

Arnold ROSNER

MUSIC FOR SYMPHONIC WIND BAND

LOVELY JOAN: RHAPSODY ON AN ENGLISH FOLKSONG, OP. 88

NOW COMETH THE REDEEMER, OP. 119

THREE NORTHERN SKETCHES, OP. 117

DANCES OF INITIATION, OP. 98

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Density512
Jacob Aaron Schnitzer
Nicholas Perry Clark

ARNOLD ROSNER: MUSIC FOR SYMPHONIC WIND BAND

by Walter Simmons

During his fifty-year compositional career, the American composer Arnold Rosner (1945–2013) produced a body of work that combined diverse influences into a powerful, distinctly personal musical voice. His catalogue comprises compositions in nearly every genre, including three operas, eight symphonies, numerous works for orchestra and wind band, several large-scale choral works and many chamber, solo and vocal pieces.

Rosner's musical language is unified by a basis in the harmonic and rhythmic devices of the polyphonic music of the Renaissance and early Baroque. These roots can be found, to varying degrees, in virtually all his music. During the course of his career, his language gradually expanded from its idiosyncratic and intuitive beginnings, adding a free triadicism and exotic modalities, intensified in some works by more contemporary harmonic dissonance. He further imbued this language with the lavish orchestration and emotional drama of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Romanticism. What makes Rosner's music worthy of serious consideration, rather than being merely a pastiche of earlier styles, is the way he integrated these influences into a distinctive personal language capable of embracing an enormous expressive range. The seven works recorded here provide an excellent example of this range, including an attempt to capture an astronomical phenomenon in musical terms, an adaptation of an iconic genre of Indian classical music, a Neo-Baroque chorale prelude and a rhapsody on an old English folksong – each piece unmistakably Rosner.

Born in New York City in 1945, he took piano lessons as a boy and soon developed a voracious interest in classical music. Some sounds in particular appealed to him – juxtapositions of major and minor triads, as well as modal melodies – and before long he was working these sounds into music of his own. His family, fully aware of

the remote prospects of success offered by a career as a composer of classical music, encouraged him to pursue more practical endeavours, and so he attended the Bronx High School of Science, whence he graduated at the age of fifteen, and then New York University with a major in mathematics. But all the while he was composing: sonatas, symphonies, concertos and more – not that anyone was especially interested in hearing the fruits of his labours. His composer-heroes at the time were Hovhaness, Vaughan Williams and Shostakovich, and their influence is evident in much of his earlier creative work.

Graduating from NYU before he turned twenty, Rosner then spent a year at the Belfer Graduate School of Science, continuing his studies in mathematics. But, no longer able to resist the inner drive to pursue musical composition as his primary activity, he entered the University of Buffalo the following September, with a major in composition. That was in 1966, when serialism was the dominant style in university music departments, and young composers were often coerced, directly or indirectly, into adopting it. Rosner often recounted how the Buffalo faculty dismissed his creative efforts with varying degrees of contempt. Later, in describing his educational experience there, he would say that he ‘learned almost nothing’ from these teachers, whom he regarded as pedants. Although most of his peers capitulated to the pressure to embrace the *style du jour*, Rosner was adamantly opposed to serialism and stubbornly refused to accept a view of music that violated his most fervently held artistic values. And so, in response, his department repeatedly rejected the large orchestral work he had submitted as his dissertation. Realising that they would never accept the kind of music he considered meaningful, he gave up the notion of a doctorate in composition and decided instead to pursue a degree in music theory, with a dissertation – the first ever – on the music of Alan Hovhaness. He completed this document successfully, and in the process became the first recipient of a doctorate in music granted by the State University of New York.

Rosner devoted the rest of his life to writing the music that represented his personal aesthetic ideals, supporting himself through academic positions at colleges in and around the New York City area. His most enduring position was as Professor of Music

at Kingsborough Community College of the City University of New York, which he held for thirty years, until his death in Brooklyn in 2013, on his 68th birthday.

