NAXOS

William ALWYN

Symphonies Nos. 2 and 5

Lyra Angelica (Harp Concerto)

Suzanne Willison, Harp

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

David Lloyd-Jones

William Alwyn (1905-1985)

Symphonies Nos. 2 and 5 • Lyra Angelica (Harp Concerto)

William Alwyn was born in Northampton on the 7th November 1905. He studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where, at the age of 21, he was appointed Professor of Composition, a position which he held for nearly thirty years. Amongst his works are five symphonies, concertos for flute, oboe, violin, and harp and two piano concertos, various descriptive orchestral pieces, four operas and much chamber, instrumental and vocal music. In addition to this Alwyn contributed nearly two hundred scores for the cinema. He began his career in this medium in 1936, writing music for documentaries. In 1941 he wrote his first feature length score for *Penn of Pennsylvania*. Other notable film scores include the following: *Desert Victory, The Way Ahead, The True Glory, Odd Man Out, The History of Mr Polly, The Fallen Idol, The Rocking Horse Winner, The Crimson Pirate, The Million Pound Note, The Winslow Boy, The Card,* and *A Night To Remember*. In recognition of his services to the film medium he was made a Fellow of the British Film Academy, the only composer ever to have received this honour. His other appointments include serving as chairman of the Composers' Guild of Great Britain, which he had been instrumental in forming, in 1949, 1950 and 1954. He was a Director of the Mechanical Copyright Protection Society, a Vice-President of the Society for the Promotion of New Music (S.P.N.M.) and Director of the Performing Rights Society. For many years he was one of the panel reading new scores for the BBC. The conductor Sir John Barbirolli championed his first four symphonies and the *First Symphony* is dedicated to him.

Alwyn spent the last 25 years of his life in Blythbough, Suffolk, where, in those tranquil surroundings, he concentrated on two operas, *Juan, or the Libertine* and *Miss Julie*. In addition to chamber and vocal music, he composed his last major orchestral works there, the *Concerto Grosso No. 3*, commissioned as a tribute to Sir Henry Wood on the centenary of his birth in 1964 and first performed at the London Promenade Concerts that year by the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by the composer, the *Sinfonietta for String Orchestra* in 1970 and the *Symphony No. 5 'Hydriotaphia'* during 1972-73. When not writing music he spent his time painting and writing poetry and an autobiography entitled *Winged Chariot*. He died on the 11th September 1985 after various illnesses just two months before his eightieth birthday.

Andrew Knowles

Symphony No. 2, the second of my cycle of four symphonies, was in complete contrast to *No. 1*. All vestige of classical form was abandoned. I conceived it in one continuous movement only broken by a momentary pause before *Part II* where the music plunges into a tumultuous *Allegro* in contrast to the quietly ecstatic section that preceded it. The symphony concentrates on the development of a single main motif, accompanied by ominous triplet interjections on the timpani, building to a huge climax which finally resolves into a tranquil, almost modal *pianissimo* coda. I wish I could say that the work (first performed in 1953) was an immediate success but, although warmly received by the audience, it met with considerable opposition from the critics who were all at sea when faced by my symphonic innovations, neither understanding my harmonic frankness (steadfast adherence to the basic essentials of tonality and melody) or the new freedom of my formal design ... [the *Second Symphony*] is my favourite of the five.

(from *Winged Chariot: An Essay in Autobiography* by William Alwyn)

Symphony No. 5 was commissioned by the Arts Council for the 1973 Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Festival. A gap of fourteen years had elapsed since the composition of my fourth symphony; a period almost totally

occupied in the composition of my two operas, *Juan, or the Libertine* and *Miss Julie*. During that time my attitude to symphonic writing had radically changed. My aim now was to compress the inordinate length of the late-romantic four-movement symphony into a short one-movement work while still preserving the dramatic contrasts of the traditional symphonic form but confining it to four brief sections.

This fifth symphony is dedicated, appropriately 'to the immortal memory of Sir Thomas Browne (1605-82)', physician, philosopher, botanist and archaeologist, Norwich's most famous citizen, whose great elegy on death was first published under the title of *Hydriotaphia: Urn Burial, or a Discourse of the Sepulchral Urns lately found in Norfolk* (now more generally known by its sub-title: *Urn Burial*), and whose own mortal remains lie buried in the magnificent church of St Peter Mancroft in the heart of the city.

Although each section is headed by a quotation from the book, the symphony is not intended as 'programme music'; Browne's wonderful prose sets the mood of each section and is an expression of my personal indebtedness to a great man whose writings have been a life-long source of solace and inspiration.

