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TOCCATA
CLASSICS

Philip SPRATLEY

Orchestral Music Volume Two

**Symphony No. 3,
Sinfonia Pascale**

**Cargoes: Suite for Orchestra
after John Masefield**

A Helpston Fantasia

**Siberian Symphony Orchestra
Dmitry Vasiliev, conductor**

FIRST RECORDINGS

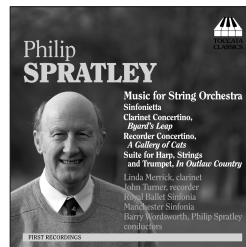


PHILIP SPRATLEY ON HIMSELF AND HIS MUSIC

My early years were spent at Balderton, near Newark, Nottinghamshire, where I was born in 1942. I played the piano as soon as I was big enough to climb on the stool or be helped up by my elder brother, who was a big encouragement. My introduction to music was through the concerts of the Newark Operatic Society or singing in the choir with my father at St Giles' Church. Visits to the Albert Hall in Nottingham with my mother were a real joy, especially the Nottingham Harmonic Society concerts conducted by the much loved Herbert Bardgett. When I was fifteen, the vicar of Newark, the Rev. J. H. D. Grinter, arranged for me to play the organ at neighbouring Coddington Church. This activity kept me going, as school was not very enjoyable and the only thing there I really looked forward to was cricket and thus the opportunity to travel.

After I had worked on the railway and had a few other jobs, the award of a scholarship to the Royal Manchester College of Music came as a complete surprise. I had been given a place but a grant for the year had been refused and I had no funds of my own. At Manchester my tutors were George Hadjinkos for piano and Tom Pitfield for composition. I also took time to play some organ with Ronald Frost, who was for years chorus-master of the Hallé Choir and the finest they have ever had. After a brief return to my roots, being unable to settle I took up a post in Romford, Essex. Four years later my wife and I moved to Lincolnshire, first to Long Bennington where our three children were born and thence to Deeping St James. I was an instrumental teacher locally and, for almost twenty years, Director of Music at Bourne Abbey.

My catalogue of works is quite small, with only about 50 works in it I care to acknowledge. Nevertheless, an opera *Rutterkin* (1971, rev. 1994–95), based on the story of the witches of Belvoir, had very successful productions in Bottesford and later at Kesteven and Grantham Girls' School. A second opera, *The Three Strangers* (1977, rev. 2002/7), is so far unperformed. My most ambitious work is *A Choral Symphony* (1983, rev. 1995 and 2005), on poems of the local pastoral poet John Clare, which was premiered in 1983 by the Grantham Choral Society conducted by Philip Lank.



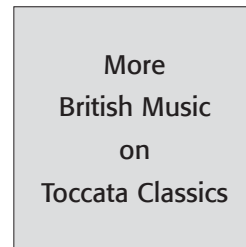
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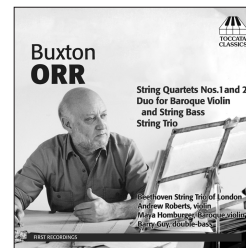
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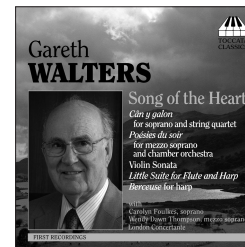
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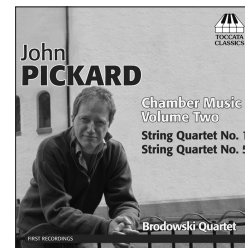
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wide number of innovative projects, from festivals of contemporary classical music to the World and European ballroom dancing championships. In 2009 the SSO took part in the Fourth Festival of World Symphony Orchestras held in the Hall of Columns in Moscow; and in April 2010 it became a member of the Forum of the Symphony Orchestras of Russia in Yekaterinburg.

A Note on the Omsk Philharmonic Hall

The Omsk Philharmonic Hall was redeveloped between September and April 2010: the redevelopment had to be completed in time for a concert by Valery Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra. The idea was to renovate the existing hall acoustically, but to achieve a hall that would be acceptable we had to tear out all the inner walls, the ceiling and even the main floor, digging down some 2.5m. The hall originally had a steep seating rake rather like a cinema, which we reformed with a much flatter main floor and a balcony. It also originally had a proscenium, which we replaced with a concert platform.

