The Creel

Journal of The Rawsthorne Trust
and
The Friends of Alan Rawsthorne

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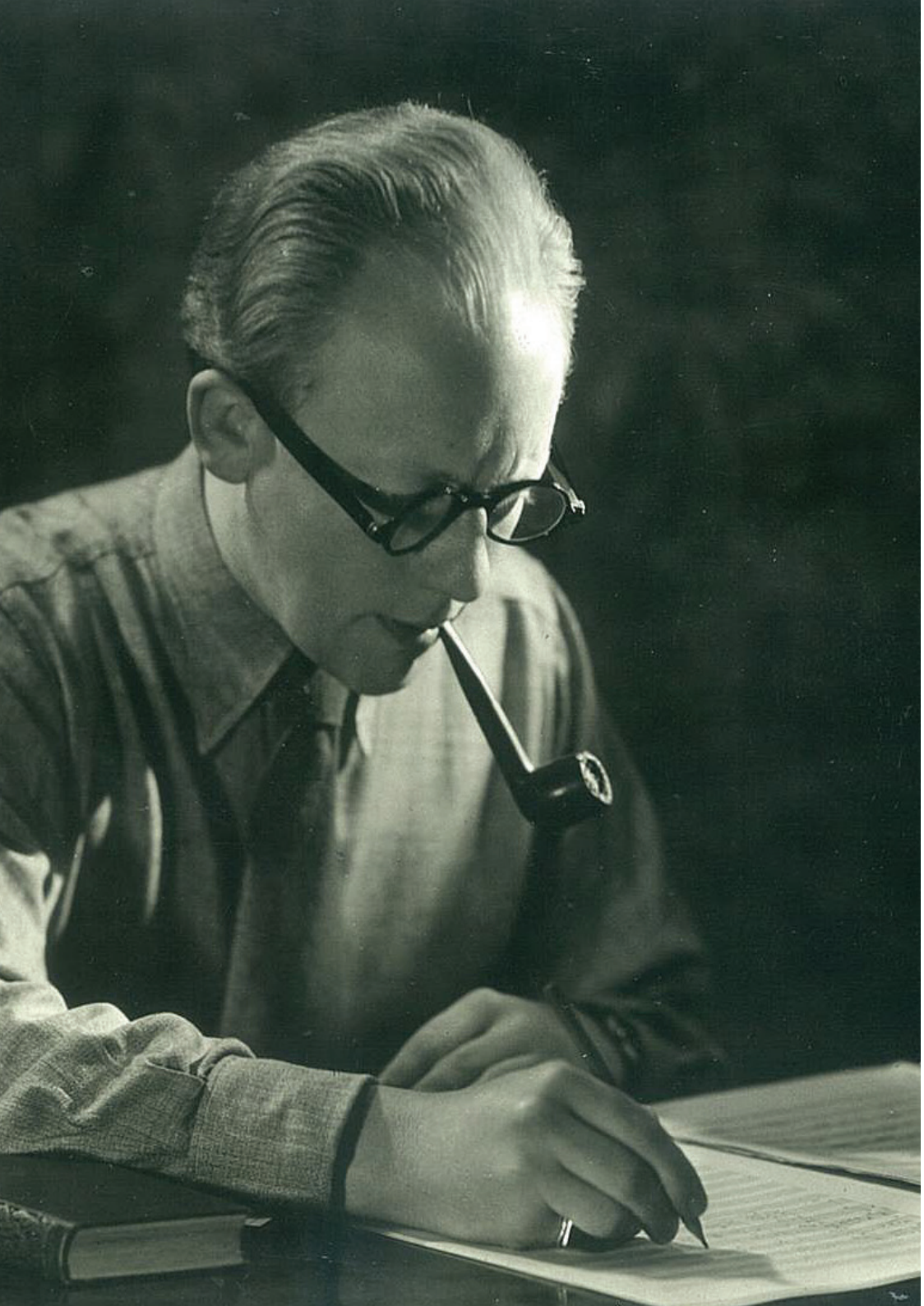

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Frontispiece: Alan Rawsthorne, Bristol, 1940.