Rosner did not turn his attention to composing for wind band until the late 1980s, when he wrote his Symphony No. 8, subtitled 'Trinity'.¹ Pleased with the results, he returned to the medium frequently, completing seven additional works for band between 1990 and 2005. This album presents the first recordings of those seven compositions, beginning with the *Dances of Initiation*, Op. 98, composed in 1993. Rosner's programme note asks a question of his own title:

initiation into what? New uses, or overlaps of old harmonies? New and sometimes darker realms of feeling? New ways to count old rhythms? Mystical or occult spirituality? ... Counterpoint? ... Color? ... Sensuality? I prefer to invite each person to decide for him- or herself. One interpretation of the provocative title suggests that the music initiates the ensemble into new and strange, but entirely effective ways of hearing the various musical components.

Leaving such meditations aside, the work is structured in three compact movements: the first, marked *Maestoso* [1], is in 3/4 and uses more counterpoint than the others, some of it in fairly antique style. Indeed, the counterpoint begins immediately at the work's onset. A main feature is the overlap of held chords against moving patterns of harmony in the rest of the band. Some passages feature close interlocking rhythms, in the character of 14th-century hocket, with some 'kick' in the form of major-minor cross-relations.

The second movement (*Andante moderato*) [2] is in 5/4 and gives a melodious solo to the first alto saxophone. Later, and very loudly, the whole band plays the same tune. Contrasting quiet moments highlight the flutes and glockenspiel.

The third movement (*Allegro*) [3] is in an irregular 9/8 structure (2+2+2+3), which can be found in ethnic dance music as widely flung as Brazil and Yugoslavia.

The first performance of *Dances of Initiation* was given in 1993 by the Symphonic Band of the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire; the conductor was Don George.

¹ Recorded on Naxos 8.573060.

A dramatic contrast is offered by *Eclipse*, Op. 100 [4], which dates from 1994. Here Rosner writes:

Eclipse was commissioned by the Oshkosh West High School Wind Ensemble, through a grant from the Meet the Composer Educational Program.

In the work, I have tried to describe the actual events of a total solar eclipse in colorist and programmatic design. Listeners may try to follow the astronomical progress, or may listen in a more general impressionistic or emotional way, at individual pleasure.

Although the music uses a free, if conservative, chromatic style, and makes fairly heavy emotional demands, I have tried to tailor the score for high school ensembles by avoiding complex rhythms, extreme ranges, and difficult passage-work for the most part.

Atypical of Rosner's output, *Eclipse* is a truly programmatic work, in that it attempts to create a musical analogue to this astronomical phenomenon, following an eclipse from the night preceding its appearance to its climactic completion, and then its gradual receding as the night-music returns. These stages are clearly indicated in the score. Rosner adds: 'Let me quickly advise that I resisted the impulse to write an actual retrograde of the pre-totally portion to close the piece, dismissing the thought as clever but obvious and expressively vacuous. But the character of the earlier portions comes back in reverse sequence'. *Eclipse* is dedicated to the Oshkosh West High School Wind Ensemble and its conductor Peter Schmalz, who gave the world premiere in 1995.

AGA!, Op. 104 [5], was composed in 1995 and was first performed that year by the University of Michigan Symphony Band under the direction of H. Robert Reynolds. Rosner was fond of several non-western music styles and taught courses in ethnomusicology for many years. Among his favourites were the developmentally advanced forms characteristic of Indian classical music. I have taken the liberty of making some minor editorial changes to his programme note for the work:

To define *raga* as the Indian equivalent of a mode or scale barely scratches the surface. Traditionally, each *raga* is associated with not only a set of pitches, but also with appropriate moods and times of day. While a western composer may modulate from one mode to

another at whim, the notes of a *raga* constitute an ‘ur’-melody, based on which countless improvisations may be woven.

The typical ensemble for this music is a trinity consisting of a melody instrument (such as a sitar), a percussion instrument (such as the pair of hand drums called the tabla), and a ubiquitous drone (traditionally provided by the tanpura, a highly resonant string instrument designed for this purpose). In most performances, the first portion is in a free, elastic rhythm, while the second portion is rhythmically tighter and more vigorous. The drummer participates in the second half only.

