

# Charles O'BRIEN

## COMPLETE ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLUME ONE

ELLANGOWAN: CONCERT OVERTURE, OP. 12  
SYMPHONY IN F MINOR, OP. 23

Liepāja Symphony Orchestra  
Paul Mann

# CHARLES O'BRIEN: A SCOTTISH ROMANTIC REDISCOVERED

by John Purser

Charles O'Brien was born in 1882 in Eastbourne, where his parents, normally based in Edinburgh, were staying for the summer season. His father, Frederick Edward Fitzgerald O'Brien, had worked as a trombonist in the first orchestra to be established in Eastbourne and there, in 1881, he had met and married Elise Ware. They would return there now and again, perhaps to visit her family, whose roots were in France: Elise's grandfather had been a Girondin who had plotted against Robespierre and, in the words of Charles O'Brien's son, Sir Frederick, 'had to choose between exile and the guillotine. He chose the former and escaped to England, hence the Eastbourne connection.'<sup>2</sup> Elise died tragically in 1919, after being struck by an army vehicle.

As well as the trombone, Frederick Edward O'Brien played violin and viola and attempted, unsuccessfully, to teach his grandchildren the violin: 'it was like snakes and ladders – one minor mistake and we had to start at the beginning again', Sir Frederick recalled.<sup>3</sup>

Music went further back in the family than Charles' father. His grandfather, Charles James O'Brien (1821–76) was also a composer and played the French horn, and his great-grandfather, Cornelius O'Brien (1775 or 1776–1867), who was born in Cork, was principal horn at Covent Garden.

Charles O'Brien's musical education was of the best. One of his early teachers was Thomas Henry Collinson (1858–1928) – father of the Francis Collinson who wrote *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland*.<sup>4</sup> The elder Collinson was organist at St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh, as well as conductor of the Edinburgh Choral Union, in which he was succeeded by O'Brien himself. Charles O'Brien graduated with a B.Mus. from Pembroke College, Oxford, in 1907, and a D.Mus. from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1926. During this time, in Edinburgh and by correspondence, he took lessons in composition from Hamish MacCunn, perhaps the best-known Scottish composer of

<sup>1</sup> Sir Frederick O'Brien (1917–2012) was a leading QC and was knighted for services to the legal profession.

<sup>2</sup> Information from Sir Frederick O'Brien.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Routledge, London, 1966. Francis Collinson (1898–1984) was also a folksong collector and music director of the BBC radio programme *Country Magazine*.

the day,<sup>5</sup> who was, as usual, blunt in his comments, writing to Charles in 1903: 'As to the Variations.<sup>6</sup> In the first place they are unnecessarily *thick* and heavy'. MacCunn went on to write alternative versions 'instead of the splashy broken chords you use. This would be simpler and more to the purpose.'<sup>7</sup> But he never fully succeeded in curing O'Brien of his love of splashy broken chords, though he did acknowledge O'Brien's progress – as well he might.

I have not time now to say more than that you have made very decided progress in these essays,<sup>8</sup> compared with what you showed me in Edinburgh.<sup>9</sup>

I hope that you will persevere and go on writing, and that the Academy is flourishing.<sup>10</sup>

The 'Academy' in question (which, according to Sir Frederick O'Brien, appears to have been a somewhat *ad hoc* organisation) was never very large, with O'Brien himself and one or two others constituting the teaching staff. How long it survived is not known, but after the death of MacCunn in 1916 it was moved to Glasgow and linked to the Glasgow Athenaeum, subsequently the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (now The Royal Scottish Conservatoire).