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Editorial

2014, a year of so many anniversaries, is significant in the field of Rawsthorne studies too, for it sees (in order of seniority) the ninetieth birthday of Gerard Schurmann, vice-president of the Friends of Alan Rawsthorne, and the seventy-fifth birthday of the president, John McCabe. Both, of course, were close friends of AR, and both have done their very best to keep his memory and his music alive in the forty-three years since his death. We offer them our congratulations and our gratitude.

Courtesy of Dimitri Kennaway and Martin Ellerby, younger friends of Messrs Schurmann and McCabe respectively, we are in a position to mark these milestones fittingly, with personal appreciations of the vice-president and president. We also have two articles on Rawsthorne's own music; not new, by any manner of means, but not seen recently, and never before in the pages of *The Creel*. The running order is a kind of sandwich, with the Rawsthorne articles first and third, the president second, and the vice-president last –the article about him happens to be much the longest of the four, and so balance is best served by placing it in this position.

The two Rawsthorne articles are snapshots in time; both show the position that Rawsthorne had reached in the late 1940s, and how his works were assessed at that point. However, in terms of insight and attention to detail they are more like x-ray photographs than snaps. By a remarkable coincidence, the year 2014, in addition to containing all the other anniversaries, sees the centenaries of the authors of both these articles.

The first is by the late Professor Wilfrid Mellers, who will need no introduction to most of our readers. It comes from his volume of essays *Studies in Contemporary Music* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1947). When you survey this volume, you see at once the power of Mellers' intellect and the depth of his knowledge of the music of the first half of the twentieth century; and you see, too, the influence that he has had: in the essay 'Erik Satie and the "Problem" of Contemporary Music' he was one of the first to express the idea that Satie was much more than just an amusing footnote in the history of French music. 'Mahler as Key-Figure' is another example of an early(ish) appreciation of a composer who, in most British minds at least, had yet to be accorded his full stature.

A major portion of *Studies in Contemporary Music* is concerned with French composers – 'The Later Work of Claude Debussy' and 'The Later Work of Gabriel Fauré' are educations in themselves. He also considers at length the British music of the time: he writes enthusiastically on Rawsthorne, Bridge, and several others – 'Rubbra and the Dominant Seventh' is one of his more intriguing titles – but Britten's name crops up only for purposes of comparison – mostly with Rawsthorne himself.

The same comparison is inevitably made by the Dutch composer Marius

Flothuis, author of our other article from the 1940s. But unlike Mellers, he deals with Britten's music in considerable detail, devoting to him the longest section in his book *Modern British Composers*. Rawsthorne, on the other hand, complete with pipe and pewter tankard, is accorded the biggest illustration in the book (the same picture appears on page 20 of this issue of *The Creel*).

Flothuis' treatment of Britten has been described as 'strange', and he says himself that 'it is possible that our judgment of his work will seem too strict, and of others too mild'. Strange or not, his treatment is highly objective: to summarise, he 'loves the man this side idolatry'. His knowledge of the works, and enthusiasm for many of them, is impressive: still, to put it mildly, he doesn't really write like someone hoping to be invited to the Aldeburgh Festival at any point in the near future.

What surprises most of all is that Flothuis undertakes this encyclopaedic survey largely from printed scores alone: recordings were fewer (and more fragile) in those days. At one point he writes: '*Peter Grimes* has not been shown in Holland, and thus I write only from knowledge of the vocal score.' But to a musician of this calibre, complex scores are as easily intelligible as other people's bedtime reading. This is at once admirable and dangerous; many a work has been found wanting when judged from the score – particularly if the latter is a keyboard reduction – when the hearing of a committed performance would have brought about a different verdict altogether. Mellers makes a related point in the introduction to *Studies in Contemporary Music*:

> … to quote long passages from orchestral scores is patently impracticable, and even if it were possible, the impression the reader would get from looking over the quotation would not be the same as that which he would get from hearing the work performed. Music, unlike painting, is an art that unfolds itself in time …

