

Transcribed and played
by David BRIGGS on
the Organ of
Blackburn Cathedral

Recording made on
Wednesday 30 November
2005, by kind permission
of the Dean and Chapter

Producer:
Richard Tanner

Recorded by
Lance Andrews

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for Chestnut Music:
Madge Nimocks



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Chestnut Music 003

Total Playing time 72:11

DAVID BRIGGS

Symphony No 8, the 'Unfinished' - Franz SCHUBERT

1. Allegro Moderato 16:02
2. Andante con moto 11:56

Symphony No.4 in F minor, Opus 36 - Peter Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY

3. Andante Sostenuto-Moderato
con anima 19:11
4. Andantino in modo
di canzona 9:56
5. Scherzo: Pizzicato
ostinato 5:23
6. Allegro con fuoco 9:43

The Art of Organ Transcription

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An internationally renowned recitalist, David Briggs has achieved a reputation as an innovative organist, particularly for his orchestral transcriptions and his art of improvisation.

David Briggs studied organ with Jean Langlais in Paris. He won the first prize in the International Improvisation Competition at Paisley and was the first British winner of the Tournemire Prize at the St Albans International Improvisation Competition.

Having held positions at Truro and Hereford Cathedrals and King's College, Cambridge, where he was Organ Scholar, David is Organist Emeritus at Gloucester Cathedral, where he directed the music for eight years. While at Gloucester, he oversaw the complete rebuilding of the Cathedral organ by Nicholson, and directed the Three Choirs Festivals, conducting some of the UK's finest professional orchestras, notably the Philharmonia.

David Briggs is also a prolific composer and his works range from full scale oratorios to works for solo instruments (including the carillon!). Commissions include a setting of the St. John Passion for choir, chamber orchestra and soloists; Symphony 'Missa pro defunctis'; a setting of the Solemn Requiem Mass; and a song cycle, 'Dreamworld', recently released on the Chestnut Music label. Orchestral transcriptions include Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4, Bruckner's Symphony No. 7, Schubert's 'Unfinished Symphony', Mahler No. 5 and Ravel's Daphnis and Chloe. David has recorded 23 solo organ CDs which have received wide critical acclaim.

During the past year, David has played more than 50 concerts and conducted masterclasses around the world. Recent venues include the Royal Albert Hall in London, Notre-Dame in Paris, the International Performing Centre in Moscow and Severance Hall in Cleveland, Ohio. He is frequently asked to perform improvisations for silent movies including Hunchback of Notre-Dame, Phantom of the Opera, and Nosferatu.

David now lives in New York and is represented by Chestnut Music. For more information and to order CDs, please visit his website: www.david-briggs.org.uk



Thoughts from David Briggs ...

Ethos and practicalities.

It has been refreshing to observe, over the past couple of decades or so, the pendulum swinging more towards the mid-point in terms of programming for organ concerts. At the beginning of the twentieth century it was not difficult to find recital programmes consisting almost entirely of orchestral transcriptions. Players such as E. H. Lemare and W. T. Best brought great skill and integrity to the playing of this repertoire and, in that very different sociological era, audiences were often huge. At the Alexandra Palace in the 1930s so many people came to the recitals by Harry Goss Custard that he was obliged to have two sessions every Sunday afternoon! The choice of repertoire was, of

course, also related to the evolution of the recording industry. Records (78 rpm) were the order of the day - and inevitably the quality of reproduction was fairly rudimentary. The playing of orchestral transcriptions in organ concerts therefore gave the general public virtually their only regular opportunity to experience the great orchestral and operatic repertoire, first-hand.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Organ Reform Movement arrived and the playing of transcriptions and arrangements went completely out of fashion. The rationale suddenly became centred on historic performance practice and trends in organ

building mirrored this movement - or was it the other way round? Audiences could expect to hear a very different type of recital - invariably Bach, a plentiful supply of early repertoire and then, bypassing the nineteenth century, works by Messiaen or one of his contemporaries. There was a definite tendency towards specialization and members of the general public, who were often entirely unfamiliar with this repertoire, became perplexed and, to some extent, ostracized.

The current trend towards recapturing both the enthusiasm and the size of the audience is very refreshing. There is no doubt that organists have benefited from the increased breadth of historical knowledge inherited from the reform movement in terms of touch, fingering, articulation and rhetoric, but now there is an increasing realization amongst many players that the crucial thing is not to play for oneself but, principally, for the

enjoyment of others! Louis Vierne at Notre-Dame described his attitude towards performance in the following fashion: "Il faut rigoler les gens." (You must entertain people.)