The idea of transferring this style to the full western symphonic band occurred to me as early as the late 1960s – the time when Indian music enjoyed a meteoric rise in listener attention. I was attracted to the coloristic possibilities and the power of the wind ensemble, and also felt such a piece would constitute a highly unusual experience for student players. But I was equally aware of the hazards. Would the players and audience tolerate the sparsity of harmonic progression? Since asking large components of a band to improvise concurrently would invite harsh clashes, could the melodic fantasy of genuine Indian music be approached in a thoroughly notated work? Another choice concerned the question of what *raga* to base the work on: Should I invent my own or use an existing example?

I decided to use *Rag Jog* (pronounced to rhyme with ‘vogue’). As in many ragas, the descending and ascending forms differ somewhat. In the descent, there is a ‘zig-zag’ or wrinkle of A–B flat–A flat, which gives additional character to the major–minor aspect of the scale.

I have followed the usual two-part slow–fast design, using very little percussion in the first half. In the second half, I have assigned some of the rhythmic parts to the brass, but have taken advantage of the drumming capabilities in the band, placing two pairs of timpani at the sides and a set of *timbales* in the rear center of the stage.

In some *raga* performances there are rhythmic interactions between melody and drums, or between two drummers. I have composed two such examples, the first between *timbales* and the winds, and the second between the timpanists. I have also tried to follow the tradition of building intensity within each of the two portions as they progress.

Inevitable in a work attempting to embrace two musical cultures, some liberties are taken. I have occasionally interrupted the drone, and have also allowed it to migrate among many registers and colors. This is partially to relieve the listener, but also to prevent certain instrumental parts from degenerating into monotones. I have tried to keep these breaks very short in the hope that the general beacon-like character of the drone would be retained. Nevertheless, certain low-range instruments are occupied with only one or two pitches for long stretches. I have occasionally used brief harmonic progressions. These are always very short, principally serving to emphasize or re-establish the drone rather than undermine it.

I have used a few pitches not found in *Rag Jog*. These occur in quick turns, slides, and so forth, and indeed can be found in genuine performances, too. The greatest deviation from tradition is the usage of countermelody. This is rare because when two melodic parts improvise there is little control of the harmony. But as composer I have availed myself of this opportunity to add complexity and linear interest for listeners and players alike, and have tried to keep the textures to a density of two melody voices while restricting any sense of western harmonic progress to other portions of the work. The sections with countermelody can be found in both the *Andante* and the *Allegro*.

One aspect of this piece warrants further comment: there is no shortage of works for wind band that draw upon distinctive features of non-western music and national folk styles to evoke the flavour of their musical cultures, but most such works feature pre-existing folk-melodies, usually treated according to conventional western harmonic procedures. In *RAGA!* Rosner addresses a more ambitious challenge: to create a work based on original thematic material in the manner of genuine Indian music and applying to it the procedures found in authentic Indian ragas, but within the expanded instrumental context of a symphonic wind ensemble.

De Profundis, Op. 91, completed in 1991 [6], is the most complex and challenging work on this album. This time the programme note was supplied by Rosner's archivist, the composer and organist Carson Cooman:

The passacaglia was a musical form which Rosner employed on many occasions to achieve distinctly personal musical ends. *De Profundis* is subtitled 'a passacaglia for symphonic band'. The title means 'out of the depths' in Latin (most often used to refer to Psalm 130, which begins with those words). As is often characteristic of Rosner's passacaglias, the music begins quietly and atmospherically, builds to an absolutely shattering climax, and then recedes again.

The complexity of *De Profundis* is apparent from the beginning, with the presentation of the ground bass: an *ostinato* of 31 notes embracing eleven of the twelve tones in irregular rhythm and barely discernible tonality. The ground bass itself contains several motifs that contribute to the development of the work as a whole, with additional motifs, introduced as the variations proceed, adding considerably to the developmental foreground. Although the work deviates from many aspects of the traditional passacaglia, the basic tone of the piece – slow tempo, serious and sombre mood, a gradual increase of intensity to a climax – conforms to the formal prototype.