These are not the only correspondences between the two treatments. An interesting though admittedly not very important one is the offbeat use of the word 'sport'. Mellers writes (in the Rawsthorne article itself): 'the unique case of Elgar … we may legitimately regard as a "sport" in our musical history'. What? Elgar was fond of cycling and horse-racing, we know, but that can hardly be the intended meaning. Even with a dictionary, intuition is needed: the correct definition is probably 'an animal or plant that varies singularly and spontaneously from the normal type'. Elgar, then, is being described as a 'rare bird'. Fair comment, few would deny. Flothuis uses the word in a similarly unusual, but quite different way:

> Britten is not the only composer to have a predilection for variation. I mention this phenomenon in connection with what I would call the *sportive element* in English music. The English are known as a people exceptionally fond of games, and the writing of variations, which is indeed a game in music, is very general in England.

Later, in writing specifically of Rawsthorne, he speaks of the 'play' element, with the same meaning: a tendency to prefer variation to development. This is a tendency to which Mellers also refers – indeed, that is part of the point of his article.

More seriously, in paying Rawsthorne a fairly even-handed compliment, Flothuis hints at a worrying truth: 'he is less productive than Britten, but his works are less unequal'. Mellers takes the downside of this much more to heart:

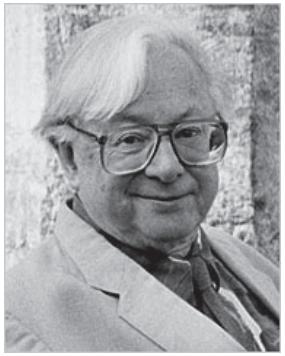
> the only disquieting feature is that Rawsthorne's output is so exiguous, and that prolonged creative inactivity during the war years can hardly have helped in this direction. It seems to me very important, for himself and for British music, that much Rawsthorne music should be written, and performed, during the next few years.

Much was indeed written and performed in the decades following that pronouncement. And yet Mellers was by no means the last to worry about the effects of war service – not perhaps in this case physically very dangerous, but nonetheless unwelcome and disruptive – on Rawsthorne's long-term career.

Martin Thacker

Alan Rawsthorne and the Baroque

Wilfrid Mellers



Wilfrid Mellers (1914–2008), one of the foremost music critics of his day, studied and later taught both English and Music at the University of Cambridge. Later closely associated with the University of York, where he was founding professor of music, he produced many articles and books on both classical and popular music, always from intellectually challenging points of view. This article on Rawsthorne, written with his customary blend of insight and commitment, is reproduced by kind permission of his widow, Mrs Robin Mellers.

When, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the English musical tradition gradually declined, fundamentally for social and economic reasons, one of the symptoms of decay was our failure to absorb the significant trends of contemporary musical evolution. It is, for instance, pertinent that although Haydn and Mozart were frequently played in London in the first half of the nineteenth century they exerted virtually no influence on our contemporary composers, who were unable to assimilate the implications of their sonata idiom.

The great social-dramatic phase of instrumental evolution we simply by-passed, so that it is hardly surprising that when Holst and Vaughan Williams came to work towards the renaissance of our musical culture they should have returned to the great days – to Tudor polyphony and, behind that, folk-song and hence to a fundamentally vocal conception of their art. (The unique case of Elgar, whose magnificently ripe symphonies are as it were the culmination of a symphonic tradition that had never happened, we may legitimately regard as a 'sport'[1] in our musical history.)

Most of our best music has been, and I think still is, vocal in conception. For instance, when Edmund Rubbra comes to make a consistent attempt to solve the symphonic problem as it appears to a British composer of our time, he significantly approaches it from a vocal-polyphonic standpoint. But there has developed of recent years an increasing tendency for our composers to try to compensate for our lack of an instrumental and operatic tradition, to catch up on two hundred years of musical evolution. The work of Britten in opera and Tippett in oratorio is an attempt to start again