Some years later, MacCunn had received a copy of O'Brien's Sonata in E minor, Op. 14, for piano.<sup>11</sup> He was impressed, and wrote in a letter of 27 April 1914:

I see much to admire. It is gratifying and encouraging, in these days, to see anyone doing as you have so well done in addressing yourself to so serious and lofty a style of composition. I hope you will go on with ever increasing success and technical power.<sup>12</sup>

Charles recalled all this instruction (which was given freely – 'it was a labour of love on his part'<sup>13</sup>) with the deepest gratitude, even though it is clear that it was frequently trenchant. O'Brien reveals as much in a

<sup>5</sup> Latterly MacCunn (1868–1916) is remembered solely for his concert overture, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, Op. 3 (1886–87), thanks not least to its use as the theme music for the BBC television series *Sutherland's Law* in 1973–76. But for two decades, from 1882, MacCunn was regularly commissioned (by the Crystal Palace Saturday Concerts and other such bodies) to compose a series of cantatas, and *Jeanie Deans*, the first of his two operas, first produced in 1894, was also very successful.

<sup>6</sup> O'Brien's preserved compositions do not include a set of variations; this one must either have been lost or destroyed.

<sup>7</sup> Letter dated 12 December 1903. MacCunn's letters to O'Brien are in the possession of the O'Brien family.

<sup>8</sup> It is not clear what 'essays' are being referred to here.

<sup>9</sup> Letter in the possession of the O'Brien family.

<sup>10</sup> Letter in the possession of the O'Brien family.

<sup>11</sup> Recorded by Warren Mailley-Smith on TOCC 0256.

<sup>12</sup> Letter in the possession of the O'Brien family.

<sup>13</sup> Information from Sir Frederick O'Brien.

brief essay he prepared in 1967, for a broadcast for the centenary of MacCunn's birth.

As a teacher of composition, MacCunn, though a Romantic composer, laid considerable stress on a Classical training particularly on the lines of *strict* counterpoint, and while always helpful he could express his opinion bluntly and *forcibly*.

One particularly interesting comment of MacCunn's, from a letter of 24 October 1903, seems to fly in the face of his other recommendations:

You should give the freest rein to your fancy in conceiving the pattern of the variation and the firmest curb to your intellect in carrying out your design.<sup>14</sup>

In 1914 Charles married Helen MacDonald. Her father was a strict Presbyterian and an elder of the Kirk, and if he was around on a Sunday, there was no playing in or out of doors.<sup>15</sup>

After graduating in 1907, O'Brien earned his living as an organist, conductor, pianist and music-teacher in Edinburgh, where he conducted the Edinburgh Royal Choral Union and the Bach Choir (1911–20), was for many years (until 1964) Director of Music at the Royal Blind School, and later music-master at St Serf's School, Edinburgh. He also became a Director and, in 1943, Honorary Fellow of the London College of Music. He was also a life-long member of the Edinburgh Society of Musicians, proud of the fact that his father had been a founder member, and also that in the midst of war in 1942 'There has been no break in the Meetings of the E.S.M. 52 Meetings annually, and most of them extremely good!'<sup>16</sup> He died in 1968.

O'Brien's compositions offer a landscape which is often Scottish but rarely rugged. His territory is more that of the wide rolling hills of the Borders than the twisted folds and thrusts of the Highlands. But these gentler hills are not to be taken lightly. In all his music, O'Brien's gift of melody is a delight and, though he rarely challenges the listener, he always entertains. His voice is one that deserves to be heard again and this, the second of a series of Tocatta Classics recordings of O'Brien's music, is more than welcome and thoroughly rewarding.

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<sup>14</sup> Letter in the possession of the O'Brien family.

<sup>15</sup> Two generations before, in Edinburgh, the father of the composer Alexander MacKenzie had to contend with the police at the door to put a stop to their quartet-playing on a Sunday. The matter was resolved with a half-crown, a dram, and the declaration that Haydn quartets were sacred music!

<sup>16</sup> Information from Sir Frederick O'Brien.