Of course the idea of presenting music in transcription is a very old one - indeed transcriptions have been made throughout musical history. J. S. Bach was frequently making arrangements of both his and other composers' music and thereby crossing instrumental boundaries. The 1746 Schubler Chorales and the arrangements of the Vivaldi concerti are obvious cases in point. His frequent use of the word Klavier in his keyboard music implies that his attitude towards specific keyboard instruments was quite liberal - the music was made to be played on whatever instrument was to hand. There is no doubt that really great music speaks for itself and can be effective in different guises. As well as J. S. Bach, many

other great composers have made transcriptions of their own music (e.g. La Valse, Ravel, and Le Sacre du printemps, Stravinsky, which also exist in piano duet form). Liszt made transcriptions of Beethoven's symphonies for piano solo and Maurice Ravel orchestrated Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition, a work that was originally written for piano. Having said that, of course, a transcription is by its very nature, something of an illusion and has to sound effective in its new guise. A poor transcription, or a good transcription badly played, can easily turn into a travesty of the original. However, a good transcription, interpreted well, can heighten our awareness of the message behind the music - we can listen with new ears. A new artistic dimension is given to the original. Perhaps it's rather like seeing a painting in a new frame in a different gallery and under different lighting conditions. It is basically the same conception but can affect the observer in an entirely different way.

Over the past decade, a number of very large-scale organ transcriptions have been made and recorded. At the reopening of the organ in Notre-Dame de Paris, Olivier Latry played his brilliant transcription of Stravinsky's Sacre. Lionel Rogg has transcribed and recorded (on the Bis label) the Eighth Symphony of Anton Bruckner on the new Van den Heuvel organ at Victoria Hall, Geneva. Pierre Pincemaille has made staggering arrangements of two other Stravinsky ballet scores, L'Oiseau de feu and Petroushka and recorded them (for FY) on the Gonzalez/Dargassies organ of Radio France in Paris. And there is my own transcription and recording (for Priory) of Mahler's Fifth Symphony. The latter amazingly became Priory's best selling organ disc, emphasizing that transcriptions are coming very much back into fashion! Interestingly, none of the above composers left any original music for organ.

Neither, sadly, did Debussy, Ravel, Bartok, Prokofiev, Rachmaninov... Maybe this is due to the technological evolution of the instrument. Today's computerized control of registration offers the player much more possibility for rapid changes of colour, timbre and dynamic.

Is it not likely that to Debussy, for whom colour was paramount, the instruments of the time seemed somewhat intractable?

Transcribing major orchestral works like Schubert 8 and Tchaikovsky 4 is an extremely stimulating, if somewhat lengthy, experience. Because the organ is rather like a self-contained orchestra, the transcription can, at best, present the music in an entirely new light. I have been in love with both of these pieces since playing them as a teenage violist in the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. Inevitably, in making an arrangement



for organ, one is obliged to make many choices - principally for those passages where there is simply so much going on in the orchestra that it is impossible to play it with two hands and two feet! This was a delicate and important procedure, working out exactly what is essential and what might remain "implied". In some ways, streamlining of the orchestral texture doesn't necessarily mean impoverishment of the musical content. The advantage of inputting the transcription directly into the excellent 'Sibelius 3' software means that one is able to make modifications very easily after trying the music out. These changes are generally registrational but sometimes involve structural reorganisation of counterpoint, including making octave transpositions etc. in order to make the music lie more comfortably under the fingers. Many passages are completely reworked until the final result becomes convincing as an organ piece. If the transcription is too complicated,

too difficult, the musical content will suffer anyway because the performance will sound awkward. That is why I gradually reach a clear and natural transcription of as many passages as possible. As hinted at above, registrational integrity and smoothness is essential in this symphonic repertoire. In the recording, I make extensive use of registrational "camouflage" to try and cover up the stop changes. The generous Blackburn Cathedral acoustic helps, too! The transcription I made does not attempt to be a slavish imitation of the original orchestration, but more an adaptation. My aim is to give the organ the sonic character of a large orchestra. The organ, moreover, has a unique ability to sustain, particularly fortissimo, and thus the huge climaxes (especially in the Tchaikovsky) have an even more awesome quality.

