

GEORGE LLOYD
(1913 - 1998)

Albany Symphony Orchestra
George Lloyd conductor

SYMPHONY IN A (NO. 1) (1932)

- 1 Section One: Introduction: Vivace (theme 1); andante (theme 2); tempo 1 [3:55]
- 2 Variation 1: (Tempo 1) [1:55]
- 3 Variation 2: (Tempo 1) [1:30]
- 4 Variation 3: Poco meno [1:00]
- 5 Variation 4: (Poco meno) [1:22]
- 6 Variation 5: Tempo 1 [2:00]
- 7 Section Two: Andante con fervore [5:07]
- 8 Section Three: Vivace (tempo 1) [1:12]

TWELFTH SYMPHONY (1989)

- 9 Section One: Introduction: Tranquillo (theme 1); poco meno lento (theme 2) [3:12]
- 10 Variation 1: Comodo [3:00]
- 11 Variation 2: Grazioso [1:58]
- 12 Variation 3: Grave [2:38]
- 13 Variation 4: Vivo [4:13]
- 14 Section Two: Adagio [12:00]
- 15 Section Three: Allegro [13:57]

Total time = 66:12

GEORGE LLOYD SYMPHONIES 1 AND 12

GEORGE
LLOYD

SYMPHONY IN A (NO. 1) Albany Symphony Orchestra
TWELFTH SYMPHONY George Lloyd, conductor

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THE FIRST AND THE LAST

The two works brought together on this disk bookend British composer George Lloyd's exceptional symphonic output: *Symphony in A*, his first effort in that form, in essence the starting point of his career, and the *Twelfth Symphony*, his last, written midway through the hard-won celebrity he achieved during his final score of years.

Recorded soon after a concert featuring the American premiere of the former and the world premiere of the latter, and now remastered for this CD, both performances were given under the composer's baton. Together they demonstrate his incontestable command of the orchestra, not just as a conductor but as a superb orchestrator who already as a youth knew how to make a large instrumental ensemble sing.

More than that, they affirm that Lloyd's great gift for lyricism—the hallmark of his talent—remained undiminished into his closing decade.

To see George Lloyd on the podium even at that late date—jutting out his tough Celtic chin and tossing his mane of silver-white hair—one would hardly suspect that serious health concerns had dogged him throughout appreciable portions of his life. Born in 1913 in St. Ives, Cornwall, into a family quite comfortable of means and intensely keen on music, he suffered recurrent bouts of childhood rheumatic fever severe enough to delay his formal schooling until he was 12.

By then he was ablaze with the musical fervor that his parents, taking up the educational slack, had instilled in him. After two years, with their consent, he left school to pursue studies in composition with Harry Farjeon, counterpoint with C.H. Kitson, orchestration with William Lovelock and violin with Albert Sammons.

Yet an equally profound, if not the chief, influence on him came directly from his father, William, a freelance flutist and writer whose book, *Vincenzo Bellini: A Memoir*, bore witness to his passion for Italian opera. Music bound father to son in a relationship highlighted by concertgoing, paternal reminiscences—which pieces he had performed where, what virtuosos he had heard—and compositional exercises: Puccini translated a particular dramatic event into music in such and such a way; how would the young Lloyd set it?

Before testing his hand at an opera of his own, the young Lloyd shot out his first three symphonies—one in 1932, two more the following year. Then, with his father as librettist, he tackled a brace of grand-scale operas: *Iernin*, inspired by Celtic folklore, which played Penzance in 1934 and London in 1935, and *The Serf*, another medieval romance, which debuted at Covent Garden in 1938. All five works were well received, but it was the impact of the operas that carried him toward the forefront of the British musical world.

Then World War Two plunged him into his second health crisis. In 1942, while serving in the Royal Marines, Lloyd barely survived an explosion caused by a malfunctioning torpedo launched from his own ship. Even with his wife Nancy sedulously tending to his recovery from the blast, in which 17 shipmates perished around him, the psychological after-shocks left him a virtual cripple. Composition was at first beyond him. But he persevered and by 1948 had finished two more symphonies.

Both were turned down by England's highest musical arbiter, the British Broadcasting Corporation, as stylistically *arrière-garde*. The BBC's painful rejection was mitigated only partly by a Festival of Britain commission for Lloyd to write an opera to be showcased during 1951. The result was *John Socman*, another medieval-themed composition with a libretto by his father.