# THE ORCHESTRAL MUSIC OF CHARLES O'BRIEN, VOLUME ONE

by Paul Mann

In spring 2014 I first met Charles O'Brien's grandson David, the driving force of the series of recordings underway on Toccata Classics.<sup>1</sup> He turned out to be warm and genial, and a persuasive advocate for the work of his grandfather. I left with a photocopy of the manuscript full score of the Symphony in F Minor, and even a casual read-through on the flight home made me wonder why it had languished unplayed for the best part of a century. It soon emerged that there were nine other orchestral works of various durations – enough, it turned out, for three discs.<sup>2</sup> Their century of neglect had left them in a fairly poor physical and editorial condition, and so I created new performing editions especially for these recordings, which were made in a spirit of ever-increasing pleasure and admiration.

This music offers a sepia-tinted glimpse into the first quarter of the twentieth century in the company of an exceptionally fine composer who, while content to write in the language of his distinguished (mostly German) musical ancestors, never quite succeeded in repressing the distinctive Scottish brogue which makes his voice unique. He seemed as much at home with large-scale symphonic structures as with the charming light music he composed specifically for radio and theatre orchestras of the day. The main cause of his neglect, it seems fair to assume, was an unfashionable lack of interest in the future.

This first volume contains the two most important works of O'Brien's orchestral output and, in the case of the *Ellangowan Overture*, Op. 12 (1909), the one most profoundly connected to his Scottish heritage. *Ellangowan* was also the most frequently performed of his works in its own day: it was premiered in a concert given by the Edinburgh Amateur Orchestral Society on 9 February 1914, conducted by the composer, with subsequent performances in 1918 by the Bournemouth Municipal (later Bournemouth Symphony) Orchestra conducted by Dan Godfrey, and in Eastbourne (Charles O'Brien's birthplace) in 1928. It was also heard in a shorter version (O'Brien's Op. 10),<sup>3</sup> rubbing

<sup>1</sup> The first volume (of two) of the piano music, to be found on TOCC 0256, presents the Piano Sonata in E minor, Op. 14 (1910), the two sets of *Scottish Scenes*, Opp. 17 and 21 (1915 and 1921), and the *Deux valse*s, Op. 25 (1928), in performances by Warren Mailey-Smith.

<sup>2</sup> Volumes Two and Three (TOCC 0263 and 0299) of the orchestral music are in preparation.

<sup>3</sup> Scheduled for release on TOCC 0299.

shoulders with Elgar's Second Symphony and works by Holst, in a concert conducted by Sir Donald Francis Tovey in the Usher Hall in Edinburgh on 23 March 1933, but in spite of this early success it seems then to have fallen out of the repertoire. With the exception of various amateur performances, and a heavily cut version played by the BBC Scottish Symphony under a young Andrew Davis in 1972 (for which the material for the two versions became confusingly intertwined), it remained unplayed until now. The work is heard here in its original uncut form for the first time in living memory.

The two versions of *Ellangowan*, Opp. 10 and 12, seem to have been composed more or less simultaneously. The companion work, Op. 10, is scored for a smaller orchestra, and is around five minutes shorter than Op. 12, replacing the contrasting slower central section with 50 bars or so of new material in the same tempo. And perhaps it is easy to see why the composer made this alternative version: the original *Ellangowan* is, at almost eighteen minutes, rather long for a concert overture, and early reviews were indeed quick to find fault in its apparent prolixity. After the 1914 premiere, an (anonymous) local critic complained that it 'lacks something of definiteness of form', and delivered himself of a short composition tutorial:

About the last thing which any composer learns is the fine art of letting things alone, and Mr O'Brien's principal defect is that he has tried to get a little too much into his score.<sup>4</sup>

The piece is certainly on a large scale, and is at times daringly unconventional in form, especially in the subsequently revised middle section, and yet its energetic discursiveness is endearing, and it is difficult to escape the impression that the composer knew exactly what he was doing, and simply took as long as he needed to do it.