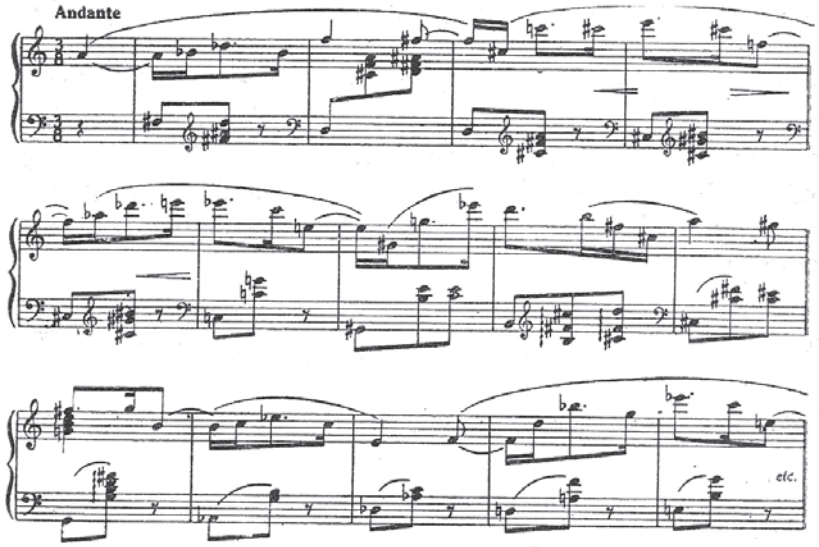
where our Restoration composers failed, taking account, of course, of all that has happened in between. And the writing of operatic music entails the linking of vocal technique with instrumental stylisations, just as baroque opera marked an essential transitional stage between the vocal polyphonic outlook and the instrumental sonata architecture.

Now almost alone among contemporary British composers, except perhaps Bliss, Alan Rawsthorne seems to think basically in instrumental terms. His achievement is, however, more closely related to Britten's and Tippett's than such an account would superficially suggest, because the kind of instrumental thinking which he favours is the Baroque rather than that of the second half of the eighteenth or the nineteenth centuries. If Britten and Tippett link up with our failure to attain an adequate operatic stylisation at the end of the seventeenth century, Rawsthorne links up with our early eighteenth-century failure to attain to a classical stability of instrumental architecture.

Purcell was both a local composer and a European; by the eighteenth century any organic connection between the local and the European had for us almost vanished. In this sense Rawsthorne had a more difficult task in achieving a consistent idiom than a composer who could start from the implications of the spoken and sung language. He was bound to use an idiom which had no very obvious connection with the English tradition; indeed he is the only English composer of consequence who has persistently used the kind of idiom loosely referred to as 'central European'. While he has never been an atonalist he has developed an instrumental extension of diatonicism rather along the lines of Hindemith's idiom – or at least of those features of it which relate back to the baroque figuration of Bach. I have already suggested that the re-creation of a baroque stylisation is of central importance to the English tradition; what is remarkable is the ease and apparent spontaneity with which Rawsthorne has woven what looks like a foreign idiom into the texture of our native musical attitudes.

For although Rawsthorne's idiom is quite unlike that of any other British composer, it has evolved with complete consistency. He never seems to have had any doubt about the direction in which he wanted to go, and his music is singularly 'of a piece'. The basis of his music is melody. This melody may attain to a long sustained lyricism which, though it is not 'like' Bach, is the product of similar attitudes of mind; a decorative instrumental modification of plastic cantabile line, phrased usually on the analogy of stringed instruments. Of this lyricism the slow and more rhapsodic movements of the Viola Sonata and the two-violin Variations provide admirable instances; still finer is the continuous cantilena of a passage such

as this from the chaconne of the Piano Concerto:[2]

