's music to public attention. The work was first performed by Cardiff University Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Mark Eager, on 27 October 2017.

***Haven*, Op. 4 (1995, rev. 2011–17)**

Subtitled *Fantasia on a Theme by J. S. Bach*, this work [2] is Elcock's Op. 4 and thus precedes his First Symphony. He describes the piece as a fantasia on the *Sarabanda* movement from Bach's Partita No. 1 in B minor, BWV1002, explaining that 'I was bowled over by the generosity of spirit that I felt when I heard the opening bars of that Sarabande, and I wanted to do something to highlight that generosity'. He made minor revisions to *Haven* between 2011 and 2017. The score was originally prefaced by Gerard Manley Hopkins' short poem *Heaven Haven*; Elcock later removed it, though only because its subtitle (*A Nun takes the Veil*) seemed misleading in this context. *Haven* explores and reworks various motivic ideas from the original piece, expanding, combining and developing them. Extensive use is made of the rising fourths at the start of Bach's theme; for example, their sequential outline is present in the harmonic bass-line of the opening string music. Elcock has further characterised his relationship to the original Bach by reference to an oft-misquoted sentence added by the composer Gerald Finzi (1901–56) as a form of codicil to his complete worklist: 'To shake hands with a good friend over the centuries is a pleasant thing, and the affection which an individual may retain after his departure is perhaps the only thing which guarantees an ultimate life to his work'.

Although there is no direct or deliberate reference in *Haven* to Finzi's music itself, those familiar with the characteristic gentle momentum of his slow movements – such as the *Eclogue* for piano and strings, or the *Introit* for violin and orchestra – may sense

a comparable rhythmic 'shaking of hands' in Elcock's writing here. In a 2011 newspaper article for *The Guardian*,[12] the tenor Mark Padmore provided an apt gloss on Finzi's words by quoting the concluding stanza from *To Meet, or Otherwise* by Thomas Hardy, the poet arguably closest to Finzi's heart:

> So, to the one long-sweeping symphony
> From times remote
> Till now, of human tenderness, shall we
> Supply one note,
> Small and untraced, yet that will ever be
> Somewhere afloat
> Amid the spheres, as part of sick Life's antidote.

These lines are strikingly pertinent not only to *Haven* but also to the tenderer moments of Elcock's Fifth Symphony. As *Haven* proceeds, one is progressively aware of the *Sarabanda* as an implied presence in its primordial, undissected form; and indeed Elcock himself has written how, 'when the solo violin at last plays Bach's music exactly as he wrote it, we are supposed to feel that it has been there all along'. This 'palimpsest effect' therefore prefigures the unsettling message in the much later *Choses renversées par le temps ou la destruction*, cited earlier. In *Haven*, as in *Choses renversées*, ghostly Bach serves as the mirror of a gentle perfection interred ever deeper beneath the rising ground of modernity with its haste, violence and white noise.

Haven takes its audience across ever-changing terrain, its climaxes patiently built but then dissipated with disconcerting abruptness. There are phases of escalating harmonic dissonance, others of accelerated tempo. In one studiedly incongruous passage, rogue piccolo and snare drum impart a potentially ugly militarism to the musical narrative. This moment falls just after Bach's sequential passagework has been briefly wedded to an Edwardian opulence, with unison horns declaiming against offbeat chords from the full orchestra in a manner reminiscent of Elgar's concert overture *In the South (Alassio)*.

[12] 'Gerald Finzi, the quiet man of British music', *The Guardian*, 27 January 2011, accessible online via https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/jan/27/gerald-finzi-mark-padmore.

At such moments things threaten to tip over into burlesque – but, as with everything else in what seems to be a kaleidoscope of the human condition, the vision is transient.

Finally, Bach's violinist comes to life, and, though still seemingly at a tangent, the fractured modern world pauses to listen, its backdrop fanning upwards through the hushed strings. As the orchestra threatens to cover and obliterate the still small voice, it is as though the handshake across the centuries has sundered, opening distances up again as the violin line sinks ever deeper, back into the past. Yet, at the last, the orchestra falls suddenly away, leaving three bars of pristine Bach startling in their sudden immediacy.

Haven is dedicated to the conductor Eric Masclaux, who directed the first performance of Elcock's *Serenade* for flute and strings.

***Incubus*, Op. 28 (2017)**

The most recent of the works presented here, *Incubus* is an orchestral adaptation by Elcock of the final section from his string quartet *Night after Night* (separately catalogued as Op. 27). The quartet took its title from a quatrain in one of the *Songs of Travel* by Robert Louis Stevenson – though only its first line is applicable here:

> Night after night in my sorrow
> The stars stood over the sea,
> Till lo! I looked in the dusk
> And a star had come down to me.

