

RAWSTHORNE

Symphonies Nos. 1–3

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

David Lloyd-Jones



Alan Rawsthorne (1905–1971)

Symphonies Nos. 1–3

The first performance of a composer's first symphony is a musical rite of passage, a declaration that he or she has arrived. Rawsthorne, like Brahms, left his entrance into this august company a little late, for he was 45 when he completed his *First Symphony*.

Rawsthorne's reputation was founded upon a handful of published compositions. The earliest and most esteemed of these were the *Theme and Variations for Two Violins* (1937), *Symphonic Studies* (1938), *Four Bagatelles for Piano* (1938) and the *First Piano Concerto* (1942), with all of which he established a singular voice. Of post-war compositions, the *First Violin Concerto* (1948) and the *Concerto for String Orchestra* (1949), further secured his standing. It was against this accumulation of solid achievement that his *First Symphony* was expectantly awaited.

The symphony was commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Society and first performed on 15th November 1950 by the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Adrian Boult. Without preamble the listener is propelled into the turbulent opening section, *Allegro tempestuoso*, into the first forty or so seconds of which the composer concentrates most of the elements which prove ripe for subsequent development. The movement is marked by restlessness, both harmonic and rhythmic; agitation even underlies the calm secondary theme which appears on the oboe. This is continued by the strings, accompanied by a scurrying semi-quaver figure which becomes material in the ensuing development. A long-drawn melody (cor anglais and violas) provides contrast and leads to a reprise of the opening theme, now passive and lyrical. Cellos and basses start a climb from the depths, building the foundation for a crescendo, a prelude to a shortened reprise of the opening music. The movement ends sombrely on a unison G, the tonal centre of the whole work. In the slow movement a recitative-like figure on the lower strings and bassoons, alternating with a chordal passage on horns and trumpets, establishes an immediate change of mood. The main theme is a long, sad melody

for flute, which is taken up by muted strings, giving it greater expressive intensity, before further development. A middle section is of a contrasting, romantic and sentimental nature, the climax of which brings a restatement of the introductory material. The cor anglais plays a version of the first flute subject leading the movement to a quiet close. The restlessness of the scherzo is attributable to the continual shifts in metre, alternating 5/8, 3/8, 2/8, of the main subject, which is derived from the flute melody of the previous movement. The contrasting middle, trio, section, now in a stabilised 2/4, can be traced to a descending woodwind figure in the first movement. These are just two examples of the integration of the symphony's thematic materials. The reprise of the opening section concludes the movement. Rawsthorne tells us: "The last movement is based on an idea stated in a short introduction by the brass, *maestoso*, which is soon doubled in speed to form the subject of the main *Allegro*". He considered this movement "rather more discursive than the rest of the Symphony". It proceeds in an unbuttoned fashion through several inventive episodes before the introduction of what Rawsthorne calls "a secondary theme of a playful nature", which adds material for further episodes. The end arrives rather abruptly to seal the symphony with an emphatic G major chord, scored for the full orchestra. The work was well received.

Rawsthorne's *Second Symphony* (A *Pastoral Symphony*) was a commission from the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (supported by the John Feeny Charitable Trust), and was given its first performance in Birmingham on 29th September 1959 by the commissioning orchestra under Meredith Davies. It is no programme piece; no quails or imitations of other bird song are to be heard. Rawsthorne moved to live in rural Essex in 1953 and this is an expression of the pleasures of living in an environment where the passage of the seasons could be closely observed and a tranquillity, denied the urban dweller, was to be found. Nevertheless the harsher undercurrents of country life are not ignored; beneath the surface of the music melancholy undertones are to be

sensed. The introductory bars accumulate to form an exquisite chord of harmonic portent. The movement's main elements are a flowing melody, its continuation by a secondary idea heard in woodwind and violas, and a lively scherzando figure recognizable by its dotted rhythm. The second part of the movement begins with lyrical phrases derived from the first theme accompanied by sustained harmonies, until the mood is broken by rough chords on the strings. From here the movement works towards a modified version of the opening material. The slow movement opens with a drowsy horn solo, containing an echo of the previous movement. This is an introduction to the rhapsodical principal melody declaimed by flute, oboe and violins, which is developed until a contrasting section is reached, described by Rawsthorne as having "... a rather march-like feeling. The theme is darker, more gloomy." The composer explores this in three-part canon, employing the full orchestra at its climax. The somnolent horn call returns to put the movement to bed.

