



THOMAS HYDE SYMPHONY

BBC SCOTTISH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
GEOFFREY PATERSON conductor

BBC
RADIO



Thomas Hyde

Symphony, Op. 20 (2016–17)

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra

Laura Samuel *leader*

Geoffrey Paterson *conductor*

Symphony, by Thomas Hyde, was commissioned by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and BBC Radio 3. The world premiere was performed on 10th March 2018 by the BBC Scottish Orchestra at City Halls, Glasgow and first broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on 4th August 2018.


Scottish
Symphony
Orchestra



Symphony, Op. 20

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------|
| 1. Aborted Anacrusis | [X:XX] |
| 2. Obstructio | [X:XX] |
| 3. Lento | [X:XX] |
| 4. Allegro delicato | [X:XX] |
| 5. Con calma | [X:XX] |
| 6. Vigoroso e feroce | [X:XX] |
| 7. Temps suspendu | [X:XX] |
| 8. Molto tranquillo – Svegliato | [X:XX] |
| 9. Avanti! | [X:XX] |
| 10. Espansiva (volante!) | [X:XX] |

Total playing time [XX:XX]



Thomas Hyde

Flights around tradition: Thomas Hyde's *Symphony*

Thomas Hyde's one-movement, twenty-minute **Symphony** opens with a veritable barrage of musical ideas, each jostling for aural space. Each fragment has its own character: the material is by turns dynamic, lyrical, fanfare-like, or, in the case of some glissandos for trombones, grotesque. Following a series of low, repeated C naturals in the lower strings that cannot but evoke momentarily the beginning of Michael Tippett's Second Symphony, the entire procession returns in a varied repetition. All is in flux. All is volatile. Eventually the individual ideas begin to grow, to expand and develop, but still they continue to interrupt one other. Considerable propulsion is generated through such juxtapositions until suddenly – catastrophically – the music collapses onto an extended, dissonant cluster in the strings, over which a timpani solo is heard, followed by the return of the grotesque trombones, rudely exultant. Listening to this beginning against the background of expectations formed from other symphonies, one might conclude that something has gone very wrong.

Some musical genres are more burdened

by the past than others. Early on his career, Hyde tackled with aplomb two such genres with his opera *That Man Stephen Ward* (2006–07) and String Quartet (2009–10). In these, he demonstrated his ability to navigate deftly between the demands of tradition and the freedom of personal expression. But the symphony, with its associations of grand, public statements, is perhaps the most weighted down of all (think of how long it took Brahms to emerge from Beethoven's shadow!). The demands of tradition include (in Hans Keller's pithy formulation) 'the large-scale integration of contrasts', the presence of multiple movement types (including a slow movement and scherzo), and a goal-directed motion from beginning to end. For Tippett, another composer for whom the symphony was something to be grappled with both heroically and critically, these characteristics, represented above all by the middle period symphonies of Beethoven, are constituent elements of a historical archetype. At the same time, this archetype is sufficiently embedded into the Western cultural imagination that deviations – in the form of notional archetypes – are, in Tippett's formulation, permissible. Such deviations might challenge or render problematic inherited notions of what the symphony is or does. Thus, as composers such as Schoenberg and Sibelius have demonstrated,

the requirements of the genre could be met within the confines of a single movement, and with it a rethinking of the relationship between symphonic forms and functions. And these reworkings lead in turn to an expanded sense of what the symphony is, or might be.

Hyde's Symphony is deliberately positioned within this living, expanding tradition. As with other composers of his generation, Hyde's relationship with tradition is less fraught than that of his predecessors: he is respectful to it, but not deferential, and this frees him to engage productively with the past. Hyde has likened its opening to 'a plane going down the runway, failing to take off and shunting itself back to the terminal building'; the remainder of the Symphony witnesses the plane 'heading back down the runway and finally taking wing'. For all of the soaring quality heard at its conclusion, one should be wary of positioning the work in the line of other symphonic pieces that more directly celebrate, or even emulate, the experience of flight (such as Roberto Gerhard's Symphony No. 3 'Collages', 1960.) Rather, Hyde has suggested that his composition might be approached via the example of the 'wonderful landscape paintings by Peter Lanyon, taken from a glider'. These

paintings bear witness to the ways in which Lanyon's experience of flight opened up new possibilities of engaging with the traditions of landscape painting, reinvigorating the genre through his abandonment of singular viewpoints for multiple perspectives, and of direct representation in favour of the immediacy of sensation. When Hyde comments that 'I think I am going over the same ground as all previous symphony composers since Haydn, but this time by air rather than horse and carriage', he seems to be referring precisely this ariel view of, and approach to, past precedent.