The backstage turmoil and ultimate failure of this work, compounded by his father's death, precipitated Lloyd's third health crisis, a nervous collapse. Turning his back defiantly on opera, he abandoned London and moved south to Dorset, where he and his wife took up the commercial farming of carnations and mushrooms.

Unable to forsake composing altogether, though, Lloyd little by little built up an inventory of mostly large orchestral pieces—several concertos and, by the time he and Nancy returned to London in the early 1970s, four additional symphonies. The BBC, still enamored more of modernism than melody, routinely ignored the scores he sent in for consideration. This situation continued until BBC Radio 3, heeding the admonitions of a few persuasive supporters, aired a performance of Lloyd's *Symphony No. 8* in 1977.

So enthusiastic was listener response that Lloyd's stalled career as a composer suddenly regained propulsion; he

was in demand as never before; old works were dusted off, recording contracts tendered, a tenth symphony commissioned; and in the mid 1980s a trans-Atlantic invitation soon had the Cornishman flying to the United States to serve for several seasons as principal guest conductor and musical advisor for the Albany Symphony Orchestra in upstate New York. It was for the ASO that he composed his last two symphonies.

"He just lived for composing and conducting," his wife later recalled. "He loved the Albany Symphony Orchestra and it played for him with all its heart."

As if compensating for lost time, Lloyd continued to work assiduously up to his final health crisis—the heart failure often associated with rheumatic fever—dying in 1998 at the age of 85. His final work was, fittingly, a *Requiem*, one of several accompanied choral and vocal compositions that occupied him toward the end of his life. He may have renounced opera, his first love, almost half a century earlier, but the marriage of human voice and acoustic instrument still held him in thrall.

SYMPHONY IN A (NO. 1)

George Lloyd completed his *Symphony in A* in a white heat shortly after he turned 19 and promptly got it performed by the Penzance Orchestral Society on 23 November 1932. Then, as his nephew William Lloyd relates, "He put the score under his arm and set off to see Dan Godfrey at the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra." Godfrey, a composer-arranger as well as a conductor, was at the time famous for his Winter Gardens festivals and his aggressive promoting of new British works.

Sir Dan was initially disinclined to meet with the young man, but Lloyd "persisted and eventually was shown into his office. He explained that he had written a symphony and wanted it performed. Godfrey looked at it there and then, and agreed. George asked who would conduct it, and Godfrey said, 'You had better do it yourself.' That was George's introduction to conducting."

This somewhat more "official" premiere took place—according to a notation penciled into the composer's score—on 24 November 1933, performed and broadcast by the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra at the Bournemouth Pavilion. The following year Lloyd revised the work, and then apparently it remained untouched until 1980, when, during a tossing-out of old materials, he happened on it and decided not to discard it. Its form, he said, still intrigued him, and he made some further revisions in it.

It was this twice-revised version that the Albany Symphony Orchestra debuted on 30 March 1990 at the Troy Savings

Bank Music Hall in Troy, New York, with a second performance the next evening in the orchestra's home hall, the Palace Theater, in Albany.

Certainly in form this one-movement symphony was novel for early-1930s England. Even by American standards it was original: Roy Harris's breakthrough Third Symphony, also in a single movement, wasn't written until 1939.

Lloyd was undoubtedly proud of its "short and sharp" design. His program notes for both the British performances and the decades-later American premiere all dwell on the work's structure: an introduction with two contrasting themes, A and B, followed by a handful of variations on A (his notes disagree on whether there are four or five variations—some of them simply melt into others); a *con fervore* expansion of B; and finally a fuguelike treatment of A that briefly brings back B before sending A home amid fanfares.

Yet nowhere did Lloyd mention any emotional wellspring for the piece. This might not disappoint as concerns the first theme, which is neutral enough to pass as merely some playful motif suitable for, among other permutations, a march and a fugato (tracks 6 and 8 on this disk). The second subject, however, is so suggestive of bittersweet yearning that the heartache is almost palpable. It tempts us to believe that the composer must have had some deeper investment in it beyond the intellectual.