My other earnest desire in making the transcriptions, as well for my own enjoyment,

is that it might entice other lovers of organ music to branch out and explore the wonderful riches of the symphonic repertoire. Some time back I met an organ music enthusiast who only knew Mahler 5 through the organ transcription and the recording I made some years ago for Priory. I urged him to go to the nearest record shop post-haste and buy the original article! Franz Schubert's Symphony No. 8 in B minor, commonly known as the Unfinished (German: Unvollendete), was started in 1822 but left with only two movements complete even though Schubert would live for another six years. A scherzo, nearly completed in piano score but with only two pages orchestrated, also survives. It has been suggested that Schubert may have sketched a finale which instead became the entr'acte from his incidental music to Rosamunde, but all the evidence for this is circumstantial. The symphony's famous first movement, Allegro moderato in B minor, is in sonata

form, opening with a low whisper in the strings followed by a lonely melody sounded (in the original orchestration) by the oboes and clarinets. A typical Schubertian transition consists of just four measures, effectively modulating to the sub-median key of G major (mm. 38-41). The second subject group is one of Schubert's most famous and is played in the original by the celli and repeated by the violins. An emphatic closing theme features heavy sforzandi, and is based on continual development of the second subject. Commentators on the symphony reaching back as far as Brahms have noted the highly dissonant chord that ends the exposition. Here Schubert superimposes a tonic B in the bassoons over the dominant F# chord, creating a mixture of the two tonalities that evokes the end of the development in Beethoven's Eroica Symphony. The development section is extended and features a stormy reworking of the 2nd subject. Near the

end, the flutes and oboes recapture their melodic role from the movement's beginning, preparing a transition to the recapitulation.

The recapitulation follows standard sonata form principles, except for a somewhat unusual modulation for the second subject. Instead of the conventional employment of the tonic (B minor), Schubert composes the second subject in B major (initially, we heard this theme in G major). The closing theme reaches the threshold where the exposition had repeated, but leads instead to a coda in the tonic b minor that recalls the opening theme.

The second movement, *Andante con moto* is in E major and alternates between two contrasting themes. The first features serene counterpoint between (in the original orchestration) the basses, horns, and violins. The second theme is more melancholy, appearing first in the solo clarinet before passing to the other woodwinds. Both themes

are interrupted by emphatic episodes of stormy counterpoint, and are repeated in variation.

The fragment of a scherzo intended as the third movement returns to B minor. The key of the symphony is virtually unprecedented: Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven wrote no symphonies in B minor, presumably partly because the key is a very difficult one for valveless brass instruments - there was no B natural crook for horns and trumpets. Schubert partly gets around this by writing for trumpets in E. His first movement starts in B minor, and modulates to a second subject in G major after a surprisingly short four measures of transition.

Although this symphony was written in 1822, Schubert gave the two completed movements in 1823 to Anselm Hüttenbrenner, representative of the Graz Music Society, which had given Schubert an honorary diploma. They were not performed until 17

December 1865, when they were conducted in Vienna by Johann Herbeck, who had persuaded Huttenbrenner to show him the score and who added the last movement of Schubert's Third Symphony as a finale. After Herbeck's discovery of the two completed movements of this symphony, some music historians and scholars toiled to "prove" the composition was complete in this form, and indeed, in its two-movement form it has proved to be one of Schubert's most cherished compositions. The fact that classical decorum was unlikely to accept that a symphony could end in a different key from its beginning, and the even more undeniable fact that Schubert had begun a third movement (of which the score he gave to Huttenbrenner included the first page) seems to disprove the thesis. Yet as noted above, B minor was difficult to score for brass instruments, and this might have prompted his abandonment of the work. Recently English musicologists Gerald

Abraham and Brian Newbould have offered completions of the whole symphony, using Schubert's scherzo and the *entr'acte* from his incidental music for the play *Rosamunde*. This movement had long been suspected by some musicologists to be the finale for this symphony. (In fact, it was played as a finale at the symphony's British premiere on 6 April 1867.) Both works have B minor as their fundamental key, they have identical instrumentation, the *entr'acte* is in sonata-form (as are all Schubert's symphonic finales) and they share a very similar mood. If the *entr'acte* indeed started life as the finale of this symphony, then Schubert evidently discarded it (probably at that stage unorchestrated) from the symphony and used it instead in the play, presumably only orchestrating it for this purpose and perhaps making compositional changes.