Within the external walls of the concert-hall space we created a new reverse-fan shape and tilted walls to generate strong early lateral reflections in the audience areas. When reflected sound in a concert hall arrives at a listener's ears from the left and right, he or she should feel enveloped in the music. Our early studies showed that reverse-fan shaping of the side walls can enhance this effect, and it is a feature of our concert-hall designs for the Meyerson Symphony Center, Dallas, and Symphony Hall, Birmingham.

Our more recent studies include modelling the strong effects of 'audience-grazing attenuation' – an effect that occurs when sound propagates only just above the heads of the audience and which can render the cellos inaudible. We have found that by tilting the side walls inwards, the sound will propagate from sufficiently above audience head-height to avoid this effect. In the unique design of Omsk, we have employed both reverse-fan shaping and tilted walls to enhance the strength of the early lateral sound. Although Omsk is the first concert hall to have these features, its success ensures that it will not be the last.

Nicholas Edwards
Acoustic Dimensions
Coventry

Apart from an unperformed violin concerto (1991, rev. 2002/4/9) and *An Autumn Symphony* (2008–9), the rest of my works are on the short side, including the tone-poems, *Plough Monday* (1973) and *The Legend of Hugh* (1974). Since I am a church musician there are, inevitably, a number of anthems and organ pieces in my list and a few works for concert band for local venues.

But my real passion is for folk-music, closely followed by the music of the Baroque. In the late 1960s and early '70s I collected and published several mumming plays from the locality. These are traditional post-Christmas romps which were performed by local ploughboys and the like. I am co-author with David Occomore of *Bushes and Briars: An Anthology of Essex Folk Songs*,¹ which contains several of the songs we collected in there in the 1970s.

My philosophy is simple. Compose only when you really have to. Music is an act of friendship and one should always have audience and listeners in mind.

Cargoes: Suite for Orchestra after John Massfield (2010–12)

Cargoes was begun in 2010 as a work for two pianos and, apart from the opening bars, took an inordinate time to complete. By 2012 the two-piano version had been abandoned as the work seemed crying out to be orchestral. The first movement proved the most difficult and work was done intermittently for over a year. Finally, after the scrapping of many sketches, the initial idea of twelve months earlier became the basis of it. The rest of the work proved easier but revision and tidying took over two years. This piece can almost be classed as three songs without words and is a musical essay on John Massfield's famous poem. The three stanzas are headed 'Quinquereme', 'Stately Spanish Galleon' and 'Dirty British Coaster'.

The movements follow without a break, the first, 'Quinquereme' [1], is in ternary form with piano and harp prominent and with help from some tuned gongs. After an imposing beginning, the middle section of the second movement, 'Stately Spanish Galleon' [2], contains a Sarabande which in turn is followed by a return of the first theme. The third movement, 'Dirty British Coaster' [3], is a picture of the 'mad March days' in the Channel. The scoring calls for a standard orchestra with a cor anglais and with xylophone and percussion providing some of the action.

A Helpston Fantasia (2010)

In 2009, the John Clare Cottage and visitor centre was opened in the village of Helpston, once in the county of Northamptonshire but since 1974 in Cambridgeshire. Part of the cottage where Britain's finest nature-poet was born and where his parents lived has been tastefully restored. In it there are numerous

¹ Monkswood Press, Loughton, 1979.



manuscripts of the poet, including his book of fiddle-tunes and folksongs. Clare was one of the first serious collectors of English folk material and anticipated the work of the English Folk Dance and Song Society by a hundred years.

John Clare (1793–1864) was not only a great poet but was also famed in his early life for being a splendid fiddle-player who was called upon for all sorts of occasions, particularly Saturday-night dances. His book contains tunes he had collected, heard or exchanged on his travels and some which might have originated from the locality. Although one or two tunes give the impression that they may have come from more remote parts of the British Isles, this may or may not be the case as the national grouping of tunes ‘has been much overstressed and England can reasonably claim a share in the body of traditional dance music.’² Clare’s manuscripts are hastily written and contain several mistakes and therefore give the impression that he used his fiddle-tune book merely for reference and then relied on his memory. It is immediately apparent that he possessed a good ear. He himself declared that he was much influenced by the singing of his father, who had an extensive repertoire of songs.