So it is intriguing what William Lloyd discovered recently, while searching the archives in vain for an early draft of the symphony before revisions were incorporated. Pasted inside the back cover of his uncle's personal copy of the score was the following undated, typewritten poem:

What! Are you the God that men dread—
 You! An arch and roguish boy
Every mischief in your head,
 Every heart and lip your toy?
Though your arrows shoot me through,
Away! I'll have none of you.

Love is sure. He bends his bow
 Once; and when his arrow flies
All the little wantons go;
 At his word all trifling dies.
So, as Love alone I sue,
Be off! For I'll have none of you.

—W.A.C. Lloyd

Written by the composer's father, these two sextains resist easy decipherment. Is the "arch and roguish boy" of the first stanza Cupid? Then who is this "Love" in the second stanza who is also male, also armed with bow and arrow—Apollo, god of music? Is this a Victorian allegory about the sensual versus the spiritual? About easy gratification versus the tough-love rewards of pure art? Is it something of more private significance to the poet, which perhaps the poet's son was also privy to?

Despite such haziness of detail, the poem's overall thrust exhorts a spurning of the trivial for the true. And while it may have no precise programmatic link to *Symphony in A*, the poet's contrasting of mischievous superficiality to some loftier passion is at least echoed in the younger Lloyd's composition, where none of the variations on the bouncy, bad-boy-Cupid first theme ever engages us as surely as the lovely second theme.

And so, unexpectedly, because of a bit of verse stuck into the score, we find ourselves imbuing the entire symphony with a meaning that Lloyd's structural explanation gave no hint of. It connects us of this cyber age to a deceased artist in his youthful attempt to acknowledge, interpret and immortalize some inner conflict experienced by his father, a gentleman from the 19th century. It erases time and grants us entrée into someone else's soul. Or so it pleases us to think.

TWELFTH SYMPHONY

It may also please us to try relating George Lloyd's earliest composition to those that followed. Lloyd himself fueled our inclination. Not only did he invite comparison by pairing his first and his final symphonies in concert and on disk; but he also used the form of *Symphony in A* as the model for his *Twelfth*—"The structure of *Symphony No. 1*," the composer stated in his 1990 program notes, "suited the frame of mind I was in at the time I was thinking of *Symphony No. 12*"—intentionally tying off both ends of his symphonic catalog with a handsome symmetry.

Like *Symphony in A*, the later work is in a single movement consisting of three continuous sections: an introductory statement of two contrasting themes, leading to several variations; a slower, expansive middle; and a fuguelike finale. It has a few technical differences: in the variations and the middle section both themes are explored, rather than just one theme in each, as in the earlier symphony; and its finale is considerably lighter contrapuntally. It is longer too and in instrumentation more smoothly polished and colorful—as exemplified by the charming effects in the *vivo* variation (track 13).

But the greater difference is one of spirit. Notwithstanding its fervent secondary theme, one of the most attractive Lloyd ever fashioned, *Symphony No. 1* is raucous and urgent, eager to get going. *No. 12* takes its time; it replaces bounciness with relaxation, impassioned yearning with serenity; it has already arrived.

So, of course, had the composer by then. Controversially lauded as a crusader against “horrible sounds” and the “squeaky gate”—his waggish terms for tuneless avant-garde music—he finished the piece in London on 25 May 1989, about a month shy of his 76th birthday and four years after his titanic, visceral *Symphony No. 11*.

That he had no plans for a thirteenth symphony is indicated by an inscription he penned in a score presented to Susan Bush, head of Albany Records and former manager of the Albany Symphony Orchestra. (Both she and former ASO president Peter Kermani had arranged Lloyd’s first visits to America and were the dedicatees of the ASO-commissioned *Twelfth*.) Writing several weeks after the premiere, he thanked her “for the great effort you made in setting up and bringing about the performances and recording of this symphony. I am happy that my last symphony should have had such a good beginning.”

But as if to underline that the *Twelfth* would be his valedictory symphonic gesture, Lloyd had imbedded a clue in the music itself. He selected as the respective closing cadences for the three sections the chords C, E and G—spelling out the pitches of that cornerstone of Western harmony, the C-major triad. For such a tonal traditionalist, signing off on the touchstone genre of classical music after bequeathing a neat dozen to the canon, what better farewell could there possibly be?

—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 among orchestras 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.

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