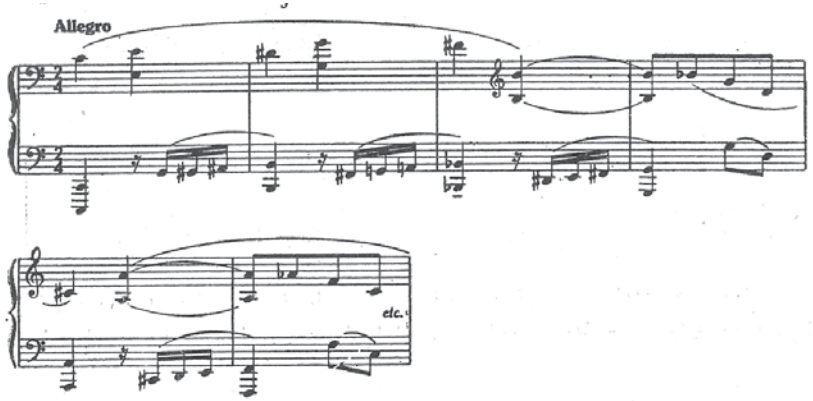


Although the peculiar poise of this is attained through the interplay of the melody with harmonic and rhythmic elements to be referred to later, we may note the carefully balanced contours of the line, the placing of the dissonant tensions of the leaps of major sevenths. As in much of Bach's lyrical writing the regularity of the metrical pulse is dissolved in the fluidity and continuity of the melody.

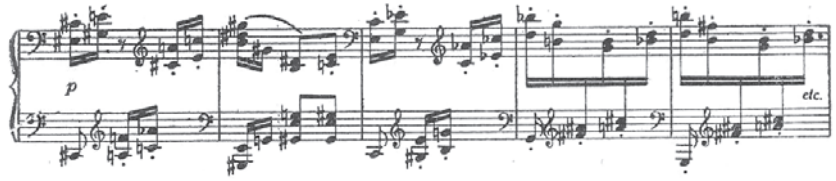
But this plastic lyricism is only one aspect of the melodic nature of Rawsthorne's music; a perhaps more frequent mode is a type of agile contrapuntal writing in which, as in Bach, the rigidity of a persistent motor-rhythm is counteracted by the 'violin-like' nature of the phrasing. Almost all of his quick movements are built on this principle; and the contrapuntal writing of the fast movements of the two-violin Variations presents the technique in its simplest and most lucid form.

A further counteraction of the rigidity of metre is provided by the freedom of the tonal transitions; there is rarely a key 'centre', the shifts of tonality being, as in Hindemith, kaleidoscopic. The tonal impression, though ambiguous, does not, however, tend to vagueness. The second of the little piano Bagatelles can begin in C major and end with some unison C sharps with an effect of complete inevitability; and the explicit or implicit insistence on the common triad, through all the tonal vagaries, preserves some kind of harmonic criterion. The opening of the first Bagatelle is characteristic,

mingling a wayward subtlety in the tonal transitions with great virility in the resonance of the major triads:



The manner in which, in the Piano Concerto passage already quoted, the cantilena, soaring over the continually shifting triads of the accompanying figure, repeatedly produces a major–minor ambiguity in the harmony is pervasive in Rawsthorne's music, and adds the rather tart, astringent flavour to his mating of solid diatonic triads with an extreme tonal instability. He also often employs a decorative chiaroscuro of harmonies, usually thirds or sixths involving false relations, in regularly floating patterns which parallel the decorative elements of his lyrical writing:



Such an effect as this from the chaconne of the Piano Concerto relies partly on the clarity of the articulation of the sound pattern; there is a beautiful passage a little further on in the movement in which strings and woodwind weave pianissimo figurations in sixths (involving persistent major–minor clashes) around the piano's relentless unfolding of the chaconne rhythm. Throughout one might say that Rawsthorne's conception of 'free' dissonance is intimately related to his conception of texture, the articulation of the mosaic of sound; he uses it to give 'edge' – a curious tingling quality – to the contour of his lines and the mould of his formal architecture.

From the formal standpoint, Rawsthorne is unequivocally a baroque composer with his roots in the formal conceptions of Corelli and Bach. He is never a dramatic symphonic composer in the sense that Beethoven or even Mozart is, depending on the development of thematic motives through contrasts of tonal centre. His notions of form are rather architectural and decorative and have two main prototypes in the baroque music of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries – the variation and the concerto grosso, the latter comprising toccata technique (decorative arabesque or passage work), cantilena or aria, fugal elements related to the old fantasia technique, and the formalism of the dance.