Now Cometh the Redeemer, Op. 119 [7], was composed in 2005. Carson Cooman writes:

Now Cometh the Redeemer is an orchestration for concert band of the second movement of Rosner's [String Sextet, Op. 47, 'Nun komm' der Heiden Heiland'], a work inspired by the Lutheran chorale of the same name, and especially the mid-Baroque setting by Michael Praetorius. The composer wrote that the stirring chorale tune 'sits comfortably beneath the surface and is finally sung forth in all its glory near the end, replete with ribbons of contrapuntal decoration and enhancement'.

This work is an excellent, representative example of Rosner's pure Neo-Renaissance/early-Baroque approach, a 'sub-style' that he employed in some of his most important works, such as the Symphonies Nos. 5² and 8. *Now Cometh the Redeemer* was first performed in 2005 by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) Wind Ensemble, under the direction of Jack Stamp, to whom the work is dedicated.

² Available on Naxos 8.559347.

The next work, *Three Northern Sketches*, Op. 117, was composed in 2003. Carson Cooman describes it as

a set of tone poems inspired by northern lands and climates. The jagged and powerful first movement ('Ice Sculpture') [8] leads to a gentle 'Pastorale' in 5/8 meter [9]. The third movement, 'Aurora' [10], employs the technique that Rosner called *stile estatico*. In it, he used 'complex cross-rhythms or cross-color overlap' to achieve 'high spiritual intent'. This movement is an atmospheric evocation of the Northern Lights.

The subtitles of the three sections of this abstract work are intended to stimulate the imagination of the listener. The piece was premiered in 2004 by the IUP Wind Ensemble, conducted by Jack Stamp.

Lovely Joan, Op. 88 [11], is based on an English folksong perhaps most familiar as the subject of the middle section of Vaughan Williams' *Fantasy on Greensleeves*. Once again, Carson Cooman writes:

While Rosner had a lifelong interest in folk music from many countries and wrote several pieces with overt folk and ethnic inspiration, *Lovely Joan: Rhapsody on an English Folk Song* is his only composition to use an actual folk tune. It is his personal addition to the popular and traditional concert band genre of folk song rhapsodies. Rosner's treatment is characteristic in its complete exploration of all the harmonic potential of the original tune. Formally, the work is cast in two halves: an atmospheric, motet-like *Adagio non troppo* followed by the fugal *Allegro*. This ebullient second section is filled with what the composer himself called 'contrapuntal pyrotechnics', including a remarkable ten-entry stretto.

To this description I can add that in this work Rosner develops the folksong with an exhaustive rigour that far exceeds the treatment of folk-melodies in the typical 'folksong rhapsody' for wind band. The premiere of *Lovely Joan* took place in 1990 at California State University, Fullerton; the conductor was Mitch Fennell.

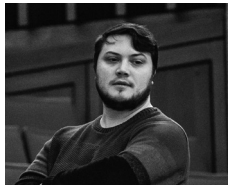
Walter Simmons, musicologist and critic, has written extensively on American composers who maintained an allegiance to traditional musical values. He is the editor of a series of books, 'Twentieth-Century Traditionalists', published by Rowman and Littlefield. He wrote the first two volumes himself (under the Scarecrow Press imprint): *Voices in the Wilderness: Six American Neo-Romantic Composers* (2004), which considered the lives and works of Barber, Bloch, Creston, Flagello, Giannini and Hanson, and *Voices of Stone and Steel: The Music of William Schuman, Vincent Persichetti, and Peter Mennin* (2011). A staunch advocate of the music of Arnold Rosner, he was a close associate of the composer for more than forty years. He is also active as a record producer, responsible for more than a hundred first recordings.

The American conductor **Jacob Aaron Schnitzer**, a recipient of The Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Award for his initial contributions to orchestral music, serves as Artistic Director of Density512 and Associate Conductor of The Missouri Symphony. A champion of new music, he has led world premieres of more than 60 works by living composers. He holds degrees from the University of Missouri – Kansas City (UMKC) Conservatory, Boston University and the University of Texas at Austin and studied additionally at the Bayreuth Festival and Domaine Forget de Charlevoix.