The quartet is almost three times the length of *Incubus* on its own, and contains four sections of material in all, but with elements of recapitulation involved, too. In this arrangement, a newly written introduction serves to adumbrate what follows. Elcock has written that he conceived the quartet originally 'as a representation of an obsessive nightmare, which, like all good nightmares, ends abruptly. Comparison with the string quartet shows that I changed the ending, which here achieves a last-minute A major tonic chord'. Subsequently he implied that the true nightmare is insomnia and all that comes in its wake: 'The quartet was an attempt to exorcise the feelings of loneliness,

sorrow, grief, regret or anguish experienced when awakening in the middle of the night and not being able to get back to sleep'.

Incubus begins [1] with an eerily discordant wall of string sound, in which inchoate wisps of material soon orbit stepwise above and then below a central note in an apparently aimless fashion. A rapid escalation leads to a faster section dominated by semiquaver movement which sometimes recedes into an accompanying role and sometimes assumes the foreground. The stepwise motif is never far away, serving to convey the hermetic oppression of bad dreams. Whereas *Night after Night* possessed an intimacy of expression characteristic of the string-quartet medium, *Incubus* assumes the more universal dramatic nature of Elcock's symphonic allegros. That added final major chord brings proceedings to a conclusion in which one can easily imagine him suddenly sitting bolt upright, awake and yet still partially captive, like his listeners, in the clutches of the preceding vision – even though the composer insists that in real life such a thing never happens.

Incubus is an ideal candidate for the 'overture slot' in orchestral concert programmes. Likewise, it offers an ideally concise introduction to the music and vivid imagination of a remarkable composer.

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Dmitry Vasiliev was born in 1972 in the city of Bolshoi Kamen in Primorsky Kraj in the Russian Far East. He graduated from the Rostov State Conservatoire and then took a postgraduate course and probation period under the guidance of Alexander Skulsky at the Nizhny Novgorod State Conservatoire. He also participated in the master-classes of Alexander Vedernikov and Vladimir Ziva in Moscow.

He has since been active all over Russia. In 1997 he set up the Tambov Symphony Orchestra in Tambov, south of Moscow, which he led as artistic director and chief conductor until 2005, touring with the Orchestra to France and Moscow. While in Tambov he was artistic director of the International Rachmaninov Festival in 2001 and 2002, the Tambov Musicians' Festival in 1999, 2000 and 2001 and the Musical Province Festival in 2002. In 2003–5 he held the position of guest chief conductor of the Sochi Symphony Orchestra on the Black Sea, and since 2005 he has been principal conductor of the Siberian Symphony Orchestra in Omsk (it is known domestically as the Omsk Philharmonic), where in 2008 and 2010 he was artistic director of the New Music Festival. In June 2009 he took the Siberian Symphony Orchestra to Moscow to participate in the Fourth Festival of World Symphony Orchestras.

He has also conducted in Moscow, St Petersburg, Rostov-on-Don, Saratov and elsewhere in Russia and, internationally, in France, Italy and Poland. In 2003 he was awarded a diploma in the Fourth International Prokofiev Competition in St Petersburg and in the same year recorded a CD of Stanford and Schumann for Antes Edition with the Rostov Philharmonic Orchestra. The soloists with whom he has appeared include the soprano Hibla Gerzmava and bass Vladimir Matorin, the pianists Denis Matsuev, Nikolai Petrov and Eliso Virsaladze, the violinists Pierre Amoyal, Alexandre Brussilovsky and Oleh Krysa and the clarinettist Julian Milkis.

Among the world premieres Dmitry Vasiliev has to his credit are works by Mikhail Bronner, Sofia Gubaidulina, Ilya Heifets, Alemdar Karamanov, Ephraim Podgaits, Tolib Shakhidy, Andrey Tikhomirov and Mieczysław Weinberg, as well as Russian premieres of music by Woldemar Bargiel, Karl Jenkins, Charles Villiers Stanford, Alexander Tchaikovsky, Eduard Tubin and others.

The **Siberian Symphony Orchestra** (SSO) is one of the largest of Russian orchestras. It was founded in 1966 at the instigation of the conductor Simon Cogan, who remained at its head for more than ten years. From the beginning it attracted talented graduates from the Leningrad, Novosibirsk and Ural Conservatories, each institution with a well-earned reputation for producing dynamic and highly professional musicians. For many years the Siberian Symphony Orchestra toured the cities of the former Soviet Union, giving concerts in Moscow and Leningrad, Krasnoyarsk and Chita in central and eastern Russia, the cities along the Volga, Riga in Latvia, Kiev in Ukraine, Minsk in Belarus and Almaty in Kazakhstan. From 1975 the Orchestra participated in the contemporary-music festivals organised by the Union of Composers of the USSR, performing music by Khachaturian, Khrennikov, Shchedrin and other prominent composers.

