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levels of what used to be referred to—in the music of Vaughan Williams—as rugged spiritual grandeur: its slow tread gives space not to the mere fact but to the actual fruits of profound meditation.

HAVERGAL BRIAN: *Symphony No. 6*; *Symphony No. 16*. London Philharmonic Orchestra c. Myer Fredman. Lyrita SRCS 67.

HAVERGAL BRIAN: *Symphony No. 22*<sup>1</sup>; *Psalm 23*<sup>1,2,3</sup>; *English Suite No. 5*<sup>4</sup>. Leicestershire Schools Symphony Orchestra c. <sup>1</sup> Laszlo Heltay, <sup>4</sup> Eric Pinkett, with <sup>2</sup> Brighton Festival Chorus and <sup>3</sup> Paul Taylor (tenor). CBS 61612

### Christopher Norris

As Brian's music becomes known through broadcasts and recordings, one gets to recognize the style and see more exactly what kind of achievement, or musical ideal, his works intend. There are now five symphonies on record, from the Sixth (the *Sinfonia Tragica*) of 1948 to the Twenty-Second (*Symphonia Brevis*), completed in 1965. Taking these two alone, one could make some guess at the way Brian's thought developed in that last, amazingly active twenty years; from the broad drama of the *Tragica* to the pared-down argument of the later work, where the clash of ideas leaves little room for mere suggestion of atmosphere. But this is perhaps to over-simplify. Numbers 10 and 21 (available on Unicorn) seem to reverse the expected pattern: the later work spreads expansively over four distinct movements, while the Tenth with its single movement seems closer in many ways to the *Sinfonia Brevis*. Perhaps it is a mistake to look for any single, unambiguous 'development' in Brian's music; its energies clearly lie too deep, in too complex a creative character, to fall into anything like a clear-cut pattern.

The present Lyrita issue is something of a milestone, being the first Brian recording with fully professional forces. Its fine recorded quality brings out impressively the sureness and sensitivity of Brian's mature scoring. His originality lies partly in the way that muted details of orchestration (as at the opening of the Sixteenth) gradually form connections and assume structural importance. For all the spirit and musicianship of the Leicestershire Schools Orchestra, one must recognise the importance of first-rate performance in music which relies so much on the range and virtuosity of modern orchestral playing. Myer Fredman's splendid performances with the London Philharmonic give Brian the kind of attention which previously only the BBC, once in a while, was able to provide.

The *Sinfonia Tragica* was based on music which Brian had intended for a setting of Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, but was unable to use through problems of copyright. Of the works so far on record, it is the most accessible to imaginations at home with the symphonies of Mahler or Sibelius. The latter seems a powerful influence, both in the kind of remote, unearthly orchestral image which frames the beginnings of movement in Brian's symphony, and in the great rifts of mood—and usually of tonality—which give the work its elemental quality. Brian never loses direction, even in the long stretches of high, desolate counter-point between strings and woodwind; a feature of his style which often, rather strikingly, reminds one of Shostakovich. The closing bars are an affirmation on the highest level, which one feels has been absolutely *earned* by what has gone before—a 'tragic' symphony, like Hindemith's *Mathis*, entirely independent of its detailed dramatic origins.

The Sixteenth is an altogether more difficult work, without the strong

lyrical promptings which, in the *Tragica*, balance the natural fatalism of Brian's symphonic thinking. Certainly the Sixteenth has its radiant passages, like the marvellous *crescendo molto* which leads, with such inspired rightness, from the fourth-section *cantabile* to the subsequent fugal passages. However, the lyricism of this work is more by way of episode, more firmly put in place by the music's determined realism, than in the nobly-suffering Sixth. The mysterious third section—a kind of fluid passacaglia on a shifting six-note bass—suggests the remote, unaccommodating region which the symphony as a whole seems to inhabit. This music is as starkly unmannered as anything I have heard of Brian, or for that matter of any British composer in this century. The *maestoso* coda is a statement in small of Brian's musical character: passionate, by no means pessimistic but rejecting all illusions, even—at this stage—the tragic elevation which characterized the Sixth.

The *Sinfonia Brevis* has neither the scale nor, in some ways, the deep seriousness of No. 16. It is a short work, barely ten minutes in performance, with two main sections in clear contrast, held together (as Malcolm MacDonald remarks in his sleeve-note) by a cryptic final entry of the first section's 'missing' recapitulation. This terse construction is clearly as much a product as a source of the brooding energies one feels behind the music. Yet compared even with the pretty unyielding Sixteenth, this late style does seem to have sacrificed emotional breadth, or grandeur of theme, to a certain almost obsessive concentration of material. Remembering Brian's one-time interest in Schoenberg, as commentator although no disciple, it is perhaps not fanciful to discover some late emergent traces, as in the opening with its prominent intervals of the fourth, or in the way Brian constantly allows 'vertical' motives to disrupt an often jagged and fragmented melodic line. The symphony may, as MacDonald suggests, bear 'the sense of strange landscapes and rumours of war'; but it also conveys a formalistic delight in whatever is hard, self-sufficient, resistant to facile enjoyment. The Leicestershire Schools Orchestra has taken on an extremely difficult score, but the few lapses in detail never disguise the intelligence of their playing.

The larger part of the CBS record is devoted to two non-symphonic works. The 1901 setting of *Psalm 23*, very much in the choral idiom of its time, is dramatic and forthright, with none of the deep-reaching scepticism revealed in the later music. The Fifth English Suite (1953), subtitled 'Rustic Scenes', is in this sense very much a product of the late Brian. Its pastoral gestures are 'gawky', as the word might apply to the poems of Thomas Hardy; there is more to this simplicity than the movement-titles admit, and the effect (in the first movement especially) is rather *faux-naïf*. The slow movement, *Reverie*, is the heart of the work: a rambling sorrowful eclogue for strings which sounds like nothing else in the English pastoral vein. There is a neat polyrhythmic intermezzo for wind and percussion, brilliantly scored in its far from simple style, and a finale of Ivesian brashness and density.