

GEORGE LLOYD
(1913-1998)

SYMPHONY NO. 11 (1985)

- 1 Vivo [17:53]
- 2 Lento [8:53]
- 3 Leggiero e brillante [8:32]
- 4 Grave [7:57]
- 5 Finale: con esultazione [15:27]

Total time = 59:00

Albany Symphony Orchestra
George Lloyd, *conductor*



GEORGE LLOYD SYMPHONY NO. 11

GEORGE
LLOYD

TROY060



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GEORGE WALTER
SELWYN LLOYD

was born on 28 June 1913 in St. Ives, Cornwall, near the sea-whipped southwesternmost tip of England. He was the second of three children in a well-to-do family steeped in artistic sensibility. His mother, Constance Priestly Lloyd, played the violin, viola and piano. His father, William A.C.

Lloyd, a writer and flutist, was the son of an American opera singer, Fanny Powell Lloyd, whose father had been the New York City-born painter, William Henry Powell.

This artistic inheritance was one of two things that crucially delineated George Lloyd's boyhood. Rheumatic fever was the other, keeping him out of the formal educational system until he was 12. By then the home-schooling his parents provided had indulgently nurtured his musical precocity: he had been playing the violin and piano more than half his life and was already composing.

At 14 he decided that, since composing was clearly his calling, he had no further need of the prep school he had been attending for two years. His parents acquiesced. Private lessons in London—with such notables as Harry Farjeon in composition and Albert Sammons in violin—followed. So did his first blush of celebrity. Barely into his majority, Lloyd already had three nicely received symphonies under his belt.

Even more promising was the success of his first two operas (for which his opera-enthusiast father wrote the librettos): *Iernin*, a supernatural Celtic love story, which enjoyed an exceptional run at Penzance in 1934, and *The Serf*, also about ill-starred medieval lovers, which played at Covent Garden in 1938. Between the operas, Lloyd met, wooed and wed Nancy Juvet, from Switzerland. In both personal and professional realms, his star was most auspiciously ascending.

Then Hitler invaded Poland. During the ensuing World War, Lloyd's rising star not only came to a standstill—it practically blinked out altogether. Serving as a Royal Marine gunner and bandmember aboard an Arctic-convoy cruiser, in 1942 he barely survived the effects of a torpedo blast that crippled the vessel and drowned 17 of his shipmates in a flood of fuel oil and near-freezing ocean water. That harrowing incident so traumatized him in body and mind that his doctors pronounced that he would need to be institutionalized for life.

His wife disagreed. Whisking him away to the south of England and, after the war, back to Switzerland, she painstakingly set about restoring his health. Slowly, doggedly, over the course of several years, Lloyd managed to compose a concert overture and two symphonies. The couple returned to London, and he duly submitted the scores to England's foremost musical entity, the BBC.

The BBC accepted the overture but snubbed the more ambitious symphonies. It was an unexpected and disheartening rejection. But soon afterward came a commission for him to write an opera for the 1951 Festival of Britain—a second chance to restart his stalled career.

The physical act of composing the grand-scale *John Socman*—another medieval tale with a libretto by his father—was draining for Lloyd. Dealing with backstage infighting, the disappointing production and his father's death proved more than he could manage. He suffered a nervous breakdown. Renouncing opera and the London musical scene, he settled with his wife in Dorset, on the Channel. There they raised and marketed first carnations, then mushrooms. Only in off-hours did he compose, dutifully submitting the BBC the resultant scores, still hoping for performance and recognition.

But those scores basked in what Lloyd unashamedly called “tunes.” And such openhearted, melody-based music—no matter how commendably crafted—was deemed by key BBC administrators and a contingent of influential music critics to be irrelevant, a leftover of a bygone time, sound and Zeitgeist. For them the ethos of the post-World War West was more meaningfully conveyed by such modernists as Pierre Boulez (who also happened to be the BBC Symphony Orchestra's chief conductor in the early 1970s).

On top of that, Lloyd—like George Gershwin, who had endured similar snubbing by the musical elite in America—was an outsider, with no posh academic credentials, no sure foothold in the old-boy network.

He was never totally without supporters, though, and he did have two significant professional advocates among his compatriots. The first was pianist-composer John Ogdon, who had premiered Lloyd's *Piano Concerto No. 1*, “*Scapegoat*,” in the early sixties. Studying orchestration under Lloyd, Ogdon connected with him not only artistically but perhaps, given his own history of mental turmoil, on a deeper personal level as well. It was thanks to the pianist's efforts that, in 1969, the BBC accepted Lloyd's *Eighth Symphony*.

