

NAXOS

Havergal  
**BRIAN**

**Symphony No. 2**  
**Festival Fanfare**

**Moscow Symphony Orchestra • Tony Rowe**



## Havergal Brian (1876-1972)

### Symphony No. 2 in E minor · Festival Fanfare

Havergal Brian's bold and magisterial handling of the orchestral brass is one of his most widely acknowledged compositional strengths, yet the short fanfare on this disc, scored for four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, and two tubas, is his only extant composition for brass ensemble. A recently discovered symphonic poem, *The Battle Song*, seems to have been intended for the very different line-up of the British brass band, but only survives in short score. *Festival Fanfare*, dated Christmas 1967, is one of Brian's last works, written when he was nearly 92, at the suggestion of an American admirer, David Cloud. Brian contemplated writing a more reflective companion movement, but did not proceed with it. His original title was *Fanfare for the Orchestral Brass*, and the piece was first performed under this title on 7th May 1972 in Urbana, Illinois, by members of the University of Illinois Wind Ensemble, conducted by Robert Gray. Before Brian died in November of the same year, he renamed the work *Festival Fanfare*, as it had been chosen to open the inaugural concert of the 1973 York Festival. This, its British première, was given in York Minster on 6th June 1973 by members of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under Sir Charles Groves. Pushing outward from its initial trumpet flourish, the *Fanfare* rapidly evolves into a tiny, swiftly-moving symphonic movement, scorning repetition as each rhythm and phrase suggests the next, in Brian's fluid late manner.

1972 also found the composer much distressed by the death of his youngest daughter, Elfreda. As a result he inscribed his *Symphony No. 2*, which was soon to be performed for the first time and had previously been without dedication, to her memory. This imposing work, with its funeral-march finale, was a fitting choice for a memorial, though written over forty years before. In the aftermath of his massive *Gothic Symphony* [Naxos 8.557418-19], Brian had first returned to unfinished business. His opera *The Tigers* had lain in sketch draft

since 1919, save for the *Symphonic Dances* orchestrated from it in 1922. During 1926-27, while still living in the Brighton area, Brian arranged a vocal score of the opera; and in 1928-29, after moving to London, he prepared the massive full orchestral score in three volumes. Only then did he turn to the composition of a new work, his *Symphony in E minor*. Brian first called this his *Third Symphony*, regarding *The Gothic* as the *Second*, for he still rated his *Fantastic Symphony*, of 1907-08, long since broken up into separate concert works, as *No. 1*. The renumbering of his early symphonies, by which *The Gothic* became *No. 1* and the E minor *No. 2*, only took place in 1966.

Brian began *Symphony No. 2*, as we should therefore call it, in June 1930. He first composed the slow second movement, followed by the other three in their numerical order. The short score, finished on 1st September, was revised and fair-copied until 26th October. Brian began orchestrating on 2nd November, but during the winter of 1930-31 broke off to compose the aforementioned *Battle Song* before he finally completed the symphony in full score on 6th April 1931. For a while he referred to it jocularly as his *Little Symphony*: but while *No. 2* is indeed little in comparison to the enormous duration and forces of *The Gothic*, by all other criteria it is a very large symphony, amply laid out in four movements and scored for a big orchestra which calls, among other requirements, for sixteen horns, three sets of timpani, two pianos, and organ. These demands probably contributed to its long delay in securing a performance. The symphony was not first performed, in fact, until six months after Brian's death, when on 19th May 1973, at the Dome, Brighton, the Kensington Symphony Orchestra under Leslie Head gave the first of a run of three largely amateur performances. The first fully professional reading was a BBC broadcast recorded at the BBC Maida Vale Studios on 9th March 1979, when Sir Charles Mackerras conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

Whereas *The Gothic* had confronted the challenge of the post-Beethovenian choral symphony, *Symphony No. 2* was Brian's first serious essay in the classical four movement form, albeit as it had expanded through the Romantic era, and been modified by the impact of Wagnerian music-drama. Many elements, especially in the third and fourth movements, attest to his strong interest at this period in the symphonies of Bruckner and Mahler, an interest also reflected in contemporary articles which he wrote in the journal *Musical Opinion*: Brian was among the earliest British champions of both composers. Yet other passages, especially in the first two movements, are clearly composed with an awareness of such contemporaries as Berg, Schoenberg, and Szymanowski, and with a desire to explore, like them, new instrumental textures and the structural handling of chromaticism in melody and harmony. These influences, if such they be, are assimilated and developed in Brian's own highly personal forms. Writing to Robert Simpson thirty years after he composed it, Brian described *Symphony No. 2* as "...in the orthodox four movements - but very unorthodox inside. The slow movement 'had' me and I thought I could never leave it. The finale is a slow Rondo - rather an Irish expression".