I wrote *A Helpston Fantasia* [4] in the summer of 2010 without any performance in mind. The form of the work is a free rondo, the main melody being ‘Turnpike Gate’. This appears in different rhythms, as would have happened in Clare’s performances. ‘The Disconsolate Sailor’ and ‘Bath Waltz’ follow, with the latter going through some variations. ‘Devil among the Taylors’ then requires the clarinet solo to do some virtuoso work. ‘Betty Brown’, ‘Black-Eyed Susan’ and ‘Lovely Nancy’ bring an air of calmness. ‘Saxe Coburg’ and ‘Roodlum Irish’ continue in lively six-eight fashion before ‘Turnpike Gate’, now in the same rhythm, brings the work to a close. The scoring is for a small orchestra of flute, oboe, two each of clarinets, bassoons and horns, a single trumpet (used sparingly), harp and strings. This recording was its first performance.

The work is dedicated to the memory of two remarkable residents of Helpston, Albert and Doris Snowball, who for many years were newsgagents for the area. They were much respected for their musical activities: Albert was organist of Helpston Church for 71 years and Doris organist of nearby Barnack Church for 34 years and both were also accomplished string-players.

Symphony No. 3, *Sinfonia Pascale* (2009)

It is probably fair to say that most composers at some time in their careers, particularly in their formative years, have aspired to write a symphony. There have been exceptions, of course: Ravel, Musorgsky and John Ireland are some of the many composers who showed no interest whatsoever in the form. Others

² Peter Kennedy, *The Fiddler’s Tune Book*, Hargail Music Press, Miami, 1992, p. 4.

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. Since 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 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 Bashkurov, 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.

The last decade has been a period of growth and flowering of the SSO. Its huge repertoire includes the symphonic classics and 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 in its ranks. 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, the first of its recordings for Toccata Classics (TOCC 0136). In recent years the Orchestra has also toured in Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, Ukraine and the USA.

Since 2005 the principal conductor of the Orchestra has been Dmitry Vasiliev. Under his direction the repertoire of 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 participates in a



Dmitry Vasiliev was born in 1972 in the city of Bolshoi Kamen in Primorsky Krai in the Russian Far East. He graduated from the Rostov State Conservatoire and then took a post-graduate 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 chief guest 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, 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 Hilda 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 clarinetist Julian Milks.

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

left it comparatively late, as with Brahms, who felt inhibited by the example of Beethoven – ‘How that man dogs my footsteps’, he declared. César Franck wrote his only symphony when he was 65, not long before the cab accident which brought about his untimely death. On the other side of the coin there are composers of the Classical era who wrote dozens of symphonies, infrequently aired, and then more for historical interest than on musical merit.

When I was eighteen, I was working in a record shop in Wigmore Street in London and thus was fortunate in being able to hear the latest releases of all musical genres. One moderately priced LP label was ‘Ace of Clubs’ from Decca which recorded a wide range of works, including many symphonies, which I listened to avidly when customers were few. A few months later the idea of a symphony came to me on a visit to North Wales, where the peace and solitude were conducive to deeper thought. The music developed while I was studying composition with Tom Pitfield in Manchester, but only the first movement was completed, in piano-duet form. The youthful ambition of writing a symphony remained for many years but its subject-matter and content remained elusive. Even so, a few bars of that early work have survived several decades to be included in the *Sinfonia Pascale*.

In 1967 I was in Jerusalem hoping that a teaching job was still available but the peace had been shattered by yet another Arab-Israeli conflict. Still, there was time to do some exploring and organising some trips for rich Americans. My admiration grew for the work of the priest-architect Antonio Barluzzi (1884–1960), an Italian Franciscan known by many as the ‘Architect of the Holy Land’. One of his many triumphs was the rebuilding of the Church of the Flagellation near St Stephen’s Gate, which is also the Second Station of the Cross. Of the many features of this building, and the most arresting, is the trio of stained-glass windows which cannot fail to impress even the most sceptical of visitors. These windows are the design of Duilio Cambellotti (1876–1960) and depict three scenes: the scourging of Jesus, Pontius Pilate washing his hands and finally the triumph of Barabbas. A few ideas for a work of symphonic proportions were sketched but proved unsatisfactory. In any case it was not clear what the form and title of the piece was going to be and to finish with a depiction of the third window was not what I wanted. It was not until 2009 that I felt really able to do justice to the subject. For anyone interested in the concept of inspiration, I should state categorically that the windows themselves were only a starting point. Although more than a catalyst, they were important mostly in opening up a wider chain of thought – the music is not restricted to a depiction of the people, places and events in that superb stained glass. On the contrary: each listener should imagine his or her own scenes and images.