And it was thanks to the advocacy of conductor Edward Downes that the BBC finally played that symphony—eight years later.



At that time a change was already in the air. The UK's preeminent composer, Benjamin Britten, was dead. There were increasing signs of disenchantment with the emotive limitations of the avant-garde—even Krzysztof Penderecki, celebrated master of multitextural discord, was edging toward tonality. Andrew Lloyd Webber was doing big box office with his crowd-pleasing musicals. And John Williams was transporting audiences worldwide with his lavishly catchy, conservative film scores. Concertgoers were ready for something similarly engaging and expressive in the classical idiom.

They found it in Lloyd's *Eighth*, whose 1977 broadcast over BBC Radio 3, with Downes leading the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra, spurred the composer's return to public awareness in England—to the chagrin of the avant-gardists who still preferred to discount him and the tradition he embodied.

By chance, across the Atlantic, in upstate New York, Albany Symphony Orchestra president Peter Kermani happened to be tuned in to the fateful BBC broadcast. Like so many other listeners, he was instantly, indelibly struck by the *Eighth's* artistry. Despite his having masterminded the ASO's "made in America" promotional strategy, Kermani was determined to showcase Lloyd's music.

When an opportune programming moment arose at last in 1984, he dispatched ASO manager Susan Bush to London—where, in the wake of growing popularity, the Lloyds had resettled—to commission a symphony from the Cornishman. (For good measure, while in England, Bush took the opportunity to offer a commission to Edmund Rubbra too. The result was *Sinfonietta*, Rubbra's final work.)

Eager to have his music performed in the States for the first time, Lloyd came to a happy agreement with the Americans—not only to write but also to conduct the new piece, which the ASO would debut in concert, as well as record on England's Conifer label, during the 1986-87 season.

This was the origin of *Symphony No. 11*, of this 20th-anniversary remastered re-release of the original recording, and of Lloyd's association with the Albany Symphony Orchestra, for whom he wrote another symphony, guest-conducted, recorded and served as musical advisor on into 1991. More particularly, it was also the origin of Lloyd's close collaboration with Kermani and Bush, who soon branched off to form Albany Records—perhaps the most satisfying commercial collaboration of his career.

SYMPHONY NO. 11

George Lloyd's dozen symphonies can be categorized as neatly as the phases of his professional life: the three earliest, which helped establish his name; the six from his period of obscurity; and the three written on commission when he was back in demand.

What distinguishes the *Eleventh Symphony* from the others—according to the composer's terse 1986 program note—is that it represented for him his intensified exploration of different orchestral colors and the emotions they arouse: "I felt I must try once more to extend a little further the range of sounds I had already been making, but keeping within the parameters that were natural to me." And, to be sure, the symphony shimmers, even more brightly than his radiant, Arctic-inspired *Fourth*.

But what sets it apart more emphatically is its unstinting ebullience. It is a great, surging, five-movement gush—a fount of singing melodies and insistent rhythms—unleashed by someone delighting in his technical prowess and confident of his creative instincts.

Lloyd must have started work on it soon after the commission came through; the basic composing was probably done by the end of 1984, when he began orchestrating. The orchestrating went on through the early part of the new year, and he dated the autograph score 29 March 1985, although he continued making minor adjustments. On 17 May he could inform Kermani, "I am writing to let you know that your symphony has been finished—all except the metronome marks."

Vitality explodes at the *Eleventh's* very outset, as the first movement—longer than Prokofiev's entire *Classical Symphony*—opens with a slap-in-the-face salvo: brash upward leaps of a fourth, obstinate triplet rhythms, a succession of jumpy motifs sometimes construed as tone rows (in reality, they are only tone-row wannabes).

A stoical theme rises and dissolves into a quietly tense passage, where another significant phrase is unveiled: cast initially as C-sharp, B, D, E-flat, C—which are also the respective closing chords for the five movements—it will sneak ominously in and out of the rest of the movement in various guises (and will ultimately return in the finale). A lyrical countertheme appears, grows and leads to a dramatic pause. Then, from absolutely nowhere, a jazzy section arrives, snide as a teenager's smirk. In an extended recapitulation, amid renewed brashness and agitation, the stoical theme resurfaces, then the lyrical one; they compete, die down and drift off into a minor-key cadence.