Photograph: Jack Kloecker

Nicholas Perry Clark serves as Artistic Curator of Density512, as well as Interim Music Director of the Greater Rockwall Youth Symphony in Rockwall, Texas. He holds degrees from the University of Missouri – Kansas City and The University of Texas at Austin. At UMKC, he was principal conductor of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and assistant conductor of Missy Mazzoli's *Proving Up*. He leads workshops in the study and interpretation of musical scores. He is also a composer, whose works have been performed by NOW Ensemble, Zzyzx Quartet, Density512, members of the Oregon Symphony and various collegiate ensembles around the country. A student of Kevin Noe, he most enjoys directing curated, high-impact musical experiences such as his latest productions, *The Pandemic is a Portal* and *God and Other Needs*.



Photograph: Jack Kloecker

Density512 is a chamber orchestra and new-music collective founded in 2017 which aims to tell stories through imaginatively curated experiences, amplify the voices of groundbreaking artists and cultivate interdisciplinary collaborations. For this album of Arnold Rosner's wind-ensemble music, Density512 engaged an all-star team of collaborators and friends from its founding years to the present day. The current and former Density512 musicians on this album hold positions in professional orchestras and universities throughout the United States.

Density512 musicians

François Minaux, flute and piccolo*

Molly Damitio, flute and piccolo

Katie Greenwell Worsham, flute and piccolo

David Keith Blackwell, Jr., oboe and cor anglais*

Ryan Hirokawa, oboe

Jillian Kouzel, oboe

Ryan Stockhausen, clarinet/concertmaster*

Brendan Fairleigh, clarinet

Matt Rockwell, clarinet

Luz Sarmiento, clarinet

Evan Schnurr, clarinet

Iván Valbuena, clarinet

Daniel Aisenberg, alto clarinet

Stephen Savage, bass clarinet

Jacob Bricker, contrabass clarinet

Jonathan Churchett, bassoon

Adam Drake, bassoon

Davey Hiester, contrabassoon

Nathan Mertens, alto

saxophone

Sarah Hetrick, alto saxophone

Charlie Chadwell, tenor

saxophone

Kyle Blake Jones, baritone

saxophone

Sarah Au, horn*

Ben Carroll, horn

Frank Carrubba, horn

Joel Ockerman, horn

Kirstin Schularick, horn

Kenken Gorder, trumpet and cornet*

Joe Jennis, trumpet

Casey Martin, trumpet

Matthew Swihart, trumpet and cornet

Lauren Casey-Clyde, trombone*

Ho Tsz Yin, trombone

Kyam McCormack, bass trombone

Anthony Gonzalez, euphonium

Alex Avila, tuba

Charlie Goodman, tuba

Jordan Walsh, percussion*

Dan Hartung, percussion

Jack Kloecker, percussion

Reese Maultsby, percussion

Paul Millette, percussion

Ryan Patterson, percussion

Caroline Richards, percussion

Dana Wygmans, double bass

Natalie Rochen, harp

*core Density512 member



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Session assistants: John Calvin Cates, Liam Dolan-Henderson, Elise Etherton and Tiffany Wines
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Editor: John Calvin Cates
Producers: Nicholas Perry Clark, Tyler Ehrlich, Aurel Garza-Tucker and Jacob Aaron Schnitzer
Executive Producer: Walter Simmons

As with the preceding Rosner albums released by Toccata Classics, this recording has been made possible by the gracious stewardship of the composer's sister, Irene Rosner David.

Visit ArnoldRosnerMusic.com for further information.

PUBLISHERS

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Lovely Joan: Rhapsody on an English Folksong, Op. 88

De Profundis, Op. 91

Dances of Initiation, Op. 98

Eclipse, Op. 100

RAGA!, Op. 104

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Three Northern Sketches, Op. 117

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Now Cometh the Redeemer, Op. 119

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ARNOLD ROSNER Music for Symphonic Wind Band

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❻ <i>De Profundis, Op. 91</i> (1991)	10:11
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❽ No. 1 Ice Sculpture	3:50
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TT 73:29

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FIRST RECORDINGS

Jacob Aaron Schnitzer ❶–❹ ❺ ⓫

Nicholas Perry Clark ❺ ❼–❿, conductors