

signum  
CLASSICS

Symphonies Nos. 6 & 7  
Night Voyage

# CHRISTOPHER GUNNING



Royal Philharmonic Orchestra  
Christopher Gunning *conductor*

SYMPHONIES NOS. 6 & 7  
NIGHT VOYAGE  
CHRISTOPHER GUNNING

1	Symphony No. 6	[23.04]
2	Night Voyage	[12.11]
3	Symphony No. 7	[27.58]
	Total timings:	[63.16]

ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA  
CHRISTOPHER GUNNING CONDUCTOR

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SYMPHONIES NOS. 6 & 7  
NIGHT VOYAGE

Early in 2010 I moved into a new house in a new area, and in a spirit of optimism set about my **6th Symphony**. After the 5th, which is in four extended movements and runs for over

fifty highly-charged minutes, I felt the need to tackle something on an altogether smaller scale; something simpler, more direct, clearer in its orchestration, and in a way more “classical” than its predecessors. I would use themes and motifs; it may be unfashionable to do so, but it’s the way I think, and in fact I’ve always been keen to

connect with an audience. Is my desire to write the way I do connected to my history of film and TV drama scores? Maybe, because I certainly love drama in music, but there’s a world of difference between a film score and a symphony!

With my 6th, I returned to the idea of a single span incorporating several sub-sections, a form which I had already explored in my 1st, 3rd and 4th. The result may feel more like a tone-poem than a conventional symphony (if there is such a thing nowadays) and I certainly hope the music has a strong narrative to it, but there is no specific story to listen out for; instead there are a number of sections which are all connected in some way.

The trumpet call at the start introduces a simple woodwind figure which is to return at various points of the symphony. It is expanded during the first, slow, section and eventually gives way to a faster ostinato figure in the strings. The ostinato section develops, but after becoming quite forceful peters out, giving way to section three, which has soft sustained chords from the winds, harp and vibraphone against which the strings weave expressive phrases, becoming steadily more intense. Then, after quietly nocturnal solos from the trumpet and clarinet, a perky fugato

section begins, which works itself out until the opening figure returns in a much grander form. There’s a brief restatement of the idea from the third section, this time featuring two clarinets, then the music scurries to its close – and finishes with a bang!

I have always been drawn to the sea and spent many years as the owner of a small sailing yacht, pitting my wits against the elements and encountering several near disasters. **Night Voyage** is a sea piece and was born on a rainy evening standing by the Mersey river. To the West, a patch of orange lit the darkening sky, seabirds called mournfully, and I watched a large grey freighter slipping majestically out to sea. Where was it heading and what would befall it? My ship takes an imaginary journey; first there is the optimism of a new adventure, but then we meet a violent storm. As the storm subsides land is sighted and we arrive safely at dawn, battered and bruised, but intact – if chastened. There are obvious parallels with life here; this is really a tone-poem depicting a journey through an emotional crisis to a resolution of a sort.

The theme of journeying is carried through to my **7th Symphony**. Like the 6th, the music is continuous but this time falls into six main

sections, or “phases,” all founded in various ways on the rising whole-tone scale heard at the very start. This affects the harmonic language but the 7th is also the most directly tonal of all my recent pieces. This is not an unconscious development; at this point in the 21st century many composers draw upon influences from here, there and everywhere, and if you wish to express positive emotions why not use straightforward tonality?

I had in mind a long challenging journey; you can imagine the ascent of a high mountain, or something more psychological – fortunately one doesn’t have to be specific, and surely one of the joys of listening is that everybody brings their own life experiences to bear.

Phase one is slow and thoughtful, which you could regard as waking from sleep and pondering the task ahead. A far more active phase follows, mostly optimistic with hints of something heroic. With phase three we enter a mysterious, foggy world with the blurred outlines of mysterious shapes. Phase four, by contrast, is relentlessly rhythmic with a steady pulse, becoming ever more dramatic; the idea of struggling against formidable odds was uppermost in my mind. A short break in tension follows, a prelude to a return of the optimistic music heard in phase two.

Again this subsides and the thoughtful, quiet opening music returns briefly. This proves to be preparation for the final main section, with its confirmation of A Major, and the summit. At the very end, we hear the quiet rising scales from the opening, this time high in the violins; is this exhaustion? Or perhaps a hollow victory?

I should like to thank many people for their help and encouragement in the recording sessions. Firstly members of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Ian Maclay for organising the sessions, Clio Gould for leading the orchestra, Mike Hatch for recording and remixing the music, Catherine Handley and Paul Bateman for their assistance with score reading, and Sveta Gunning for preparing the orchestral parts. This was a brilliant team.