The formal layout, introduction and sonata-allegro, rhapsodic slow movement, furious ostinato-scherzo and funeral march, is also susceptible to programmatic interpretation, which Brian sometimes tentatively encouraged. Indeed the work marks a watershed in his symphonic approach, which in the first two decades of the century had been conditioned by the programmatic symphonic poems of his hero Richard Strauss. Most of Brian's early orchestral works are in some sense programmatic - occasionally, as in the comedy overture *Doctor Merryheart*, to a very detailed degree. Yet there was always tension between programmatic and purely musical considerations. Even *Merryheart*, while illustrating specific scenes and events, evolved in purely musical terms as a set of symphonic variations. It stands independent of its programme; and, significantly, Brian appears to have suppressed the programmatic outline of

another major work, the symphonic poem *In Memoriam*. Although *The Gothic*, dedicated to Strauss, was unique enough to transcend such considerations, Brian acknowledged that one source of inspiration was Goethe's *Faust*, which he quoted on the title page.

While denying that *Symphony No. 2* had any detailed programme, Brian at first drew attention to the earliest of Goethe's dramas, *Götz von Berlichingen* (1771-73), as a primary inspiration. According to Reginald Nettel, writing of Brian in *Ordeal by Music* (Oxford University Press, 1945), "the four movements are associated in the composer's mind with various aspects of the character of Götz. The first, his resolution: the second, his domestic piety and love of his children: the third, the smell of battle; and the fourth, his death".

It is hard to imagine a satisfying symphonic structure faithfully following Goethe's sprawling, multi-scened drama, set in the German Peasants' War of the early sixteenth century, modelled on Shakespeare's history plays, but itself enormously influential in launching the *Sturm und Drang* period of German literature. Brian's formulation suggests, however, that he reduced the play to its essence: which is the central character of the hero as outlaw, private man, and lover of liberty, and strongly contrasted types of action. But in later years he came to disclaim even this modicum of extra-musical influence on the symphony, and no longer wished Goethe's play to be mentioned. The most he would allow, in a letter written to Graham Hatton in 1972, was that he had had in mind "MAN in his cosmic loneliness: ambition, loves, battles, death". This is no doubt as far as we should go - that this is a work evoking, through its self-sufficient symphonic processes, the heroic ideal, in tragic mode, in a similar spirit to Mahler's *Titan* and *Totenfeier*. Yet as recently as 1969, interviewed for CBC radio, Brian had referred to *Symphony No. 2* as "the Götz von Berlichingen", and recalled showing the finale to Ernest Newman and explaining that it depicted the end of the life of Götz. The ensuing description lays all such programmatic considerations to one side and offers a brief guide to the purely musical events.

These events begin 2 with the mutter of three timpani on a bare fifth chord of E, reinforced by woodwind, while pizzicato cellos and basses pick out an angular, chromatic theme. Its three-note opening phrase, B-A#-F, a tritone split into falling semitone and augmented third, is an important germinal cell; later forms of it tend to increase the first interval and diminish the second, while preserving the tritone span. The pizzicato theme is the backbone of a brooding introduction: it recurs in the bass (though not quite continuously) in the manner of a passacaglia, while above and around it the music accumulates weight and urgency, moving inexorably to the outbreak of the main *Allegro assai*. This begins with a hectic, aspiring first subject that compresses several salient ideas into a short space. Chromatic and restlessly modulating, this moves swiftly, via two cadential bars for the brass, to a broad second subject melody in E major marked both *semplice* and *sempre teneramente* 3. With its regular rhythm and diatonic singing character – equally evident in its more intimate continuation – this contrasts strongly with the complex yet compressed first subject, though its textural complexities are quite comparable. Such marked polarities, achieved with a minimum of transition, are common in Brian's early symphonies. Ultimately they destabilise and subvert the sonata style to which his first movements appear to refer.

A sparse codetta – austere, descending phrases derived from the opening three-note cell, and a whispering passage of string figuration – leads straight into the development section. This is notably brief. A compressed version of the first subject is suddenly interrupted 4 by a mysterious episode, *Tranquillo e semplice*, where flutes, glockenspiel, and harp restate the theme of the introduction against a chromatic viola counterpoint in a dreamlike, chiming texture. There ensues development of the second subject, starting with a cello solo, working up to the recapitulation 5, which is comparatively regular but culminates in a brief climax, a dramatic polyphonic outburst, before subsiding to a bare and sinister coda with softly marching timpani. (All four movements end quietly.)