The upward-thrusting three-note figure of the opening *Allegro* on which the entire symphony is based can immediately be linked with the quotation: '*Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible sun within us.*' After a momentary silence, the second section is introduced by the sinister sound of tubular bells, muted string harmonics and an insistent reiterated harp note: '*But these are sad and sepulchral pitchers, which have no joyful voices; silently expressing old mortality, the ruins of forgotten time.*' The close of this section sinks to a whisper of sound—a high trill on the solo violin, brutally interrupted as the music plunges into a brief scherzo section: '*Simplicity flies away, and iniquity comes at long strides upon us.*' This resolves into a return of the initial crescendo, the three-note figure of the opening section. Then the distant tolling of tubular bells (*pianissimo*) initiates the solemn tread of a funeral march based on a final majestic quotation: '*Man is a noble animal, splendid in ashes, and pompous in the grave.*' A long and expressive melody builds to a *fortissimo* climax (*maestoso*). As the climax fades, the motto theme is heard for the last time, and the symphony sinks to rest in a mood of serenity, only disturbed at the last by the dissonant accent of muted horns.

'*Lyra Angelica*' (Angel's Songs) was inspired by my intense love of the seventeenth-century English metaphysical poets, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, John Donne and Thomas Traherne, of whom Giles Fletcher is probably the least known today, although his masterpiece, the epic poem *Christ's Victorie and Triumph* (1610), was the direct inspiration of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. My *Concerto* for harp and strings is a cycle of four elegiac movements, each illustrating a quotation from Fletcher's text:

1. (*Adagio*) '*I looke for angel's songs, and hear him crie.*'
2. (*Adagio, ma non troppo*) '*Ah! Who was He such pretious perils found?*'
3. (*Moderato*) '*And yet, how can I let Thee singing goe,*
   When men incens'd with hate Thy death foreset?'
4. (*Allegro giubiloso-Andante con moto*)
   '*How can such joy as this want words to speake?*'

In my interpretation of these lines I have tried to capture in musical terms the sensuous imagery and mystical fervour of the poem as a whole. The concerto is of symphonic proportions but free and harpsodic in style. A detailed analysis of its complex construction in this case is inappropriate as it might tend to distract the listener from the rapt mood I have tried to sustain by interweaving the solo harp and strings into a continuous web of luminous sound.

William Alwyn

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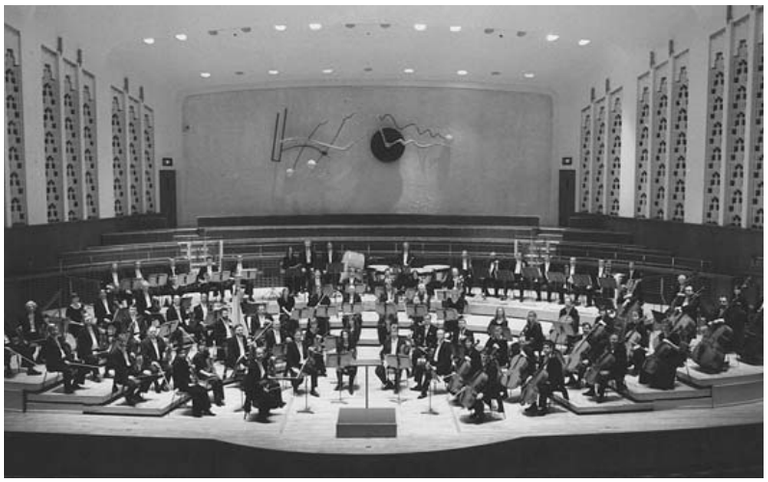
Suzanne Willison

Since completing her studies at the Royal Academy of Music, Suzanne Willison has been enjoying a varied and exciting career. She was a finalist in the Royal Over-Seas League Music Competition, winning the Outstanding Chamber Music Harpist Award. As principal harpist she has played with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, recording for Sony, Hyperion and Decca . Tours with the RPO include China, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Spain and Romania. Other work as principal harpist has been for the Northern Sinfonia, London Chamber Orchestra, Sinfonia of London, the Kings Consort, the Scottish Ensemble and English Touring Opera. From 1997 to 2000 she was principal harpist with the European Union Youth Orchestra. With Katherine Baker, principal flautist with the Hallé, as the Alwyn Duo, Suzanne regularly performs chamber music and concertos. In 2004 they featured as Artists in Residence at the Presteigne Festival of Music and the Arts, giving the première performance of Joe Duddell's flute and harp concerto *Mnemonic*, along with two other concertos and a recital. The Alwyn Duo are also Recommended Artists for the National Federation of Music Societies. Of particular note have been recitals in the Purcell Room for the South Bank Centre's 'Fresh' series, Cheltenham Chamber Music concerts and the Brighton Festival. Suzanne Willison's concerto appearances have featured the Mozart *Flute and Harp Concerto* and Debussy's *Danse sacrée et Danse profane*. She has performed at festivals throughout Britain, including the Spitalfields Festival, Rye Festival of Music and the Hampstead and Highgate Festival. Solo and chamber music recitals have also taken her to France, Germany, Italy and Abu Dhabi.