Rawsthorne's conception of variation is not the melodic one of Haydn and Mozart but rather that of Bach in the 'Goldberg' Variations and Couperin in the *Folies Françaises*. The ground-bass technique was one of the first (and most primitive) means whereby early baroque composers endeavoured to compose works built on a dance foundation which could none the less attain to considerable dimensions, and its apparently stringent limitations seem to have inspired Purcell, Couperin, and Bach to some of their most intensely passionate, because intensely disciplined, music. The chaconne of Rawsthorne's Piano Concerto, though making no pretensions to grandeur, likewise achieves a peculiar emotional power from a latent tension between the passionate contour of the melodic line already referred to, and the relentless pulse of the ground-bass, here repeated, with a cumulative intensity, not at the same level but on ascending degrees of the chromatic scale. The disturbing effect of the music comes from the combination simultaneously of eloquence and tension in the line and harmony with regularity and objectivity in the rhythm and structure. A similar characteristic is observable on, of course, an incomparably more tragic scale in Couperin's great B-minor *Passacaille*.

While the chaconne of the Piano Concerto is naturally the clearest example of Rawsthorne's connection with baroque technique, the two-violin Variations, the string quartet Variations, and even Rawsthorne's biggest and most important work, the Symphonic Studies, are more freely based on the same notion of the variation form. In all, the principle of development is cumulative over a harmonic skeleton that is hardly more than latent; and in all it is this skeleton which gives such tautness to the often very passionate melodic and figurative elements. We may note, too, that even the little piano Bagatelles have a kind of nodal, generative figure common in all of them.

About the nature of Rawsthorne's aria technique no more need be said than was implicit in our remarks about his lyrical sense in general; his aria-like movements manifest always his combination of lyrical fervour with balanced

architectural discipline. Nor is much comment necessary on his toccata technique, of which the finest example is perhaps the first movement (capriccio) of the Piano Concerto. Such movements are developed manifestations of his 'decorative' figuration, in which texture and colour combine with the glitter of the fleeting dissonances to create a patterned mosaic of sound – or rather harmonic, textural and colouristic elements are interdependent aspects of the total impression. Sometimes this decorative technique is combined with a dance formalism, as in the tarantella of the same work. The harmonic quality of the figuration again gives an astringent tang to the music's irrepressible gaiety – a rather eldritch [uncanny] Busoni-like atmosphere which prepares one for the unexpectedly moving coda in which, the movement stilled, the music flickers remotely out after some crystalline dissonances on the piano.

Perhaps I can best indicate the nature of Rawsthorne's achievement through what is, perhaps, a more personal impression. Frequently I find in listening to the Piano Concerto or Symphonic Studies, that some recollection of the late work of Vaughan Williams comes into my mind. One would not think that the idiom which I have tried briefly to analyse would have much in common with the most English of composers; that this kind of kinship would seem to be there, however latent, is I think convincing testimony to the manner in which Rawsthorne, without, of course, consciously thinking about it, has absorbed and digested the foreign elements of his idiom into an English sensibility. His music combines lyrical tension and rhythmic energy with great concision and a mordant wit. It has in abundance the virtues which English music at the turn of the century conspicuously lacked; and it is fundamentally serious and unfacetious. I regret that I have been unable to refer in these notes in more than general terms to the Symphonic Studies, since circumstances have made it impossible for me to have access to a score. But my recollection of this work suggests that there is no composer of his generation potentially capable of making a *more* significant contribution to our musical history, and only three of a comparable stature. The only disquieting feature is that Rawsthorne's output is so exiguous, and that prolonged creative inactivity during the war years can hardly have helped in this direction. It seems to me very important, for himself and for British music, that much Rawsthorne music should be written, and performed, during the next few years.

Notes

1 With regard to the meaning of this slightly unusual use of the word, see the Editorial.
2 The reference, of course, is to what is now the Piano Concerto No. 1, the second concerto not yet having been written.

John McCabe: A Personal Reflection in the Year of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday

Martin Ellerby

I first came across John's music by accident – an LP of brass quintets, which I bought for the work of another composer, happened to include his *Rounds* – a piece that, to this day, I still find impenetrable! My fault, I am sure, as not long afterwards I was to find a whole album of his orchestral music completely irresistible: many readers will be familiar with this EMI release, later reissued on CD, and consisting of *Notturni ed Alba*, the Second Symphony, and the work that at that point had the greatest impact on me, the *Variations on a Theme of Karl Amadeus Hartmann*. Quite a title ... just who was this K. A. Hartmann, I wondered? More below about John's energetic advocacy of a range of composers, not all as obscure as this one.