Christopher Gunning, March 2020

## CHRISTOPHER GUNNING

Christopher Gunning has composed twelve symphonies, as well as concertos for the piano, violin, cello, flute, oboe, clarinet, saxophone, and guitar; many of these have now been recorded. He has also composed many scores for films and television dramas, including Agatha Christie’s *Poirot*, *La Vie en Rose*, *Middlemarch*, *Cold Lazarus*, *Rebecca*, *Under Suspicion*, *Firelight*, *The Big Battalions*, *Wild Africa*, *When the Whales Came* and *Porterhouse Blue*. With a career spanning 50 years, he has won 4 BAFTA and 3 Ivor Novello Awards, and BASCA’s prestigious Gold Badge Award.

Christopher studied composition with Edmund Rubbra and Sir Richard Rodney Bennett at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. After a hugely successful career writing for the big and small screen he is now focussed on his classical work and releases.

Stephen Pritchard, reviewing a disc of his violin and cello concerti says “*You could never accuse Christopher Gunning of low output: twelve symphonies, chamber music, award-winning film and TV scores and concerti for piano, flute, oboe, clarinet and saxophone, now joined by*



*works for violin and cello. Harriet Mackenzie’s expressive playing makes Gunning’s sinuous solo line sing like a bird in his unashamedly lyrical celebration of the landscape in the Brecon Beacons. It’s instantly accessible, warmly melodic yet never trite or cloying (the first movement is a gem, built around a single chord). The cello concerto is grittier, exploring dark themes of ageing and loss”.*

Ivan March, reviewing the *Symphony No 5* disc for Gramophone made it his ‘Choice’ saying “*If you want reassurance that the current post-atonal*

*renaissance is in full swing, this is just the CD to convince you,”* and Robert Matthew-Walker at International Record Review said Gunning is “*a genuine composer*” and continues, “*Gunning’s serious works are written in a musical language that is not immediately ‘populist’ in the manner of Malcolm Arnold or Rod McKuen but which naturally inhabits a mode of expression that one would expect from a pupil of Edmund Rubbra and Richard Rodney Bennett – we are talking ‘serious music’. Gunning’s serious music deserves study – of that I am convinced – and I strongly urge those to whom fashion in art means little when compared to what is being conveyed by the creator, to investigate this disc*”.

[christopher-gunning.co.uk](http://christopher-gunning.co.uk)

## ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

For more than seven decades the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) has been at the forefront of music-making in the UK. Its home base since 2004 at London’s Cadogan Hall serves as a springboard for seven principal residencies as well as more than forty-five concerts per year in long-term partnership venues across the country, often in areas where access to live orchestral music is very

limited. With a wider reach than any other UK large ensemble, the RPO has truly become Britain’s national orchestra.

Throughout the regional programme, plus regular performances at Cadogan Hall, Southbank Centre’s Royal Festival Hall and a hugely popular series at the Royal Albert Hall, and international touring engagements, the RPO remains committed to working with the finest conductors. In July 2018, the RPO announced Vasily Petrenko as the Orchestra’s new Music Director, assuming the title of Music Director Designate in August 2020 prior to commencing the full role in August 2021. He joins the RPO’s roster of titled conductors, which includes Pinchas Zukerman (Principal Guest Conductor), Alexander Shelley (Principal Associate Conductor) and Grzegorz Nowak (Permanent Associate Conductor).

In 2018, RPO Resound, the Orchestra’s community and education programme, celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. Throughout its history it has thrived on taking music into the heart of the regions that the Orchestra serves, working with a variety of participants in a range of settings including working with young people, the homeless and recovering stroke patients. Although the RPO embraces twenty-first-century opportunities, including appearances with pop

stars and on video game, film and television soundtracks, its artistic priority remains paramount: the making of great music at the highest level for the widest possible audience. As the RPO proudly looks to its future, its

versatility and high standards mark it out as one of today’s most open-minded, forward-thinking symphony orchestras.

For more information, please visit [rpo.co.uk](http://rpo.co.uk)



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Recorded in Watford Town Hall, UK, on 3rd and 4th February 2014  
Recording Engineer, Mix and Mastering – Mike Hatch  
Recording Assistant and Editor – Claire Hay

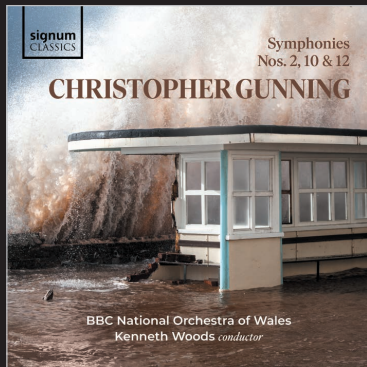
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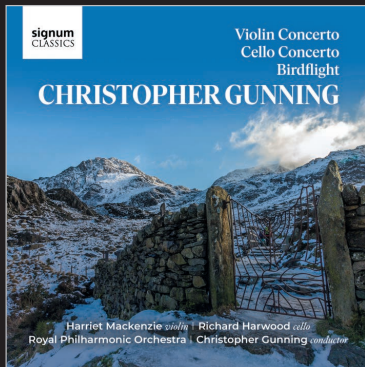
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**Royal Philharmonic Orchestra**  
**Christopher Gunning conductor**

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**Stephen Pritchard**

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