Symphony No. 4 in F Minor (Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky) Op. 36 was written in 1877-1878. It is in four movements:

Andante Sostenuto-Moderato con anima

Andantino in modo di canzona

Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato

Allegro con fuoco

All his life, Tchaikovsky retained a strong affinity for his fourth symphony. At the end of 1878 he wrote: "I adore terribly this child of mine; it is one of only a few works with which I have not experienced disappointment." Ten years later, when referring to the symphony, he wrote "it turns out that not only have I not cooled towards it, as I have cooled towards the greater part of my compositions, but on the contrary, I am filled with warm and sympathetic feelings towards it.

I don't know what the future may bring, but presently it seems to me that this is my best symphonic work."

During the composition of the symphony, Tchaikovsky wrote to his patron, Madame Nadezhda von Meck, that he wanted "very much" to dedicate it to her, and that he would write on it "Dedicated to My Friend".

The symphony's first performance was at a Russian Musical Society concert in St. Petersburg on February 10, 1878, with Nikolai Rubinstein as conductor. It was scored for piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, cymbals, bass drum, and strings.

"Destiny, that fateful force which impedes the impulse toward fulfilment, which jealously ensures that prosperity and peace are never

complete and cloudless, which hangs overhead like a sword of Damocles. It is invincible and you will never vanquish it. All that we can do is subject ourselves and vainly lament." - Tchaikovsky

Assertions to the effect that "the first movement represents Fate" are oversimplifications: according to a letter the composer wrote to Madame von Meck in 1878, it is actually the fanfare first heard at the opening ("the kernel, the quintessence, the chief thought of the whole symphony") that stands for "Fate". As the composer explained it, the programme of the first movement is—"roughly"—that "all life is an unbroken alternation of hard reality with swiftly passing dreams and visions of happiness ...". He went on: "No haven exists ... Drift upon that sea until it engulfs and submerges you in its depths".

The second movement is tinged with melancholy and regret: "How sad to think that so much has been, so much is gone! We regret the past, yet we have neither the courage nor the desire to begin life afresh. We are weary of existence." (Tchaikovsky)

The Scherzo "employs a new orchestral effect, which I have designed myself" and "is made up of capricious arabesques, of the elusive images which rush past in the imagination when you have drunk a little wine and experience the first stage of intoxication." This movement (marked Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato) has the strings playing pizzicato

throughout. (I have interpreted this in the transcription as 'Tutti Recit, boîte fermée'.)

The fourth movement, by contrast, is a portrait of a folk-holiday, incorporating a famous Russian folk song, "In the Field Stood a Birch Tree", as one of its themes. As the composer explained: "If within yourself you find no reasons for joy, look at others. Go among the people. Observe how they can enjoy themselves, surrendering themselves wholeheartedly to joyful feelings. A picture of festive merriment of the people. Hardly have you managed to forget yourself and to be carried away by the spectacle of others' joys, than irrepressible 'Fate' again

appears and reminds you of yourself... You have only yourself to blame; do not say that everything in this world is sad. There are simple but strong joys. Rejoice in others' rejoicing. To live is still possible." On finishing the symphony, the composer wrote: "It seems to me that this is my best work. Of my two latest creations, i.e. the opera and the symphony, I favour the latter. What lies in store for this symphony? Will it survive long after its author has disappeared from the face of the earth, or straight away plunge into the depths of oblivion? I only know that at this moment I ... am blind to any shortcomings in my new offspring. Yet I am sure that, as regards texture and form, it represents a step forward in my development ..."

However, initial critical reaction to the work was unfavourable, and reaction to the premiere in the United States was similar. In 1890 a reviewer for the New York Post wrote, "The Fourth Tchaikovsky Symphony proved to be one of the most thoroughly Russian, i.e. semi-barbaric, compositions ever heard in the city. ... If Tchaikovsky had called his symphony 'A Sleigh Ride Through Siberia' no one would have found this title inappropriate." A reviewer in Germany in 1897 wrote "The composer's twaddle disturbed my mood. The confusion in brass and the abuse of the kettledrums drove me away!"

In spite of its early critical reviews, the symphony has become a staple of the orchestral repertoire, and remains one of the most frequently performed symphonies of the late 19th century.