The initial inspiration came from Sir Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* (1815), although there is no direct programmatic content in the finished work beyond the title: Ellangowan is the name of the house in the Scottish borders around which some of the events in the novel unfold. The true focus of the music is Scotland itself, and although the piece contains no real folk tunes, it often sounds as if it does. O'Brien manages to make his musical ideas sound as if he plucked them from a highland hillside, possibly the best tribute one can pay to the quality of his invention, which is all the more impressive alongside the cogency of the symphonic argument. The whole piece has more than a whiff of the *Hebrides* about it, and although Mendelssohn may well have been the stronger composer, his Scottish accent was far less convincing.

The piece opens 1 with a strathspey-like idea (but in 3/4 rather than the more customary 4/4) on a pair of clarinets in dialogue with the strings. The folk-like quality is enhanced by means of the pentatonic

<sup>4</sup> Uncredited contemporary newspaper cutting supplied by David O'Brien.

scale, the ‘Scotch snap’ is much in evidence – as it will be throughout – and the all-pervasive dotted and triplet figurations are strongly suggestive of Scottish dance-music. After a joyous *fortissimo*, the violas are left repeating an obsessive dactylic rhythm over which a gentle trumpet call leads to the slower second subject. It too is almost (but not entirely) pentatonic, and sounds like a genuine folksong. Its symphonic logic is well hidden behind a spontaneous lyrical warmth, and the melody is passed gently and kindly between violins and woodwind. As it draws to a close, a note of Elgarian wistfulness enters the music, something the listener will soon come to recognise as characteristic. O’Brien’s emotions are kept under tighter control than those of his more famous counterpart, but he was clearly aware of Elgar’s influence at a time when some of the older composer’s major works were yet to be written.

The music soon returns to its *allegro* tempo and to the outdoors. The influence of Mendelssohn is at its keenest in the lively exchange of rhythmic ideas between the winds and strings, although there are still occasional pensive backward glances.

Horn and trumpet fanfares and a rhetorical sequence of trills in the strings herald a sternly dramatic transition to the *moderato* central section. The metre changes to 4/4 and the melody, played by the strings in a now diatonic G minor, sounds restlessly urgent, as if heard against the backdrop of a Scottish landscape. The ‘Scotch snap’, now also at a slower tempo, drifts across the music, and O’Brien skilfully conjures up the widest range of colours possible using only the instruments of a classical orchestra – something else he undoubtedly learnt from Mendelssohn. A haze of violin trills, with the G minor theme in the bassoons attended by distant horn calls, leads via a richly modulating key sequence back into the original tempo, with wild fanfares in the trumpets. The first subject is joyously recalled, accompanied by skittering scales in the strings.

But it is as if the dramatic landscape outside is not so easily ignored, and O’Brien returns there, via another stern transition, for a further intensified sequence of atmospheric development. This time the horn calls are darkened by the trombones, and the harmony modulates even more richly. Once again the music briefly returns to dancing, only to be forced back for a third time, with a new melody in A major, sung out by the violins and adorned by clashing cymbals. In a moment of climactic warmth, the sun finally comes out and after only a moment’s hesitation in the bass the original tempo returns for the last time. It was perhaps such daring and unconventional structural touches as these that troubled the early reviewers – indeed, they may also have concerned the composer, because he removed the entire sequence from the Op. 10 version, making it a much more straightforward, but ultimately less involving work.

A modal duet on bassoons and trumpets announces a gloriously incongruous outburst of wild Scottish dancing, at the end of which the timpanist suddenly forces the music to recover its decorum,

relocating the action from the Scottish barn into which it seems to have strayed, back within the respectable confines of the concert hall, and the horns proclaim the recapitulation as if nothing had happened. It is a splendidly charming *coup de théâtre*, and shows that the young composer was not without a sense of humour.

An entirely regular recapitulation follows, and it is perhaps here that the impatient may wish to wield a blue pencil. It is undoubtedly one of O'Brien's more curious characteristics that his recapitulations are always exact and unvaried, and so the listener must sit indulgently through everything again, exactly as it was heard in the exposition.