It is the familiarity of the formal terrain bequeathed by the historical archetype that enables Hyde to choose his lines of flight with comparative freedom. To put this another way, if the archetypal form of the symphony constitutes a particular type of musical story that carries the listener from A to B, then Hyde's Symphony can be viewed as a particular narration of this tale, in which he revels in the opportunity to change the order in which plot details, and the role of particular musical themes, are presented. Anyone who has heard *That Man Stephen Ward*, or, for that matter, had the pleasure of hearing him deliver one of his many witty anecdotes, will be aware of Hyde's gift for dramatic pacing, comic timing, ability

to incorporate pertinent asides within the main narrative arc, and flair for the grand reveal. That he brings these qualities to a wordless orchestral work should be no surprise, for communicative directness is one of the hallmarks of his style.

And so we return to the beginning of Hyde's Symphony. The distinctiveness of Hyde's opening gambit can be appreciated when situated against the background of two traditional symphonic precedents. The first of these precedents, deriving from Beethovenian archetypes, is for a dynamic thematic idea that manages to simultaneously offer a memorable statement in its own right but also offer the potential for further development. The second is for an accumulation of material that gradually coheres into a clear thematic statement. Hyde opts for neither of these alternatives. The profusion and fragmentation of ideas give the impression that Symphony begins in media res, as if the listener has accidentally wandered into the concert hall a few minutes later than intended. But whilst the fragments might expand, they do not combine into a unified thematic statement. Rather, Hyde manipulates and juxtaposes contrasting musical characters to build up energy and momentum – an energy of a different order to the

Beethovenian model – to recall instead the rhetoric of symphonic climaxes. Hyde describes the opening passage in its entirety as an 'aborted anacrusis': a tension-generating upbeat to a cathartic downbeat that fails to materialise. The moment of collapse – the string cluster, timpani solo and trombone glissandi – is marked in the score as 'obstructio': it is a blockage, perhaps psychological, to symphonic fulfilment. The remainder of the Symphony is devoted to picking up the pieces from this collapse and find a way to realise their musical ambitions.

Hyde begins this process by reclaiming some of the more overt markers of the traditional symphony. The contrast between lyrical and dynamic material heard in the opening is expanded to generate extended passages that allude respectively to a slow movement and scherzo (with trio). In the first case, an antediluvian pastoral follows the catastrophe of 'obstructio'. A long melody for solo bassoon, punctuated with distant fairy-land muted trumpets, evokes a lost Arcadia. A solo cor anglais closes the passage, referring back to material heard in the aborted anacrusis; even in Arcadia, the music is haunted by the memory – or is it an anticipation? – of a disaster foretold. Violas then strike out with the continuation of the tune, leading into a contrasting passage characterised by semiquaver scales, harp

arpeggios and percussion. The pastoral is thus transformed into something more magical, and if one hears here the echoes of Tippett or even William Mathias – a composer about whom Hyde has written authoritatively – it is because Hyde, too, shares their ability to capture numinosity. The slower pastoral material and faster magical material alternate, and as the texture thickens in the strings, the mood moves increasingly towards the ecstatic.

But full flight is not yet achieved: the music suddenly switches character. Harp and string murmurings accompany lightly dancing figures tossed around the orchestra. The intensity grows until the entire wind and brass section dance together. Evoking the lighter textures of the traditional Trio, strings then enter with a sonorous chorale-like idea, against which the percussion grumbles and glistens. The scherzo refuses to be silenced: it returns, more frenetic and urgent than ever. Insistent repeated chords in the wind threaten to overrule the dance, out of which comes the first lyrical climax of the Symphony: a glorious outpouring of melody for the upper strings that all too swiftly recedes, as if unable to sustain itself any longer. (Listeners familiar with Hugh Wood's magisterial Symphony Op. 21 (1974–82),

a work that Hyde admires greatly, might hear something of Wood in both the shape of the string melody as well as its emotional rhetoric.) As the music falters, muted fanfare figures in the brass offer sickly reflections of the more strident gestures of the introduction. The string cluster and timpani solo (though not the trombone glissandi) of the catastrophe are heard faintly, as if from a distance. The key to unlocking the Symphony has not yet been found.

The music is thus gathered together for a further attempt at finding its formal and emotional release. Once again, the contrast between tranquil, pastoral states and more dynamic, scherzo-like ideas create impetus. But this is no simple recapitulation of what comes before (even if that is, to a certain extent, and with a nod to demands of the past, its thematic function.) The control of energy this time around proves to be altogether different, as Hyde locates and explores the middleground state between the rapid juxtapositions of the opening and the separation of materials into separate slow-movement and scherzo sections. The intensity builds anew, palpably increasing in excitement as the harmony, seemingly inevitably, moves towards G (in fact, this is one of the few places Hyde

unleashes the full orchestra, having used it sparingly and with winningly transparent orchestration throughout the work). The strings pick up the very first idea heard in the symphony – a bustling semiquaver melody – before landing on pounding quaver G naturals in the bass: the dominant to the tonic C quavers heard in the introduction. And at long last, the Symphony finds its structural downbeat with a radiant reworking of the opening of the work, built firmly on C, in which the lyrical string melodies and exultant fanfares combine in celebration.

