

# Rodney NEWTON

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLUME ONE

SYMPHONY NO. 1  
SYMPHONY NO. 4  
DISTANT NEBULAE

Málaga Philharmonic Orchestra  
Paul Mann

## A FIRST RECORDING OF MY ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

by Rodney Newton

In September 2017 I was granted a unique opportunity to visit my past life – a life I was leading 50 years ago – when the Orquesta Filarmónica de Málaga under Paul Mann played a symphony that I had written in my early twenties in a tiny apartment in Bristol, but that had never before been performed. Indeed, at the time of its composition, I despaired of even finishing it, let alone hearing it.

I was born into a middle-class family in Birmingham, England, in 1945. My father was a company director and sang in an amateur choir; my maternal grandmother had been a member of Granville Bantock's Midland Singers and had sung a solo at the funeral of George Cadbury, third son of the founder of the chocolate-making firm. Other than a few piano lessons at the age of five, which were discontinued due to my reluctance to practise, I had no formal musical training until I entered Birmingham School of Music (now Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, of which I am an Honorary Member) as a part-time student in 1963. Subsequently I became a full-time student, studying timpani and percussion with Ernest Parsons, a founder member of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and composition with the Midlands organist and composer Cyril Christopher.

Leaving college in 1967, I divided my career between playing and composing, becoming first a member of the BBC Training Orchestra and then, after a short period of freelancing, joining the orchestra of Sadler's Wells (now English National) Opera as a percussionist in 1974; I remained there for eleven years, the last five as principal timpanist. I also appeared with other London orchestras, playing for a number of prominent conductors.

During this period I composed prolifically. I joined the Composers' Guild of Great Britain and, later on, the Association of Professional Composers, serving on the executive committee of the latter for four years. I also worked for three years

in music publishing as part-time Promotion Manager for United Music Publishers. In 1985, following studies in film-music composition with Richard Arnell at the London International Film School and Don Brandon Ray at Goldsmith's College, University of London, and private conducting lessons with Lionel Friend, I left the opera company to work as a composer, orchestrator and musical director in films and television, while remaining active as a player with the London orchestras. I wrote scores for BBC Television, Thames Television and S4C, and was Music Consultant to the London Film School (of which I am an Honorary Associate) for almost 22 years.

In the 1990s I became involved with brass and military bands as a composer and arranger, holding residencies with the Cory Band (currently ranked as the world's foremost amateur brass band), Williams Fairey Band and the Band of the Coldstream Guards. I also provided all the arrangements for conceptual artist Jeremy Deller's *Acid Brass* project, which gained that Andy Warhol protégé the 2006 Turner Prize. In 2001 I became active in music journalism and served as Features Editor for *British Bandsman* magazine for nine years.

In 2008 I was elected to a Fellowship of the Royal Society of Arts and in 2010 and 2014 respectively I was awarded the degrees of Master of Arts with distinction and Doctor of Philosophy by Salford University, following studies under the supervision of Professors Peter Graham and Alan Williams. Over the last decade I have conducted and adjudicated at brass-band contests at home and abroad, as well as composed and arranged for bands in the UK, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Scandinavia and the USA, and served as an external examiner for Salford University.

Between 1967 and 1979 I wrote a considerable number of orchestral works, including eight symphonies and a ballet score, which received a commendation in the 1975 Prince Pierre of Monaco competition (the judges including Henri Dutilleux and Georges Auric). However, other than my Second Symphony (*Sinfonia Civitatis*), which received an amateur performance by the London Repertoire Orchestra conducted by Ruth Gipps, very few of my orchestral works have been played. The accounts of my First and Fourth Symphonies on this album are not only first recordings but also first performances.

My Symphony No. 1 was begun in the autumn of 1967 and completed by January 1969 while I was a member of the BBC Training Orchestra in Bristol. It is very much the music of a young composer in his early twenties searching for a personal style and trying on various compositional hats (Shostakovich and Vaughan Williams being the most obvious influences).

The first movement [1] begins quietly in D minor, with an extended *Lento* introduction featuring a tiny germ cell of a falling minor second and a rising minor third. This passage leads to an *allegro* development section, which culminates in dramatic fashion with a powerful timpani solo. A reprise of the earlier material leads to a variant in the form of a quick march, which is passed around the orchestra until it also concludes in the same percussion-laden climax as before. A contemplative viola phrase acts as a bridge to a fast coda based on the march, ending with a powerful statement of the germ cell around which the movement is based.

The second movement, *Lento ma con moto* [2], paints a distinctly pastoral picture contrasted with more dramatic gestures, the principal idea being based on a gentle piano prelude I wrote at the time (the similarity between the first phrase and the aria 'Vissi d'arte' from Puccini's *Tosca* is purely coincidental, since I did not know the opera at the time). For a while, everything turns mediaeval, with a modal trumpet solo and harp accompaniment, but the dramatic idea returns and with it a distinct darkening of mood. After an angst-ridden climax, a consolatory solo violin brings the movement back to its pastoral reverie.