Divisi strings lustroously transform that minor chord into its corresponding major to launch the second movement. Lloyd in his program note dubs this yearning *lento* “a simple song”: the strings carry its flowing burden throughout, although a solo trumpet breaks through at one point and all the trumpets and horns shoulder the climax.

The ensuing scherzo begins by inverting the symphony’s opening gesture; the upward swipes are now downward jabs. Lloyd calls this movement a dance, and it might pass for a fast waltz were it not so frenetically happy-go-lucky as to verge at times on the manic. The English horn, celesta and glockenspiel interpose a little break. A lovelier calm, however, is reserved for the trio section, a dreamy Victorian lullaby so much like the trio from Tchaikovsky’s *First Symphony* that the opening bars of both (if put in the same key) can be played together in perfect accord.

A bittersweet *grave* follows, which on a technical level is doubly tied to movement one: the steady tenor-drum tattoo recalls the latter’s obstinate triplets, and the restrained trombone theme resembles a chastened version of the tone-row wannabes. On a personal level the movement’s character—suggestive of a military funeral march—may reflect the fact that Lloyd’s hospitalized mother was near death at the time. Nonetheless, so hyperbolically does the symphony as a whole relish its own euphonious existence that even this dirge has more pluck than plangency to it. It ends up solidly affirming life, not bemoaning loss.

That affirmation is positively stentorian in the finale, marked *con esultazione*, “exultantly.” (Lloyd’s penmanship in the score is ambiguous here: he may actually have intended “*con esaltazione*,” “exaltingly,” which applies just as well.) Two ideas dominate: a ceremonial trumpet theme that starts everything off and an uplifting anthem.

Lloyd plays with these subjects, changes their modality, combines them, pulls them apart, pits them against charming new phrases and instrumental effects. With melodramatic suspense, at the sound of a slapstick, he twice plunges the anthem into a hushed void, where it gets examined in eery slow motion, like a hapless abductee in the hands of an extraterrestrial. Both subjects come through it all magnificently, though, exultant and exalted as well. Then the end—which the composer has held off for as long as possible—finally arrives, like the closing sequence of a fireworks display in which all the biggest, brightest rockets are at last hurled heavenward.

Audiences at the 31 October Troy premiere and at the repeat performance the following evening at the orchestra’s home hall, the Palace Theater in Albany, gave the *Eleventh* and its composer-conductor an impressive ovation; the local press echoed their approval.

Although the *Eleventh* was not Lloyd’s last symphony, it was his last grand, gutsy utterance in that genre; the ASO-commissioned *Twelfth* was more subdued and deliberate. By the time of his death on 3 July 1998 from heart failure (often the culmination of rheumatic fever, which had been the bane of his childhood), the number of individual works in his canon was on the relatively modest side. But then his muse tended to demand of him the larger forms—seven concertos and several substantial choral-orchestral pieces, in addition to his three operas and the dozen symphonies; interspersed among these were orchestral suites and a number of chamber, vocal and band compositions. He and his wife, his most intrepid ally, who died in 2000, had no children; their progeny is this music.

—Ray Bono

THE ALBANY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

David Alan Miller, *Music Director*

For more than 30 years the Albany Symphony Orchestra has held a unique position in the orchestra world as champion of the American symphonic repertoire. Founded in 1931 by the composer-conductor John Carabella, it has also been led by music directors Rudolf Thomas, Ole Windingstad, Edgar Curtis, Julius Hegyi and Geoffrey Simon. Beyond its regular programming, the orchestra hosts a month-long American Music Festival and has a new-music ensemble, the Dogs of Desire. With more than 20 consecutive ASCAP awards for adventuresome programming, it received the 2001 ASCAP Morton Gould Award for Innovative Programming, as well as ASCAP’s first Leonard Bernstein Award for Outstanding Educational Programming and the New York State Governor’s Arts Award. Its many recordings appear on the Albany, New World, CRI, Argo and London/Decca labels.

More information about the Albany Symphony Orchestra can be found on its website: www.albanysymphony.com.

SYMPHONY NO. 11 WAS RECORDED ON 3 AND 4 NOVEMBER 1986 AT THE TROY SAVINGS BANK MUSIC HALL, TROY, NEW YORK.

ORIGINAL RECORDING PRODUCER: ANDREW CORNALL

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