The composer calls the third movement '*Country Dance*'. The first theme is written in a favourite Rawsthorne style, a jovial jig-cum-tarantella. This opens the first of three sections with fragments of the tune building to its full statement. The second section introduces a new melody, played over tenacious fragments of the first tune in the bass. The mood is broken by the sudden interjection of two trumpets, heralding the return of the first section's theme. The finale is an epilogue, which sets a poem by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1516–1547). Rawsthorne tells us that he chose this poem not for its melancholy, but for "... the beautiful alliterative verse, the close observation, and general expression of the pleasures of life in the country". The soprano soloist meditates upon material derived from the first movement. The scene is set by a return of the music heard at the very opening of the symphony. Throughout, the voice is accompanied with delicacy, in some passages in duet with a solo oboe or trumpet. The work ends as it began with the serene spell cast by the strings, tinged by the counter-harmony of the horns, before they retreat, leaving the strings to bring a resolution.

Commissioned by the Cheltenham Festival

Committee, Rawsthorne's *Third Symphony* received its first performance at Cheltenham on 8th July 1964 by the BBC Northern Orchestra conducted by George Hurst. The work returns to the turbulence of the *First Symphony*, now tempered by the subtle colouration and gentler expression of the *Second*. The opening of the first movement predicts a more astringent idiom, yet Rawsthorne's voice remains distinct. He tells us that the movement "... is based upon two thematic elements, and their relations to one another. It is in this aspect of its form that its claim to be symphonic resides". The first theme is presented in fragments, which accrue to merge into a scampering passage over which the second, imposing theme appears vehemently stated on cellos and horns. The falling interval of the final phrase has a valedictory quality – shades of Mahler – which remains prominent throughout the development and elsewhere. The working out of the materials is strenuous and rigorous because Rawsthorne employs his own version of the serial system. A return of the second theme in its original form presages the end in a quiet, shimmering passage. The slow movement is one of Rawsthorne's finest creations, written in the style of a *Sarabande*. The composer points to the salient elements, "An important feature is the pedal note F, which persists, on various instruments, throughout much of the movement. The main material consists, with the pedal-point, of an easygoing little tune played by the flute, plus phrases and figures arising therefrom." In the second section "The brass start to play a version of the opening melody but proceed in a different direction, and solemn chords build up to a climax where the music becomes much more forceful and declamatory. A very quiet reprise follows, in which the opening tune is treated in canon." "The Scherzo is subdued and hushed in feeling; it is, as it were, an indication of life below the surface. It is more concerned with hints than statements", so Rawsthorne tells us. The sections of the movement are "... articulated by a swaying figure, heard at the beginning on horn and clarinet, which serves to signpost the listener through the piece". This is airborne writing of great delicacy, which evaporates on the xylophone played with rubber beaters. Rawsthorne describes the nature of the last movement, a rondo, like that of the *First*

Symphony, as “discursive”. The three bold chords heard at its outset return to “mark moments of structural importance.” The main theme, which does not appear at once, is marked by its wide intervals. Rawsthorne described it as “obstreperous, emphatic and a little vulgar in essence ... Most of the music arises from this theme, and from the consideration of its character. Contrasting sections of quieter music intervene.” The close is remarkable and serene, briefly reflecting upon material from the first movement and reminiscent of the close of the *Second Symphony*. A horn and solo violin state the

ultimate appearance of the falling, valedictory interval from the conclusion of the first movement’s second subject. The symphonic potential prefigured 26 years earlier in the *Symphonic Studies* culminates and is fully realised here.

John M. Belcher

This recording was made with financial assistance from and in association with The Rawsthorne Trust.

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Charlotte Ellett

The lyric soprano Charlotte Ellett has earned distinction both on the concert platform and the opera stage. Her warm bright voice and natural musicianship make her ideal for a wide variety of repertoire. Following studies at the Royal Northern College of Music and the National Opera Studio, she began her career at Glyndebourne, following this with appearances as an Associate Artist at Welsh National Opera. Her subsequent operatic rôles include Miss Wordsworth in *Albert Herring*, Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*, Despina in *Così fan tutte*, Iphis in *Jephtha* and Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*. Her repertoire also includes Mozart's *Requiem*, Handel's *Messiah*, Poulenc's *Stabat Mater*, Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* and *St Matthew Passion*, Poulenc's *Gloria* and Rossini's *Stabat Mater*.