The finale [3] is a lively rondo involving odd-metre time-signatures. A brassy opening heralds a jaunty, irregular theme which is contrasted by a lush, romantic second subject. The return of the primary material introduces a jazzy, syncopated variant and a climax ushers in a return of the romantic episode. A reprise of material from the very opening of the symphony leads to the final section, which ends resoundingly with the jazzy phrase on the full orchestra.

This work, which lay dormant for nearly fifty years, has undergone some revision, but it is essentially the same piece that I wrote during my Bristol years.

Six years separate my First and Fourth Symphonies. In the interim my Symphony No. 2 received its sole performance, but I was not so lucky with my Symphony No. 3 (1974). Nevertheless, the urge to write symphonic music remained strong and, in the late summer of 1975, as I sat in my study early one evening watching the stars gradually appear, I sketched a few bars of music that became the introduction to a new symphony. The work which developed is in four movements (the third and fourth being played without a break) and is scored for a large orchestra with the usual strings, triple woodwind, three trombones, tuba, timpani and celesta, with a comprehensive percussion section of three players, including a part for a kit drummer.

The first movement [4] is entitled 'Metamorphoses' and, after its soft introduction, consists of an *allegro* with a chromatic principal theme. The bulk of the first movement consists, as its title suggests, of a series of metamorphoses of that theme. In the years separating the First Symphony from the Fourth, my music had undergone a metamorphosis itself, now featuring far more chromaticism and tonal ambiguity, which led to the serial technique I adopted in the symphonies that followed.

The second movement, 'Elegy' [5], begins with a questioning phrase on a solo horn. The mood is sombre and sorrowful, heightened by a tolling bell and a funereal tenor drum. The elegiac material, more tonal than in the previous movement, eventually swells to a warm, positive climax amid a peal of bells, but a return of bleak woodwind and the rolling tenor drum dispels any feeling of triumph, and the movement ends with the same questioning horn solo with which it began.

The third movement, a *Scherzo Malevolo* [6], is a very grim joke indeed. Much of it is given over to a highly chromatic fugato with a nightmarish marching figure in the percussion. A wistful trio section provides some respite, but the fugue figure growls and sneers until the nightmare resumes, culminating in a furious solo for a kit drummer. While I was working on the symphony, I could hear the sound of dance bands from a local community hall. The sound of the drums was inescapable, so I decided to write it into my symphony as a disruptive element, making the music sound like something from a dance hall in Hell. The anarchic drum solo is silenced by a *fortissimo* chord

from the full orchestra, followed by a bridge passage which leads directly into the final movement, which is entitled 'Passacaglia, Variations and Epilogue'.

The passacaglia theme appears on a solo trombone [7] and is answered by a solo trumpet, the material undergoing several transformations until it is stated by the full orchestra, culminating in a powerful climax in which the conflicting tonalities of the movement are flung together. There is a cinematic 'jump cut' to the soft music from the very opening of the symphony and, after two more loud statements, the epilogue begins. The horn calls from the first movement return and the music eventually ends on a sustained string chord which fades into silence.

Dedicated to my friend and fellow composer, Robert Simpson, the Fourth Symphony attracted a number of admirers, among them the conductor Sir Charles Groves, who attempted to programme it in a BBC Symphony Orchestra concert, but without success.

Four years after completing my Fourth Symphony, I wrote a short tone poem entitled *Distant Nebulae* [8], inspired by my lifelong interest in astronomy. I gave the first performance at a charity concert at St Paul's, Covent Garden, in 1979, when it was played by my own St Martin's Lane Ensemble. A further performance took place in 1981 at St Mark's, Barnet Vale, Hertfordshire, by the Hertfordshire Chamber Orchestra conducted by Howard Williams, but the work was not played again until this recording. I reused some of the material in a percussion concerto called *Nocturnale* (2010) and I made a further revision in 2017, just before the recording sessions in Málaga. Scored for an orchestra of three flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, trumpet in D, glockenspiel, vibraphone, tam-tam and strings, it takes the 'cosmic landscape' of Charles Ives' *The Unanswered Question* as its point of departure. This piece, by contrast, does not seek to pose unanswerable questions, but rather represents gentle meditation on the night sky and the mysteries of the universe. It is dedicated to my friend, the conductor and artistic director of the Presteigne Festival, George Vass.

**Paul Mann** is a regular guest conductor with many orchestras throughout Europe, the USA, Australia and the Far East. His work as chief conductor of the Odense Symphony Orchestra in Denmark achieved considerable critical success, particularly in the symphonies of Beethoven, Elgar, Mahler, Schumann and Shostakovich, and with it he also made numerous recordings of a wide range of repertoire, for such labels as Bridge, DaCapo and EMI.