But the composer does have a surprise or two in store for the substantial coda, which is of Schumannesque duration and inventiveness. All the elements are drawn together as the music becomes more and more animated, apparently headed for a joyous conclusion amid riotous scales and clashing cymbals. But suddenly a solo oboe stops the party and sadly recalls the lyrical second subject, bringing everything gently and reflectively to a close, as if looking out to sea.

The final page of the **Symphony in F Minor, Op. 23**, is dated 27 August 1922 and shows quite clearly how far O'Brien had travelled in the thirteen years or so since the youthful extravagances of the *Ellangowan* Overture. In the period between 1905 and 1915 he had composed most of the rest of the orchestral works to be heard in this series,<sup>5</sup> and it remains something of a mystery as to why his compositional activity diminished throughout the 1920s and '30s and came to an almost complete halt thereafter. Although he lived until 1968, he never again composed a large-scale orchestral work.

The Symphony lasts around 45 minutes, but never breaks boundaries that Brahms might have recognised; indeed, he hovers like a ghost over this work, in which many reminiscences of the Third Symphony, unconscious or otherwise, can be found, especially in the outer movements. Key association is always a very powerful thing, as Brahms himself knew, of course.

O'Brien's Symphony was first performed in a BBC broadcast from Glasgow on 19 April 1929, conducted by the composer but, apart from a single performance in the Usher Hall in 1934, there appear to have been no further professional performances until this one, recorded over 85 years later. In the few surviving contemporary press-cuttings, it is striking to see one critic remarking even at the time that he thought O'Brien deserving of 'much more recognition and encouragement than he is getting. The writing

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<sup>5</sup> That is, apart from an early *Berceuse* and *Mazurka* (1898), two concert overtures, *To Spring*, Op. 4 (1905), and *The Minstrel's Curse*, Op. 7 (1904–5), the *Suite Humoristique*, Op. 8 (1905), the *Scottish Scenes*, Op. 17 (1915), and the Four Orchestral Waltzes, Op. 26 (c. 1924–25).

of a symphony is a thankless job – there is no market for such a work.<sup>6</sup> And so it seems to have proved.

But then as now, the market is an imperfect guide to musical quality, and the Symphony which sat on the shelves of the O'Brien household for the rest of the twentieth century proves not only to be a finely crafted work, but a deeply engaging experience, entirely worthy of its aspirational title. The manner in which O'Brien balances the requirements of symphonic structure with his natural gift for melody is one of the finest achievements of the work.

The Symphony opens, *Con moto moderato e serio* [2], with an ominous pulsating from the timpani and the basses of the orchestra, over which the restless first subject unfolds. The music very quickly reveals a darker side to O'Brien's nature, with angry snarls and tightly coiled dotted rhythms. Even when the woodwinds attempt to inject a note of geniality, the strings maintain the mood of tense agitation, leading to a full-throated restatement of the first subject, with the brass sounding noisy exhortations.

The transitional material is no more reassuring: a sequence of vigorous two-bar string phrases answered by ambiguously hushed swells in the brass leaves a solo bassoon to take the initiative in leading the music towards its second subject, with a series of somewhat incongruously shy syncopations. The celli take these syncopations over and turn them into a melody of real warmth, which finally seems to encourage the rest of the orchestra to relax, and the exposition comes to an end in a decisively optimistic mood.

Since O'Brien must already have known that he would recapitulate the exposition in its entirety, he does not allow it to be repeated here, and he immediately embarks upon the lengthy development by returning to the mood of restlessness. The music seems to toy with the first subject, as if trying it out in different keys to see if it can be made to sound less ominous. Once again, the bassoon tries to inject a note of playfulness, but the strings seize upon its rhythmic figure for a boisterous unison accompanied by biting trombones, and this syncopated figure continues to dominate the rest of the development. Attempts by the winds to recall the geniality of the second subject are shouted down by the whole orchestra in an overpowering rhythmic unison, strongly evoking the spirit of Brahms. A single glimmer of light can be found by delicate references to the elusive second subject just as the recapitulation is ushered in, which not even the orchestra at its angriest has been able to silence.