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

Founded in 1893 by Sir Dan Godfrey, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra has had among its Principal Conductors some of the finest musicians in the world, including Rudolf Schwarz, Constantin Silvestri, Sir Charles Groves and Paavo Berglund. More recently Andrew Litton raised the orchestra's standards to new levels, crowning its centenary season with a triumphant début tour of the United States in April 1994, followed by Yakov Kreizberg and débuts at the Musikverein, Vienna, the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, and Carnegie Hall, New York. In October 2002, Marin Alsop became Principal Conductor, the first woman to hold this title for any British symphony orchestra. The name of the orchestra is internationally known through over three hundred recordings, including the award-winning release of Anthony Payne's sketches for Elgar's *Symphony No.3* with Paul Daniel (8.554719), the symphonies of Vaughan Williams with the former Chief Guest Conductor Kees Bakels and Paul Daniel, and a recording of works by John Adams under Marin Alsop for Naxos (8.559031), this last chosen as Editor's Choice in the November 2004 issue of *Gramophone* magazine.

David Lloyd-Jones

David Lloyd-Jones began his professional career in 1959 on the music staff of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and soon became much in demand as a freelance conductor for orchestral and choral concerts, opera, BBC broadcasts and TV studio opera productions. He has appeared at the Royal Opera House (*Boris Godunov* with both Christoff and Ghiaurov), Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera and the Wexford, Cheltenham, Edinburgh and Leeds Festivals, and with the major British orchestras. In 1972 he was appointed Assistant Music Director at English National Opera, and during his time there conducted an extensive repertory which included, in addition to all the standard operas, *Die Meistersinger*, *Katya Kabanova*, and the British stage première of Prokofiev's *War and Peace*. In 1978, at the invitation of the Arts Council of Great Britain, he founded a new full-time opera company, Opera North, with its own orchestra, the English Northern Philharmonia, of which he became Artistic Director and Principal Conductor. During his twelve seasons with the company he conducted fifty different new productions, including *The Trojans*, *Prince Igor*, *The Midsummer Marriage* (Tippett), and the British stage première of Strauss's *Daphne*. He also conducted numerous orchestral concerts, including festival appearances in France and Germany. He has made many successful recordings of British and Russian music, and has an extensive career in the concert-hall and opera-house that takes him to leading musical centres throughout Central Europe, Scandinavia, Russia, Israel, Australia, Japan, Canada and the Americas. His highly acclaimed cycle of Bax's symphonies and tone poems for Naxos (*Gramophone* Award) was completed in the autumn of 2003.

Symphony No.2 (A Pastoral Symphony)

- 8 The soote season, that bud and bloom forth brings,
With green hath clad the hill and eke the vale:
The nightingale with feathers new she sings;
The turtle to her mate hath told her tale.
Summer is come, for every spray now springs:
The hart hath hung his old head on the pale;
The buck in brake his winter coat he flings;

The fishes float with new repaired scale.
The adder all her slough away she slings;
The swift swallow pursues the flies' male;
The busy bee her honey now she mings;
Winter is worn that was the flow'rs bale.
And thus I see among these pleasant things
Each care decays, and yet my sorrow springs.

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1516–1647)



DDD

8.557480

Playing Time
75:10

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By the time his eagerly-awaited *First Symphony* appeared in 1950, Alan Rawsthorne had already established a singular voice with his *Symphonic Studies* (Naxos 8.554763), *Concerto for String Orchestra* (8.553567), *First Piano Concerto* (8.555959) and *First Violin Concerto* (8.554240). The *First Symphony* is an energetic, inventive and superbly scored work. The *Second Symphony*, 'A Pastoral Symphony', is no programme piece but rather a general expression of the pleasures of life in the country, even if, beneath the surface of the music harsher, melancholy undertones can be sensed. The *Third Symphony*, returns to the turbulence of the *First Symphony*, now tempered by the subtle colouration and gentler expression of the *Second*. At its heart lies the haunting *Sarabande* slow movement, one of Rawsthorne's finest creations.



Alan
RAWSTHORNE
(1905-1971)

Symphony No. 1 (1950)		24:40	7	Country Dance:	3:09
1	Allegro tempestuoso	7:08		Allegro giocoso	
2	Allegro	7:55	8	Andante *	4:44
3	Allegro non troppo	3:35	Symphony No. 3 (1964)		
4	Poco maestoso –	6:01		Allegro	8:05
	Allegro risoluto		9	Alla sarabanda: Andantino	8:24
Symphony No. 2 (1959)		19:47	10	Scherzo: Allegro molto	4:29
'A Pastoral Symphony'			11	Allegro risoluto	9:45
5	Allegro piacevole	6:30	(The composer's markings indicate that there should be only the shortest of breaks between movements)		
6	Poco lento e liberamente	5:24			

Charlotte Ellett, Soprano *
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra (David Nolan, Leader)
David Lloyd-Jones

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