There is one final narrative flourish. The trombone glissandi return, accompanied by timpani and a single, high sustained note in the violins. But here, the trombones slide upwards, not downwards; they have been transformed. From this, the music takes flight one last time, as soaring string melodies, supported by the 'magical' rising scales from the earlier slow movement, convey a sense of lightness and release, spiralling ever upwards until the music is lost in the clouds.

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Thomas Hyde

Thomas Hyde is a composer described by Opera Magazine as 'clearly his own man on his own turf' whose works are increasingly performed in Britain and abroad. His one-man opera, *That Man Stephen Ward* was premiered to great acclaim in 2008 and revived by Nova Music Opera at the Cheltenham Festival in 2015. A commercial recording, featuring Damian Thantrey in the title role, was issued by Resonus Classics in autumn 2017 and described by one reviewer as, 'the most impressive and genuinely exciting work by a young British composer I have heard in years. It is, I have no hesitation in declaring, a genuinely original masterpiece ...' Other notable works have included a string quartet (2009–10) a violin sonata for Jennifer Pike (2012) and a piano trio (2016). He has written two orchestral works, a Symphony for the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and a comedy overture inspired by Les Dawson premiered by the BBC National Orchestra of Wales conducted by Dalia Stasevska. A setting of the *Magnificat* was commissioned by Concertgebouw Bruges for The Sixteen.

Born in London, Thomas Hyde studied at Oxford University and the Royal Academy of Music where his teachers included

Robert Saxton, Simon Bainbridge and Sir Peter Maxwell Davies. He was Manson Junior Fellow at the Royal Academy of Music (2001–2) and in 2017 was elected an Associate of the RAM. He has supported his compositional work with various part-time teaching posts and is currently on the staff of the music department at King's College, London. In June 2019 he was elected to a Senior Research Fellowship at Worcester College, Oxford where he has also taught for a number of years.

As well as his composing and teaching commitments, Thomas Hyde is chair of the Lucille Graham Trust, a charity that supports music education work in London, and a member of the Little Missenden Festival committee and Presteigne Festival Advisory Group. As a writer he has recently completed a biography of the Welsh composer William Mathias and his study of David Matthews was published by Plumbago Books in 2014.

Forthcoming commissions include a string quartet for the Presteigne Festival, a 40-part motet for the Lichfield Festival in 2022 and a full-length opera in collaboration with the novelist Alexander McCall Smith commissioned by Scottish Opera.

www.thomashyde.co.uk

Geoffrey Paterson (conductor)

British conductor Geoffrey Paterson is admired for his impressive grasp of detail, responsiveness to musicians, and his ability to shape and make music from the most complex scores with natural authority.

Recent plans include a return to the Dutch National Opera, a streamed BBC Prom from the Royal Albert Hall with the London Sinfonietta (whom he conducts regularly) and appearances with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Copenhagen Philharmonic, Nash and Asko Schoenberg ensembles.

Other highlights have included Philharmonia Orchestra, Danish National Symphony Orchestra, Aurora Orchestra, Orchestre National de Lille, National Orchestra of Belgium, Basel Sinfonietta, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and Scottish Chamber Orchestra. He has also conducted at English National Opera (Philip Glass' *Orphée*), Bayerische Staatsoper (Menotti's *The Consul*, Max Richter and Saariaho ballets), Royal Danish Opera (*Die Fledermaus*, *Porgy and Bess*, and Prokofiev's *Cinderella*), Opera North (*La bohème*), Glyndebourne on Tour (*Die Entführung aus dem Serail*)

and Music Theatre Wales (Dusapin and Eotvos). He was a Jette Parker Young Artist at Covent Garden, subsequently conducting operas by HK Gruber (also in Bregenz), Massenet (recorded for Opera Rara), and world premieres by Birtwistle and Tansy Davies.

Geoffrey studied composition with Alexander Goehr at Cambridge and then went to the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. He won First Prize and Audience Prize at the 2009 Leeds Conductors Competition. He participated in masterclasses with Pierre Boulez in Luzern, and assisted Antonio Pappano, Mark Elder, Andris Nelsons and Daniele Gatti whilst at Covent Garden, and Kirill Petrenko at Bayreuth for two seasons.

www.geoffreypaterson.co.uk

The BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra

The BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra was formed in December 1935 and is a key contributor to the BBC's broadcasting and cultural role.

Formed in 1935, initially based in Edinburgh, then at Broadcasting House, Glasgow, the orchestra has been based at Glasgow's City Halls since 2006. The BBC SSO is Scotland's national broadcasting orchestra and performs throughout Scotland, the UK and abroad, and it maintains a busy schedule of broadcasts for BBC Radio 3, BBC Radio Scotland, BBC Television and online.

It is Scotland's leading champion of new music and has established strong links with local communities through its thriving learning and outreach programme. It is a partner in 'Big Noise', Scotland's project for social change through music; it plays a major role in the BBC's *Ten Pieces* initiative; and has a close association with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, working across a variety of disciplines with conductors, composers, soloists and orchestral players. The orchestra appears regularly at the BBC Proms and the Edinburgh International Festival and it is a recipient

of the Royal Philharmonic Society Award and of four Gramophone Awards.

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