The idea for the third movement and thus an opportunity to create a complete work presented itself quite accidentally. Years later my wife and I saw a group of African dancers in Peterborough and there was



a spontaneous joy in their music and dancing. This occasion led me to consider the early Christians who behaved similarly when, in the dark ages, stories in the gospels were read to them by wandering priests. Pagan ways were not abandoned but were annexed into the faith, initially with reluctance but eventually with the blessing of the church hierarchy. One such priest in my homeland of South Lincolnshire is St Guthlac of Crowland and the Deepings and I found it easy to imagine his work and witness. Although the listener is temporarily flung back to the scene of the first movement, the atmosphere of fear and frenzy gives way to one of optimism and ultimate triumph.

The first movement, in which tension is never far away, is in sonata form but without a codetta [5]. The hymn-like second subject brings a temporary respite to the tumult. In the development, at the point where the harp first enters, there is a brief reference to a passage which occurs in the third movement but this mood is dispelled when the second subject reappears with an accompaniment of menacing trumpets and timpani. The recapitulation begins with the main theme more fully orchestrated. After the appearance of a modified second theme the main subject is repeated in a short coda.

The beginning of the *Nocturne* is played on the flute [6]. Strings and woodwind alternately share some short episodes but the overriding mood is of gloom and despair. Of course, a scherzo in its accepted character seemed out of place a work such as this but in this movement there is an impassioned middle section which begins peacefully enough but gradually develops into a nightmare. It is here that the vibraphone makes an appearance. The movement continues with the woodwind in octaves developing an earlier idea, with soft lower brass and strings swapping duties. The mood of the beginning returns, with the flute having the final say.

After a reference to the main theme of the first movement, the third movement, *Chaconny*, begins with a germ of an idea played by the harp, lower strings playing *pizzicato* and percussion [7]. Of course, 'chaconny' is the word Purcell and his contemporaries used for a chaconne or passacaglia, a set of variations on a ground bass.³ It starts somewhat academically but gradually develops into a dance in 12/8 time, with episodes in different keys. The theme from the first movement tries hard to intervene and assume control but in the end is defeated.

The *Sinfonia Pascale* is scored for a standard orchestra, with the addition of an alto flute, saxophone and vibraphone. The recording you are listening to was its first performance.

³ It is commonly assumed that the passacaglia and the chaconne are equivalent forms and, indeed, both involve variations over a ground bass, conventionally eight bars in length. Initially, though, the passacaglia was in a minor key and in 3/4, whereas the chaconne was in a major key and in 4/4, but in practical terms the two forms soon became indistinguishable.

A Note on this Recording

Even in the relatively open world of today, it may seem odd that music by a composer from provincial England should be recorded by an orchestra in distant Siberia. In this instance the connection can be explained by the ongoing relationship between the Siberian Symphony Orchestra (known domestically as the Omsk Philharmonic) and its conductor, Dmitry Vasiliev, with Toccata Classics. For my wife and me, as composer, it proved a thoroughly enjoyable and illuminating experience, not least because from the moment we landed at Omsk, we were treated with the utmost warmth and courtesy.

Omsk is a bustling and busy city of 1.2 million people and, although established only since about 1720, possesses some fine buildings and spacious squares. It was a joy to visit several restored Orthodox churches recently restored after the ravages of Communism. And the new Philharmonic Hall is a state-of-the-art building with wonderful acoustics. The Siberian Symphony Orchestra with Dmitry Vasiliev at its head is a body of musicians who could stand their own against any orchestra in the world. Their dedication and discipline were such that from the very outset it was obvious it was a matter of pride for them to achieve the right result. The score of *Cargoes* is therefore inscribed 'For Dmitry and the Omsk Philharmonic of 2013'.