The ensuing *Andante sostenuto*, which follows without a break, is the most free movement in form, and texturally and harmonically the most elaborate and advanced. It begins with a poignant theme for solo cor anglais 6 which becomes the focus for the first of the movement's three great spans – though there are hints also of a funeral march, and variants of the first movement's angular introductory theme continue to haunt the extremely active bass lines, especially at a jagged climax marked, in Italian and English *Sempre pesante possibile* (each note hard and heavy). The second span sets in with a new woodwind theme 7, lyrically extended by horn and strings. This is interrupted by a grim, stiffly-marching episode, which abruptly dissolves into a return of the previous woodwind theme on solo clarinet 8 against a cello-bass counterpoint and a shimmering, susurrating music for four flutes, celesta, and harps. Canonic woodwind entries against chromatically swirling string textures become a bridge to the movement's third span, announced by angry, descending figures in trumpets and tubas 9. A concerto-like violin solo now appears as the focus for a passionate and polyphonic orchestral tutti. A modulatory passage for woodwind leads to a climax of extraordinary textural elaboration 10, in which elements of all three of the movement's main spans are combined in cascades of scales on strings, harps, and high woodwind. After this, the textures thin out, and the coda (like that of the previous movement) is sparse and chill, even in the final cadence for strings and horns.

The scherzo announces itself 11 with a kind of excited thrumming in the air, on harps and muted strings. Over rapid ostinati on pianos and timpani, the horns, one group after another, enunciate an ebullient hunting-call, or a call to battle. Thus begins a headlong movement of torrential sonic invention, centred on the pounding and flickering patterns provided by timpani, pianos, and, as Brian envisaged it, sixteen horns disposed in four separate groups. (The sixteen horns are an operatic requirement, heard off-stage in Wagner's *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* and taken over by Richard Strauss in his *Alpensinfonie*. It is, strictly speaking,

possible to perform Brian's symphony with only eight horns, as in the present recording). The whole scherzo seems less an evocation of a battlefield than a virtuosic orchestral toccata of Dionysiac rhythmic drive. The various groups of horns eventually come together in a wild tutti <sup>12</sup>, after which the music builds with ever-accumulating textural complexity to a shattering climax of repeated chords, reinforced by full organ. In a quiet coda, a single horn restates the main theme as if fading away into the distance, and woodwind, in descending order, spell out the notes of a dissonant harmony against flickering violins.

Abruptly, the finale breaks in <sup>13</sup> - a tragic funeral march, entirely conceived in Brian's own terms, yet unafraid to evoke echoes of Siegfried's *Funeral March* from *Götterdämmerung*. In form it is, as Brian noted, a slow rondo. (He described it thus to Ernest Newman, only to receive the immortal rejoinder - "Well, why not make it fast?") The movement opens with, and is repeatedly punctuated by, a terse, recitative-like figure, stem yet slithering, announced at the outset by violas and cellos. Every appearance is slightly different, and the short-score drafts bear witness to Brian's painstaking work on these slightly but significantly varied shapes. The main rondo idea, a melancholy theme on clarinet and bass clarinet, with its horn-call

pendant, is a transfiguration of the bass theme from the symphony's introduction. The first episode, brass and timpani evoking dark Wagnerian pageantry, brings the first of several *Götterdämmerung*-like climaxes.

A new lamenting idea, *teneramente* <sup>14</sup>, leads via a ghostly processional to recurrences of the slithering recitative and the rondo theme. This then gives way to the second episode - a wonderful, elegiac lament, deeply English in expression. Beginning eloquently on cellos and basses in seven parts <sup>15</sup>, it builds to a tremendous tutti outburst, during which the two pianos re-enter the orchestral fabric. Another processional, this time with insistent brass fanfares <sup>16</sup>, prepares for expressive string writing that leads to the symphony's final catharsis, a huge tutti for the entire forces, built out of *Götterdämmerung* figures and parts of the rondo theme. It is abruptly cut short, and the *teneramente* theme reappears on solo violin and cello before a reminder of the ghostly processional leads to the final statement of the rondo subject, on solo clarinet. The bass recitative grumbles for the last time, and clarinet and bass clarinet cadence into the enveloping gloom of E minor. The last sound is the bare fifth drum-roll, on three timpani, with which the symphony began.