Unlike the *Ellangowan* Overture, the dimensions of the Symphony make a complete recapitulation possible without any loss of dramatic tension, and it is clear that O'Brien is following Brahms' precedent, at least in the Second and Third Symphonies, of placing the heaviest structural weight on the first movement.

The end of the recapitulation leads to the most powerfully forceful music O'Brien ever conceived. It culminates in a dramatic stand-off between the brass and the rest of the orchestra, (marked *pesante*

<sup>6</sup> Anonymous review, *The Perthshire Advertiser*, 27 December 1928.

possible), followed by a furious *allegro agitato* coda, in which the basses angrily mock the bassoon's earlier shy syncopations. There is even an unexpected suggestion, in the final raging *accelerando*, of the end of the first movement of another F Minor Symphony, Tchaikovsky's Fourth.

By maximum possible contrast, the entirely placid second movement, a *Menuetto* [3], dispenses with the brass section altogether (with the exception of a pair of horns), and, as if taking up the hint of Tchaikovsky, the solo oboe announces an exquisite miniature of the utmost balletic delicacy. There is a slightly archaic feel to the *comodo* music of the little wind quintet at the beginning, and a distinctly Haydn-esque flavour to the strings' answering phrases.

As in the equivalent movement of Brahms' Second Symphony, there are two trio sections, the first of which takes place over a tonic pedal drone, with gentle syncopations in the celli. The upper strings exchange smoothly insinuating chromatic scales with urbane responses from the woodwind; in the middle section those same strings teasingly trade *pizzicato* and *arco* fragments among themselves.

In the second trio, gently pulsating woodwind chords accompany a *giocoso* tune shared between celli and violas (and later the bassoon), and even if the music becomes slightly more agitated, it never loses its high spirits. In the captivating coda, the strings engage once more in their *pizzicato-arco* game, and the music innocently vanishes with a tiny flute trill.

The scene is now set for the heart of the work, a songful *Andante sostenuto e cantabile* [4] over which the spirit of Elgar gently hovers. Once again, the brass are silent, with the exception of the horns. The first theme is shared between first violins and celli, and manages to belong naturally and completely to the Symphony without having any motivic relation with anything else in it.

As with the second movement, there are two contrasting sections, in the first of which the woodwinds exchange melodic phrases over darkly pulsating chords in the lower strings. When the opening theme returns, it does so as a horn solo (another echo of Brahms' Third) over nervously trembling triplets in the lower strings, as if no longer quite so sure of its own power to reassure. The second trio section is lighter in tone, but the texture remains sparse, as a syncopated figure in violins and violas underpins doleful exchanges among the winds. As if the music can find its way back only by stopping dead in its tracks, it simply does so.

The return of the opening material is identical in orchestration to its first appearance but somehow feels transformed by the experience it has undergone. As it draws to a close, the music of the first trio forms a valedictory coda, dying away over a vapour of violin trills and *tremolandi* in the purest and most peaceful C major.

In a further suggestion of Brahms' Third, the finale [5] begins *Allegro con moto* with a restlessly hushed string unison, away from the tonic, taking as its starting point the reposeful C with which the slow

movement had ended. Unlike the Brahms, by contrast, O'Brien retains the *misterioso* quality for longer, and the determinedly forceful energy of the music reveals itself only gradually.

The second subject is somehow nervous and fragmentary, and the strings' response brings the most unmistakable intimation of Elgar's influence. An athletic (and very Brahmsian) rhythmic idea closes the exposition, with unstable syncopated triplets undulating over dark growls from the trombones.

