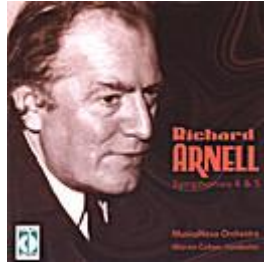


Mp3 Musicanova Orchestra - Richard Arnell: Symphonies 4 & 5



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Known as Britain's leading living symphonist, Richard Arnell's mature works for symphony are here, presented by MusicaNova Orchestra, an emerging professional ensemble from Arizona. 6 MP3 Songs

CLASSICAL: Orchestral, CLASSICAL: Contemporary Details: During an incredibly long creative career which has seen his name so often linked with the ballet and the cinema, and during which he has produced work of the highest quality in virtually every genre of concert music, it is clear that the symphony, as a concept, form and title, holds a special place in the oeuvre of Richard Anthony Sayer Arnell. The standard numbering of his own works shows that he has composed six, although the Sinfonia-Quasi Variazione has a strong claim to be included within their number, as does the Ode to the West Wind, essentially a Symphony with voice. Listening to the six official symphonies as a sequence it is clear that they are the work of the same composer, surface detail and structural specifics never obscuring the fact that these are all the product of a singular vision and imagination. They are, though, remarkably different from each other. The conductor, Warren Cohen, once asked the composer why they were all so different from each other, to which he received the straightforward and absolutely typical retort, Well, thats the point, isnt it! A concept that many other composers, who determinedly try to compose the same piece over and over again may benefit from taking to heart. The Fourth Symphony in the words of Arnell himself, seems to me to be the most condensed, the most intense and perhaps the most personal. The symphony is in three movements, (i) Andante-Allegro, (ii) Andante, (iii) Allegro vivace, each initiated by motivic material introduced by the timpanist. In 1989, following a rehearsal of the work at York Minster, I - rather naively - commented to the composer that the finale seemed on the brief side for such a monumental work. Very clearly and concisely (Arnell is a born educator) he explained to me that this was

the plan. The structure was, in a sense, telescopic, each movement growing progressively briefer, the combined weight of movements two and three balancing that of the first. Arnell describes the opening Andante as a prelude but, unlike the classical model which in Mozart and Haydn was a kind of curtain raiser to the main action, this movement contains ideas used and greatly expanded in the following Allegro. The seeds of what is to come are expertly sewn and, to quote Donald Mitchell (Music Survey, Vol. II, No. 2 (Autumn, 1949), p 96) the first movement of the symphony seemed to increase in weight and importance on closer acquaintance; in particular its epilogue has about it a quality that I can only describe as inevitability. After such a monumental opening movement, which concludes with a brilliantly conceived and orchestrated chorale-like epilogue, the second movement is a beautifully-judged contrast. The theme of this movement has been described as romantic, pastoral, sentimental and bitter-sweet, but I think Arnells characterisation of it as nostalgic, first happily so, alternatively sadly so is exactly right. The beautiful theme ebbs and flows, and occasionally swells over a varied and meticulously detailed undulating accompaniment. The timpanists initiation of the finale is violently rhythmic, which is emulated by the rest of the orchestra when they join in. Arnell describes the movement as vigorous and eventually heroic, perhaps. The ending is savage and abrupt, and features the same three notes from the timpanist with which the opening movement was initiated. These three notes - F, E and A - are, again in the composers own words, components of the mysterious Phrygian mode. That audiences are immediately aware of the works quality is possibly demonstrated in this extract from a review by William Mann of Beechams London premiere (The Times 27.3.52) He dragged Mr. Richard Arnell three times from the seat he had just sat down in, and bade him share the applause for a stunning performance of Arnells fourth symphony. He stood on, and stamped on, his dignity with unnerving capriciousness, resorted constantly to Hi! or to any loud cry Just as the Fourth is a masterful working-out of the thematic and harmonic possibilities suggested by the timpanists opening gesture, so the Fifth is a thesis extrapolated from the defiant, dissonant chords that mark its opening. The orchestration of both is brilliant, but not showy. This, again, another indicator of the respect he holds for the concept of the symphony: for brilliantly, showy orchestrations explore his ballet scores, in particular Punch and the Child, or The Great Detective. Despite its rhapsodic feel, the Fifth is, if anything, more formally laid-out than the Fourth, and as pregnant with contrapuntal intensity, but in this case cast as long, arching, lyrical lines rather than tight, repetitive motifs. An instant to listen out for is the beautiful and plangent duet between cor anglais and

horn in one of the slower sections of the central movement. Whereas the form of the Fourth is seemingly open-ended, each surprising new turn growing naturally, organically and - seemingly - inevitably from the music that precedes it, there is much more of a sense of sequential exploration and revisiting of themes in the Fifth. All three movements of Arnells Fifth Symphony are essentially cast in broad tempi, although in the composers description the central movement is a vigorous scherzo introduced and often interrupted by music of a slow, lyrical nature. Arnells music is punctuated amazingly regularly by melodies of delicious lyricism, and in many ways the Fifth Symphony displays the fullest flowering of this rare and precious gift. There are themes, particularly in the finale, that have a visionary, almost otherworldly quality. It is music of such entrancing beauty that you wish for it never to end. Virgil Thomson, in his New York Herald Tribune article quoted above, speaks of Arnells symphonism as clearly British music but also remarks that it possesses an emotional reality that we are not accustomed to associate with the British composer. He is correct in spotting the influence of a culture other than the stoic British. The first three of Arnells symphonies were composed in America, the Fourth composed during most of 1948 immediately after his return. Arnell once sent me a cassette of a piece of his, and on the reverse side, as a filler, included Roy Harris Third Symphony. For a composer as sui generis as Arnell, his accompanying letter (dated 28.08.97) includes a very interesting paragraph: I've put Roy Harris on the B side which perhaps you dont know? One of the best American works I think, written in 39 and I first heard Toscaninis broadcast in 40 or so. Had an influence I think dont you? - on me, I mean. Wherever these works are listened to, I am sure they will speak directly to the heart. Program notes: Patrick Jonathan People who are interested in Ralph Vaughan Williams Sir Edward Elgar John Rutter should consider this download.

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