



# ALAN HOVHANESS

## Symphonies Nos. 4, 20 and 53

### The Prayer of St Gregory

John Wallace, Trumpet

The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama  
Wind Orchestra • Keith Brion



## Alan Hovhaness (1911-2000)

### Symphonies Nos. 4, 20 and 53 • Trumpet Concerto • The Prayer of St Gregory

Of Armenian and Scottish extraction, the American composer Alan Hovhaness absorbed a variety of influences during a prolific and distinguished career. He studied at the New England Conservatory with Converse, and, after some criticism of his early work by Bernstein and Copland, turned to Armenian sources for inspiration. His later career brought wider influences from the Far East, before a return to Western traditions. A composer of considerable originality, he often made use of idiosyncratic instrumentation, not least for a number of his 67 symphonies, part of a corpus of over four hundred compositions.

Of the *Symphony No. 4 for Wind Orchestra* Hovhaness writes: "I admire the giant melody of the Himalayan Mountains, seventh-century Armenian religious music, classical music of South India, orchestra music of Tang Dynasty China around 700 A.D., opera-oratorios of Handel.

"My *Symphony No. 4* probably has the spiritual influences of the composers Yegmalian, Gomidas Vartabed, and Handel. It is in three movements. The first movement, *Andante*, is a hymn and fugue. The *Allegro* movement follows, ...as (wind choirs) develop the fugue in vocal counterpoint. The second movement, *Allegro*, is a dance-trio-dance form. The third movement, *Andante espressivo*, is a hymn and fugue. *Allegro maestoso* in a 7/4 meter is a final hymn and fugue over bell sounds."

The symphony, composed in 1958 for the American Wind Symphony of Pittsburgh, is the first of Alan Hovhaness's eight wind symphonies. The instrumentation is that of an expanded symphony orchestra wind section. Extensive solo passages are given to the bass clarinet, contrabassoon, marimba/xylophone, oboe and English horn. Quartets of horns and trombones figure prominently in the opening movement. Solo melodies are modal, while the harmonic character is essentially tonal employing major and minor triads in unusual, but satisfying relationships.

Bell sounds which dot the final contrapuntal hymn and fugue are essentially atonal, positioned against triadic harmonies.

In his *Symphony No. 20, 'Three Journeys to a Holy Mountain'*, the composer has essentially composed three very different pilgrims' marches. He writes: "The first movement is in the spirit of Armenian religious music in three great melodic arcs, the last having the mood of a spiritual". The opening clarinet choir suggests a barren landscape and employs an oriental harmonic device called the *dragonfly*, in which consonant open harmonies and triads are periodically touched and then released by temporary dissonances. The first of three arcs begins with a noble, hymn-like trumpet statement. Clarinets return for the second time, again with their dragonfly utterances. A second arc starts with solo English horn. It is a warm, rolling, reverent and fully developed slow march. Once again the dragonfly returns to intersperse the arcs, now with flutes added and leading to the final melodic arc in the style of a grand and noble spiritual. Clarinets and flutes return for a final time to complete the movement. "The second movement is a long melodic line completed non-harmonically and unisonally over held drones in Oriental style." Suggesting a fresh start in this collection of pilgrims' marches, a solo alto saxophone plays a dance-like figure, joined on and off with other saxophones and lifted along by the rhythms of a percussion ostinato. Clanging chimes announce grand unison trumpets intoning a prayer/sermon, punctuated with primitive clashing cymbals. The final section is a fetching dance, with solo oboe and clarinet section gracefully moving forward above bouncing timpani and bass drum figures. "The third movement is in the form of a chorale and fugue: at the climax of the fugue, the chorale theme powerfully returns, interspersed with many-voiced canon interludes."

*Three Journeys to a Holy Mountain* was commissioned by the Ithaca NY High School Band in

1969 and is scored in vocal style using the numerous doublings found in larger wind band ensembles. In fact the work is enriched by the use of many multiples of some instruments (clarinets and brass), just as multiple strings function in the orchestra. Prominent solo lines are given to the English horn, alto saxophone, section clarinets and oboe.

Of his *Symphony No. 53, 'Star Dawn', for Band* the composer writes:

"The thought for the symphony initiated with a phrase from Dante, "star dawn", which suggested traveling in space. Bells symbolize the stars, long flowing melodies create a sense of journey, and great chorales symbolize humankind. My life-long interest in astronomy has suggested the thought and hope that we may colonize Mars. As we overcrowd the Earth, we must eventually confront this issue. Mars, although cold, seems to have a climate which may make this possible."

The symphony is cast in two movements. The first commemorating the journey and the second, arrival. *Star Dawn* was commissioned by Charles D. Yates, for his San Diego State University Wind Ensemble, and was completed in 1983.

Hovhanes writes of his *Return and Rebuild the Desolate Places* as follows:

"1. In the form of a netori or short prelude. Through mysterious clusters, the solo trumpet sounds like a prophet of doom. It is the voice of Cassandra. Suddenly terror strikes with fury and devastation, ending with dark glissandi of moaning trombones."