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra



The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra gives over sixty concerts from September to June in Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall and presents concerts throughout the United Kingdom, in addition to tours abroad. Members of the orchestra are involved in a number of innovative community education projects. One of the oldest concert-giving organizations in the world, the RLPO dates back to 1840. In 1957 it acquired the title 'Royal', and in 1991 it was the first organization to be granted the freedom of the City of Liverpool. The first professional conductor of the Liverpool Philharmonic, in 1844, was Jakob Zeugheer, followed by Alfred Mellon, Max Bruch, Charles Hallé, Frederic Hymen Cowen, and Thomas Beecham. In 1942 Malcolm Sargent became resident conductor, followed in 1948 by Hugo Rignold as music director. Subsequent incumbents have included Efrem Kurtz and John Pritchard, Walter Weller, David Atherton, Marek Janowski and Libor Pešek, the last appointment bringing a continuing connection with the Czech Republic. He was followed by Petr Altrichter, and Gerard Schwarz was appointed music director in 2001.

David Lloyd-Jones

David Lloyd–Jones began his professional career in 1959 on the music staff of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and soon became much in demand as a freelance conductor for orchestral and choral concerts, opera, BBC broadcasts and TV studio opera productions. He has appeared at the Royal Opera House (*Boris Godunov* with both Christoff and Ghaiurov), Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera and the Wexford, Cheltenham, Edinburgh and Leeds Festivals, and with the major British orchestras. In 1972 he was appointed Assistant Music Director at English National Opera, and during his time there conducted an extensive repertory which included, in addition to all the standard operas, *Die Meistersinger*, *Katya Kabanova*, and the British stage première of Prokofiev's *War and Peace*. In 1978, at the invitation of the Arts Council of Great Britain, he founded a new full-time opera company, Opera North, with its own orchestra, the English Northern Philharmonia, of which he became Artistic Director and Principal Conductor. During his twelve seasons with the company he conducted fifty different new productions, including *The Trojans*, *Prince Igor*, *The Midsummer Marriage* (Tippett), and the British stage première of Strauss's *Daphne*. He also conducted numerous orchestral concerts, including festival appearances in France and Germany. He has made many successful recordings of British and Russian music, and has an extensive career in the concert-hall and opera-house that takes him to leading musical centres throughout Central Europe, Scandinavia, Russia, Israel, Australia, Japan, Canada and the Americas. His highly acclaimed cycle of Bax's symphonies and tone poems for Naxos (*Gramophone* Award) was completed in the autumn of 2003.

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NAXOS

ALWYN: Symphonies Nos. 2 and 5

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The works of the British composer William Alwyn, whose centenary falls this year, include five symphonies, concertos, operas and more than two hundred film scores. Like his contemporary Samuel Barber, Alwyn was an unashamed Romantic who preferred his music to appeal to the heart rather than to the head. This first disc in a new series of Alwyn's complete symphonies includes his *Symphony No. 2*, an innovative yet accessible work which alternates passages of quiet ecstasy and tumultuous energy. *Symphony No. 5* has an epic sweep which belies its short duration of a quarter of an hour. Alwyn's pastoral harp concerto, *Lyra Angelica*, interweaves the harp and strings into "a continuous web of luminous sound".

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

William ALWYN
(1905-1985)

Symphonies Nos. 2 and 5 • Lyra Angelica

Symphony No. 5 ('Hydriotaphia')

1 Moderato – Allegro non troppo – Andante sostenuto – Allegro con fuoco – Tempo di Marcia funebre 14:27

'Lyra Angelica' Concerto for harp and string orchestra*

2 Adagio 7:55

3 Adagio, ma non troppo 6:55

4 Moderato 7:20

5 Allegro giubiloso – Andante con moto 5:52

Symphony No. 2

6 Con Moto – Molto moderato – Quasi Adagio molto calmato 11:44

7 Allegro molto – Moderato largamente – Molto tranquillo 15:38

Suzanne Willison, Harp*

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra • David Lloyd-Jones

This recording was made with financial assistance from The William Alwyn Foundation

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