The rhythmic idea from the close of the exposition takes hold of the development and attempts to treat it playfully, but the music never loses its edgy quality. In spite of two moments of expansive warmth in (also Brahmsian) parallel thirds, the trombones assert their dominance and repeatedly sound the main theme as if warning the music not to become too relaxed. The orchestra responds with passages of increasingly vigorous *fugato*, which set the scene for the recapitulation.

It, too, is entirely regular, but as in the first movement, enough drama has been generated for it to play itself out while retaining the tautness of the symphonic argument. The coda is signalled by the trombones, once again ominously sounding the main theme, but this time they are defied by a quite sudden and blazing shift into F major, *con fuoco, trionfale*. The opening theme, now stripped of all its power to threaten, is thrown out *presto* amid swirling scales, roaring timpani, and Tchaikovskian reiterated chords. All is unrestrained celebration as the final three unison notes are hammered home.

## More Charles O'Brien on Toccata Classics



TOCC 0256

‘Mailey-Smith is clearly dedicated to, and fond of, this music, and plays it with total involvement, good pacing, and a nice coloristic range. [...] Fine, natural recorded sound [...] highly recommended. I know I will return to it for pleasure in the future.’

Henry Fogel, *Fanfare*

**Paul Mann** is a regular guest-conductor with many orchestras throughout Europe, the USA, Australia, and the Far East. Those with which he has worked include the BBC Orchestras, the Orquesta Ciudad de Barcelona, Bergen Philharmonic, Orquesta Sinfónica de Bilbao, Orchestre de Bretagne, Britten Sinfonia, City of Birmingham Symphony, Copenhagen Philharmonic, Flemish Radio, Orquesta Ciudad de Granada, Hallé, Lahti Symphony, Luxembourg Philharmonic, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, St Petersburg Philharmonic, Royal Scottish National, Real Orquesta Sinfónica de Sevilla, RAI Torino and Orchestra dell'Arena di Verona, among many others. His debut with the Queensland Orchestra in 2003 resulted in regular re-invitations to Australia, with the Adelaide Symphony, Melbourne Symphony, Tasmanian Symphony and West Australian Symphony Orchestras, as well as the Auckland Philharmonia in New Zealand, and the Malaysian Philharmonic.



His work as chief conductor of the Odense Symphony Orchestra in Denmark achieved considerable critical success, particularly in the symphonies of Beethoven, Elgar, Mahler, Schumann and Shostakovich, and with whom he also made numerous recordings of a wide range of repertoire, for such labels as Bridge, DaCapo, and EMI.

He first came to international attention as first prizewinner in the 1998 Donatella Flick Conducting Competition, as a result of which he was also appointed assistant conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra. He made his LSO debut shortly afterwards, and subsequently collaborated regularly with the Orchestra both in the concert hall and recording studio. Special projects with the LSO included the Duke Ellington Centenary Concert at the Barbican Hall with Wynton Marsalis, and a famous collaboration with the legendary rock group Deep Purple in two widely acclaimed performances of Jon Lord's *Concerto for Group and Orchestra* at the Royal Albert Hall, the live DVD and CD of which remain international bestsellers. Among his most recent recordings is the first-ever studio recording of Lord's *Concerto*, with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, in collaboration with Jon Lord himself and a star-studded cast of soloists, and the live recording of *Celebrating Jon Lord*, a special

concert which took place at the Royal Albert Hall in April 2014 with an all-star cast paying tribute to the late composer.

This is his second recording for Toccata Classics. The first featured the orchestral music of Leif Solberg (TOCC 0260).

The **Liepāja Symphony Orchestra** – formerly also known as The Amber Sound Orchestra – is the oldest symphonic ensemble in the Baltic States: it was founded in 1881 by Hanss Hohapfel, who also served as its conductor. The orchestral strength in those early days was 37 musicians, joined in the summers by guest players from Germany and Poland. With time both the structure and professionalism of the Orchestra grew, as did its standing in the eyes of the general public.