He first came to international attention as first prizewinner in the 1998 Donatella Flick Conducting Competition, as a result of which he was also appointed assistant conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra. He made his LSO debut shortly afterwards, and subsequently collaborated frequently with the Orchestra, both in the concert hall and recording studio. Special

projects with the LSO included the Duke Ellington Centenary Concert at the Barbican Hall with Wynton Marsalis, and a famous collaboration with the legendary rock group Deep Purple in two widely acclaimed performances of Jon Lord's *Concerto for Group and Orchestra* at the Royal Albert Hall, the live DVD and CD of which remain international bestsellers. Among his more recent recordings is the first-ever studio account of Lord's *Concerto*, with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, in collaboration with Jon Lord himself and a star-studded cast of soloists, and the live recording of *Celebrating Jon Lord*, a special concert which took place at the Royal Albert Hall in April 2014 with an all-star cast paying tribute to the late composer.

This is his eleventh recording for Toccata Classics. The first featured the orchestral music of Leif Solberg (TOCC 0260) and the second, third and fifth (TOCC 0262, 0263 and 0299) presented the complete orchestral music of the Scottish Romantic Charles O'Brien (1882–1968). His fourth was the first volume in a remarkable series of new works for string orchestra, *Music For My Love* (TOCC 0333), featuring music by Brahms (arranged by Ragnar Söderlind), Maddalena Casulana (arr. Colin Matthews), Brett Dean, Steve Elcock, Andrew Ford, Robin



Photograph: Xiaowei Liu

Holloway, Mihkel Kerem, Jon Lord (arr. Paul Mann), John Pickard, Poul Ruders and Ragnar Söderlind himself. More recently, Toccata Classics released his recordings of the Ninth Symphony of David Hackbridge Johnson (rocc 0393) and the Third by Steve Elcock (rocc 0400), each accompanied by smaller works, and an album of orchestral works by Josef Schellb (rocc 0426). Paul Mann's first two volumes of the complete orchestral music of Henry Cotter Nixon (1842–1907) appeared on rocc 0372 and 0373, also with the Kodály Philharmonic Orchestra, and a third and final volume is in preparation (rocc 0374), as is a second volume of symphonic music by David Hackbridge Johnson (rocc 0452).

The **Orquesta Filarmónica de Málaga** – Principal Conductor and Artistic Director Manuel Hernández Silva – gave its inaugural concert on 14 February 1991. It was created under the name of the City Orchestra of Málaga, an association between Málaga Town Council and the Regional Government of Andalusia, as a response to the conviction that a city such as Málaga





ought to have a major symphony orchestra of its own. Throughout the years it has maintained the commitment to offer the city high-quality music along with the best conductors and soloists on the national and international scene. In charge of the Orchestra, and of the project encompassing it, the five Principal Conductors – Octav Calleya, Odón Alonso, Alexander Rahbari, Aldo Ceccato and Edmon Colomer – have left their personal marks, and the list of guest conductors likewise contains some outstanding names, among them Sergiu Comissiona, Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, Jesús López Cobos and Krzysztof Penderecki, to name only a few. Equally, the Orchestra has been privileged to welcome soloists of considerable prestige, the roll-call including Joaquín Achúcarro, Boris Belkin, Dmitri Bashkirov, Montserrat Caballé, Renaud Capuçon, Plácido Domingo, Lluís Claret, Alfredo Kraus, Alicia de Larrocha, Pepe Romero and Renata Scottò. However, the Orchestra – renamed the Málaga Philharmonic Orchestra after celebrating its tenth anniversary – believes it is essential not to restrict its musical activity to the seasonal programmes and has put forward some exciting parallel proposals, dedicated to the task of forming the audiences of the future. With this aim in mind it has set up a programme of didactic activities, in collaboration with the Education Area of the Málaga Town Council. The Málaga Philharmonic Orchestra has also achieved much success in the major Spanish concert venues, theatres and festivals, as well as on a number of tours around Europe, which have taken it to the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Slovakia and Sweden.



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Plaza Pio XII, Málaga

Producer-engineer: Albert Moraleda

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## RODNEY NEWTON Orchestral Music, Volume One

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<b>Symphony No. 1</b> (1967–69)	<b>27:59</b>
① I <i>Lento – Allegro – Meno mosso – Allegro assai</i>	9:55
② II <i>Lento ma con moto</i>	9:42
③ III <i>Allegro con brio</i>	8:22
<b>Symphony No. 4</b> (1975)	<b>35:07</b>
④ I <i>Metamorphoses: Lento – Allegro energico</i>	10:20
⑤ II <i>Elegy: Lento</i>	8:40
⑥ III <i>Scherzo malevolo: Allegro vivo – Andante – Tempo primo – Moderato –</i>	<i>6:42</i>
⑦ IV <i>Passacaglia, Variations and Epilogue:</i>	
<i>L'istesso tempo – Poco più mosso – Tempo primo – Adagio – Largo</i>	9:25
⑧ <b><i>Distant Nebulae</i></b> (1979)	<b>7:20</b>

**TT 70:29**

**Málaga Philharmonic Orchestra**

Andrea Šestaková, violin ②

David Llavata, trumpet ⑧

**Paul Mann, conductor**

FIRST RECORDINGS