**Malcolm MacDonald**

## Moscow Symphony Orchestra

Established in 1989, the Moscow Symphony Orchestra includes prize-winners and laureates of Russian and international music competitions and graduates of conservatories in Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev who have played under such conductors as Svetlanov, Rozhdestvensky, Mravinsky and Ozawa, in Russia and throughout the world. In addition to its extensive concert programmes, the orchestra has been recognized for its outstanding recordings for Marco Polo, including the first-ever survey of Malipiero's symphonies, symphonic music of Guatemala, the complete symphonies of Charles Tournemire and Russian music by Scriabin, Glazunov, Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky and Nikolay Tcherepnin. The orchestra also stays busy recording music for contemporary films. Critical accolades for the orchestra's wide-ranging recordings are frequent, including its important film music re-recordings with conductor William Stromberg and reconstructionist John Morgan for Marco Polo. *Film Score Monthly* praised the orchestra's recording of Korngold's *Another Dawn* score, adding that "Stromberg, Morgan and company could show some classical concert conductors a thing or two on how Korngold should be played and recorded." The same magazine described a recording of suites from Max Steiner's music for *Virginia City* and *The Beast With Five Fingers* as "full-blooded and emphatic."

## Tony Rowe

Tony Rowe was appointed Assistant Conductor of the Cambridge University Musical Society by Phillip Ledger, and later served as Assistant Conductor of the acclaimed Opera Theater at the Indiana University School of Music. He was awarded First Prize by Libor Pešek at the Liverpool Conducting Competition in 1988 and later that year received the Fulton Memorial Fellowship to study with Seiji Ozawa and Leonard Bernstein at Tanglewood. On two separate occasions, he was a prize-winner at the prestigious Leeds Conductors' Competition. Rowe was founder and conductor of the Oxford and Cambridge Chamber Orchestra and later served as Music Director of the Gilbert and Sullivan Musical Theatre Company in New York. In 1992 Tony Rowe was appointed Assistant Conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra, and for ten years he served as Music Director of the Vassar Orchestra and was also Conductor of the Westchester Conservatory Orchestra in New York. He has appeared as Guest Conductor with the Minnesota, Louisville, Hudson Valley Philharmonic, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and Hallé Orchestras, and has worked with such noted conductors as David Zinman, Lawrence Leighton Smith, Gustav Meier, Michael Tilson Thomas, Sir David Willcocks and Roger Norrington.

Orthodox in its four-movement structure but, according to the composer, 'very unorthodox inside', Havergal Brian's *Symphony No. 2* was originally inspired by Goethe's play *Götz von Berlichingen*. In 1972, however, following the death of his beloved daughter, Brian dedicated his forty-year old *Symphony* to her memory. Scored for a big orchestra which calls, among other requirements, for sixteen horns, three sets of timpani, two pianos and organ, the *Symphony* includes a furious ostinato-scherzo, and a tragic funeral march entirely conceived in Brian's own terms, yet unafraid to evoke echoes of Siegfried's *Funeral March* from *Götterdämmerung*.

Havergal  
**BRIAN**  
(1876-1972)

- |              |   |              |
|--------------|---|--------------|
| <b>1</b>     | <b>Festival Fanfare (1967)</b>                                  | <b>1:44</b>  |
|              | <b>Symphony No. 2 in E minor (1930-31)</b>                      | <b>53:28</b> |
| <b>2-5</b>   | <b>I. Adagio solenne – Allegro assai – Più lento e semplice</b> | <b>12:45</b> |
| <b>6-10</b>  | <b>II. Andante sostenuto e molto espressivo</b>                 | <b>15:18</b> |
| <b>11-12</b> | <b>III. Allegro assai</b>                                       | <b>5:57</b>  |
| <b>13-16</b> | <b>IV. Lento maestoso e mesto</b>                               | <b>19:28</b> |

**Moscow Symphony Orchestra • Tony Rowe**

Previously released on Marco Polo 8.223790

Recorded in association with the Havergal Brian Society and the Rex Foundation at the Mosfilm Studio, Moscow, Russia, during May 1996

Produced by Betta Inc. • Engineers: Edvard Shakhnazarian and Vitaly Ivanov

Editor: Tamara Badeian • Booklet Notes: Malcolm MacDonald

Cover image: *The Last Man* by John Martin (1789-1854)

(© Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool / The Bridgeman Art Library)

NAXOS

8.570506

DDD

Playing Time  
55:12



www.naxos.com

Made in Canada

Booklet notes in English

Naxos Rights International Ltd.

© 1998 & © 2007