After World War II the Orchestra recommenced its activities in 1947, under the wings of the Liepāja Music School, and was conducted for the next forty years by the director of the School, Valdis Vikmanis. A new chapter in the life of the Orchestra began at the end of 1986, when it was granted the status of a professional symphony orchestra, becoming only the second in Latvia. That formal recognition was made possible by the efforts of two conductors, Laimonis Trubs (who worked with the LSO from 1986 to 1996) and Jekabs Ozolins (active from 1987 to 2008).

The first artistic director of the Orchestra, as well as its first chief conductor, was the Leningrad-born Mikhail Orehov, who took the ensemble to a higher level of professionalism, during his years there (1988–91). Another important period for the Orchestra was 1992 to 2009, when Imants Resnis was artistic director and chief conductor. He expanded the range of activities considerably: in addition to regular concerts in Riga, Liepāja and other Latvian cities, the Orchestra has also been on frequent tours abroad, and since 1992 it has played in China, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, India, Malaysia, Spain, Sweden and elsewhere. During this period a number of important recordings were made, some of them during live appearances on Latvian radio and television.

In the early days of the Orchestra Valdis Vikmanis began a series of summer concerts, which always sold out, and so, in 2010, the festival 'Liepāja Summer' was launched, to renew that tradition of a century before. As well as orchestral performances (some of them in the open air), the festival includes sacred and chamber music.

The Liepāja Symphony Orchestra holds a special place in the national cultural life of Latvia. It received the highest national music award, the 'Great Music Award', in 2006, as well as the Latvian Recordings Award in the years 1998, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2006 and 2008. In 2010 it was granted the status of national orchestra. The current chief conductor, Atvars Lakstigala, made his debut with the Orchestra in 2010 and received the 'Great Music Award' at the end of the same year.

This is the second of a series of recordings planned with Toccata Classics. The first featured Paul Mann conducting the orchestral music of the Norwegian composer Leif Solberg (TOCC 0260).

## Also from Paul Mann and the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra on Toccata Classics



TOCC 0260

‘The disc’s highlight is the marvellous Symphony (1950 51). Its three movements have a classical poise reminiscent of Haydn, yet Solberg clearly learned much from Nielsen. [...] It is a masterpiece of expressivity and poise, and under Mann’s insightful direction the Latvian orchestra produce a fizzing account. [...] The performances all round are sensitive and sympathetic, caught in very good sound to a total of 82 fascinating minutes. Warmly recommended.’

Guy Rickards, *Gramophone*



Recorded on 4–8 August 2014 in Liepāja Latvian Society House, Liepāja, Latvia  
Recording engineer: Normunds Slava

New critical editions by Paul Mann

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## Explore Unknown Music with the Toccata Discovery Club

Since you're reading this booklet, you're obviously someone who likes to explore music more widely than the mainstream offerings of most other labels allow. Toccata Classics was set up explicitly to release recordings of music – from the Renaissance to the present day – that the microphones have been ignoring. How often have you heard a piece of music you didn't know and wondered why it hadn't been recorded before? Well, Toccata Classics aims to bring this kind of neglected treasure to the public waiting for the chance to hear it – from the major musical centres and from less-well-known cultures in northern and eastern Europe, from all the Americas, and from further afield: basically, if it's good music and it hasn't yet been recorded, Toccata Classics is exploring it.

To link label and listener directly we run the Toccata Discovery Club, which brings its members substantial discounts on all Toccata Classics recordings, whether CDs or downloads, and also on the range of pioneering books on music published by its sister company, Toccata Press. A modest annual membership fee brings you, free on joining, two CDs, a Toccata Press book or a number of album downloads (so you are saving from the start) and opens up the entire Toccata Classics catalogue to you, both new recordings and existing releases as CDs or downloads, as you prefer. Frequent special offers bring further discounts. If you are interested in joining, please visit the Toccata Classics website at [www.toccataclassics.com](http://www.toccataclassics.com) and click on the 'Discovery Club' tab for more details.