"2. Inspired by a portrait of the heroic priest, Khrimian Hairig, who led the Armenian people through many persecutions. It is a melismatic hymn of the builders of the temple, who follow the sound of the trumpet, which is the cantor, or inspired messenger. The priest-like melody is in the form of three arcs: 1) The Chalice of Holiness, 2) The Wings of Compassion, 3) The Triumph of Faith. The people emerge from their dark caves rejoicing."

*Return and Rebuild the Desolate Places* was commissioned for a performance by the American Wind Symphony Orchestra of Pittsburgh and was first published in 1965. In support of the solo trumpet, the instrumentation is scaled for a small orchestral wind section.

"*The Prayer of St Gregory* was an intermezzo in my religious opera *Etchmiadzin*. Saint Gregory, the Illuminator, brought Christianity to Armenia around the year 301. This music is like a prayer in darkness. St Gregory was cast into the pit of a dungeon where he miraculously survived after about fifteen years after which he cured the King's madness."

In this case the solo trumpet functions as a cantor, or preacher. The large wind band responds as the congregation. The band version of the work was first given in 1972 by the trumpet-player Gerard Schwarz, with Keith Brion and the North Jersey Wind Symphony.

**Keith Brion**

## John Wallace



John Wallace became Principal of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in 2002. Born in Methilhill, Fife, in 1949, he learnt to play the cornet in Tullis Russell Mills Junior Band in a group of forty young players. Subsequently his musical education embraced Buckhaven High School, which was more like an Opera Factory than a school, the National Youth Orchestra, Cambridge and York Universities, and the Royal Academy of Music. His professional playing career began with the Festival Ballet and Northern Sinfonia Orchestras, as second trumpet, and subsequently as third trumpet in the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, assistant Principal in the London Symphony Orchestra, and finally Principal Trumpet of the Philharmonia Orchestra. Eventually he gained a reputation as a soloist after playing at the Royal Wedding of Prince Charles, Duke of Rothesay, in 1981, and Lady Diana Spencer. He formed his own brass ensemble, the Wallace Collection, has made many recordings, and has played with orchestras as diverse as the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Pan-African Orchestra. He brings a wide and varied background to the Royal Scottish Academy and believes that music is a primary means of communication.

## The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama Wind Orchestra

The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama has been working with musicians in Scotland and beyond for over a hundred years, and its team of distinguished specialist teachers have unrivalled experience in their respective fields. All of the Academy's courses are practically based and strongly vocational, focusing on musical performance, composition or education, and it is the only conservatory in the United Kingdom with degree-awarding powers, granted in 1994. The Academy offers its students the opportunity to excel as singers, players, composers and educators whilst encouraging experimentation, versatility and reflection. It works closely alongside the educational and artistic community, being both proactive and reactive to new educational developments and needs, and has close relationships with performers, professional companies and traditional musicians both at home and abroad.

## Keith Brion

Keith Brion leads his own New Sousa Band, is a frequent conductor of light music orchestral concerts with major and regional orchestras throughout America and internationally, and is a former leader of the Yale University Band. He first met Alan Hovhaness in 1964 and began recording his wind music in 1969 with the composer present. He has given first performances of several Hovhaness wind compositions including the band version of *The Prayer of St Gregory*.

Playing  
Time:  
**66:03**

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Alan  
**HOVHANESS**  
(1911-2000)

- |           |   |              |
|-----------|---|--------------|
|           | <b>Symphony No. 4, Op. 165</b>  | <b>19:43</b> |
| <b>1</b>  | Andante   | <b>8:18</b>  |
| <b>2</b>  | Allegro   | <b>4:02</b>  |
| <b>3</b>  | Andante espressivo  | <b>7:22</b>  |
|           | <b>Return and Rebuild the Desolate Places,<br/>Op. 213*</b>             | <b>8:56</b>  |
| <b>4</b>  | Andante   | <b>2:36</b>  |
| <b>5</b>  | Adagio  | <b>6:20</b>  |
|           | <b>Symphony No. 20 'Three Journeys to a<br/>Holy Mountain', Op. 223</b> | <b>20:32</b> |
| <b>6</b>  | Andante espressivo  | <b>8:50</b>  |
| <b>7</b>  | Allegro moderato  | <b>4:51</b>  |
| <b>8</b>  | Andante maestoso  | <b>6:51</b>  |
| <b>9</b>  | <b>Prayer of Saint Gregory, Op. 62b*</b>                                | <b>3:30</b>  |
|           | <b>Symphony No. 53 'Star Dawn', Op. 377</b>                             | <b>13:22</b> |
| <b>10</b> | Maestoso sostenuto  | <b>8:52</b>  |
| <b>11</b> | Moderato sostenuto con molta espressione                                | <b>4:30</b>  |

John Wallace, Trumpet\*

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American flag, folk artist, 1880s.



AMERICAN CLASSICS

Of Armenian and Scottish origins, the American composer Alan Hovhaness was a trend-setting pioneer who absorbed an eclectic variety of archaic and modern influences from East and West. At the heart of his huge output lies a vision of "music for all people ... which is beautiful and healing" fuelled by a deep and reverent love for nature. Hovhaness wrote 67 symphonies, from the tonal wind *Symphony No. 4*, to his space-travel-inspired *Symphony No. 53 'Star Dawn'*, both featured on this recording.

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