However, the most important thing at the time was the superb lesson in orchestration that this piece swiftly delivered, facilitated by the fact that a score, albeit the low-cost option of a facsimile of the composer's manuscript, was published by Novello, who have remained his key publisher throughout his career; something rather unusual for any contemporary composer. This score I borrowed from the London College of Music library on 'permanent loan'. In fact, considering that it sat on my shelves next to the scores of *Notturni ed Alba* and the Second Symphony, it is evident that in fact a trinity of such 'loans' must have been executed – though all three scores eventually became my legal possessions when the college moved location and the library had a clear-out sale.

What did the Hartmann variations say to me that *Rounds* so obviously didn't? I think the larger canvasses that orchestral music involves enabled me to ascertain, instantly, that this was a composer who was genuinely 'hearing' his music – an all-important difference when you are looking for models for your own work. During this time I was studying with Wilfred Josephs (another Novello composer), whose sadly neglected *Night Music* for solo voice and orchestra has had a less formidable career than John's *Notturni*. Wilf, at the end of a much greater personal journey, which has benefited my own career enormously, left me his music library in his will – and therein were further McCabe scores, doubtless ones he had picked up through his Novello connection. Such is life and one's happy chances.

Meanwhile, to return to the plot, at some point during the passage of what I have described above I ceased to be a student, and found employment at the LCM, at which John had by that time assumed the post of director.[1] The period of his administration cannot be described as an easy run. In fact, things at the Great Marlborough Street premises were to turn to turmoil, given time. However, there was a blissful period before the college's new dawn that John oversaw, and I know that all concerned were proud to have been associated with it. We encountered, in college concerts, works such as Malcolm Arnold's Fifth Symphony, a masterpiece that was simply never programmed elsewhere at the time.

John's period at the LCM saw it through to a merger with what eventually became Thames Valley University, and later still the University of West London, whilst maintaining its own independent identity as a department of the larger institution. At the college, in its new role, I maintained my former teaching commitments, and took a contract as the LCM's first head of composition. To be near the new premises I moved to Ealing. John McCabe was down the road in nearby Southall, and eventually I was able to make him visiting professor on the varied composition degree routes that I developed. It was during one of his classes that he made known his affection for the music of Alan Rawsthorne, a composer I then knew primarily on account of his Symphonic Studies. As usual, over time, I have done the 'demolition job', and acquired as much as possible of Rawsthorne's music in printed and recorded formats, as well as, in more recent years, John's outstanding biography of him,[2] which has done so much to champion this unique composer's work around the world. Of course, John being John, there was never a shortage of other composers he was trumpeting – his own listening programme must have been quite epic, especially considering his wide variety of professional musical pursuits. Some of these composers were less well known than Rawsthorne, others better: Bartók springs to mind as someone I will always associate with John's classes. Here should be mentioned his brief, but to-the-point, volume

of analyses in the BBC Music Guides series;[3] the perfect introduction for the uninitiated.

In more recent years, our professional relationship has become a more personal one, and an enduring series of concerts, dinners, celebrations, discussions, stay-overs, etc., has occurred, and is still in progress. Throughout this time I have, of course, kept very much in touch with John's music. I have the majority of his work on CD, and he has made available those pieces which are not so easy to acquire. I have had the delight of encountering *Cloudcatcher Fells* (arguably the brass band world's greatest masterpiece) in concerts and contests at home and abroad. His cycle of string quartets continues, maintaining a stunning level of invention. His ballets simply leave one in awe of his dramatic skills, and the recent survey of his piano music at the Royal Northern College of Music proves just how significant a contribution to the repertoire of his own instrument his output in that department has represented. I could go on and on – after all, I am a self-declared and proud fan.

I am well aware of the amount of work that goes into musical composition – I have dragged myself through it on many an occasion. This knowledge makes it all the more astonishing to me that John can compose at such a consistently high level, often to epic proportions, whilst also being highly active as a performer, writer and researcher, educationalist, administrator and board member. More puzzling still, how does he find time to watch all the major cricketing events that appear on TV? Part of the answer lies, almost certainly, in being blessed with the most supportive of wives; so thanks from all of us to Monica, for all she has done and continues to do in caring for John: *Salut* … and mine's a Highland Park!