From 1978 the Siberian Symphony Orchestra was headed by the conductor Viktor Tietz, under whose leadership it reached artistic maturity and developed a wide repertoire, winning first prize at the All-Russian Competition of Symphony Orchestras in 1984. From 1992 to 2004 the chief conductor of the Orchestra was Evgeny Shestakov. Since 1994 the Siberian Symphony Orchestra has regularly travelled abroad on tour and in 1996 it was awarded the title of 'Academic' – an honour in Russia.

Over the years the Orchestra has also worked with such distinguished conductors as Veronika Dudarova, Karl Eliasberg, Arnold Katz, Aram Khachaturian, Fuat Mansurov, Nathan Rachlin and Abram Stasevich. The soloists with whom the SSO has worked include the pianists Dmitri Bashkirov, Lazar Berman, Peter Donohoe, Denis Matsuev, Mikhail Pletnev, Grigory Sokolov and Eliso Virsaladze, the violinists Pierre Amoyal, Viktor Pikayzen and Viktor Tretyakov, the cellists Natalia Gutman, Mstislav Rostropovich and Daniil Shafran and the singers Dmitry Hvorostovski and Alexander Vedernikov.

Since 2005 the principal conductor of the orchestra has been Dmitry Vasiliev. Under his direction the repertoire of the SSO has become even wider and now includes not only the classics but also contemporary music, jazz, rock, musicals, film soundtracks and so on, and the Orchestra participates in a wide number of innovative projects, from festivals of contemporary classical music to the World and European ballroom-dancing championships. In 2009 the SSO took part in the Fourth Festival of World Symphony Orchestras held in the Hall of Columns in Moscow; and in April 2010 it became a member of the Forum of the Symphony Orchestras of Russia in Yekaterinburg. In recent years the Orchestra has also toured in Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, Ukraine and the USA.

The last decade has been a period of growth and flowering of the SSO. Its huge repertoire ranges from the symphonic classics to works by composers of the 21st century. The composition of the orchestra is in line with European standards, boasting more than 100 experienced, highly professional musicians. The discography of the SSO includes the four symphonies of the Danish composer Victor Bendix on Danacord and the Orchestral Suites Nos. 1 and 2 by Vissarion Shebalin (TOCC 0136), the first of its recordings for Toccata Classics (all conducted by Dmitry Vasiliev), which was followed by albums of music by Woldemar Bargiel (his Symphony in C major and the overtures *Prometheus*, *Overture to a Tragedy* and *Medea* on TOCC 0277), two of the music of Mieczysław Weinberg (*Polish Tunes* and Symphony No. 21 on TOCC 0193, and

Six Ballet Scenes and Symphony No. 22 on TOCC 0313) and Philip Spratley (*Cargoes*, *A Helpston Fantasia* and Third Symphony on TOCC 0194). The 400th recording in the Toccata Classics catalogue (TOCC 0500) was made by the SSO under Dmitry Vasiliev: the First Symphony and symphonic poem *Vaterland* by the Austrian late-Romantic Julius Bittner, a release which met with universal enthusiasm around the world (one customer review commenting that 'Dmitry Vasiliev and the Siberian Symphony Orchestra do Bittner's music credit […;] they seem to capture the essence of the style in these performances'). Most recently Toccata Classics issued Shebalin's Orchestral Suites Nos. 3 and 4 and his *Ballet Suite* (TOCC 0164).

TOCCATA CLASSICS

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STEVE ELCOCK Orchestral Music, Volume Two

1 ***Incubus*, Op. 28** (2017)	**8:35**
2 ***Haven: Fantasia on a Theme by J. S. Bach*, Op. 4** (1995, rev. 2011–17)	**24:56**
Symphony No. 5, Op. 21 (2014)	**43:47**
3 I *Allegro – Lento – Moderato*	15:56
4 II Ostinato *(Allegro)* –	6:24
5 III Canzonetta *(Largo)*	7:31
6 IV *Allegro*	13:56

Siberian Symphony Orchestra
Andrey Lopatin, violin 2
Grigorii Vever, clarinet 5
Evgeny Plaksin, horn 5
Dmitry Vasiliev, conductor

TT **77:20**

FIRST RECORDINGS