Notes

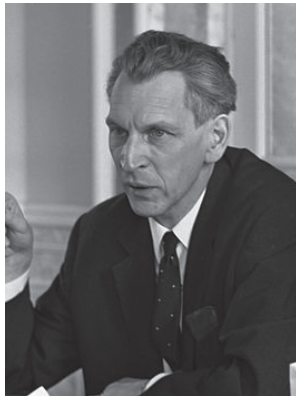
1 John was not, of course, the first outstanding figure to head the college. I will never forget the remarkable contrapuntal teaching of W. S. Lloyd Webber, father of Andrew and Julian. It was he who introduced me to the Sibelius Second Symphony and to Puccini's smaller-scale opera *Suor Angelica*. His engaging musical commentaries were sometimes accompanied by vodka and vermouth chasers!

2 John McCabe, *Alan Rawsthorne*: *Portrait of a Composer* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

3 John McCabe, *Bartók Orchestral Music* (London, BBC, 1980). BBC Music Guides.

Alan Rawsthorne

Marius Flothuis



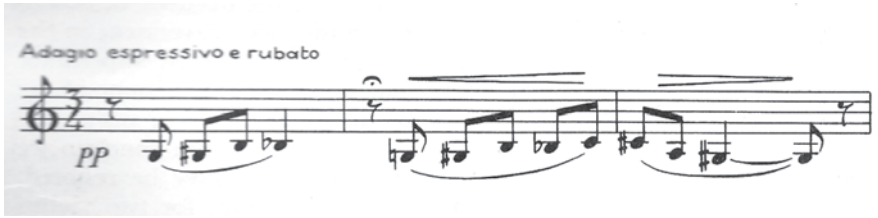
Marius Flothuis (1914 –2001) was a distinguished Dutch composer and musicologist. This essay on Rawsthorne is a section of a chapter in his Hedendaagse Engelse Componisten *(Amsterdam: H. J. W. Becht, 1949), translated into English by Olive Renier and published as* Modern British Composers *(Stockholm; London: Continental Book Company; Sidgwick & Jackson, [1950?]). In this remarkably detailed and frank survey, showing evidence of an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of the field of study, the author does not refrain from negative criticism where he feels it is justified. Bearing this in mind, it is pleasant to note that he has virtually nothing but praise for Rawsthorne.*

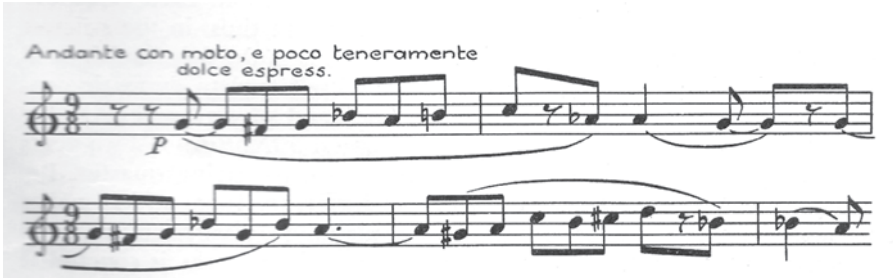
Robin Hull says that Rawsthorne 'though less spectacularly gifted than Britten, may yet stand in evident range of equality with him'.[1] Here he hits the nail on the head. Like the two other composers with whom we are concerned in this chapter[2] he is less productive than Britten, but his works are less unequal. It is an old truth that a composer must go on writing, whether the result be good or bad. Tchaikovsky said that a composer must exercise his craft daily, like a shoemaker, lest he lose his skill. But before publishing the results, it is necessary to exercise one's critical faculty. What Rawsthorne has given to the world is among the best that his generation has produced. And this generation of his is represented in Holland by, among others, van Lier and G. Landré, in Poland by Palester, in Italy by Dallapiccola, in Czechoslovakia by Kabeláč, in the Soviet Union by Shostakovich.

It was not till he was twenty that Rawsthorne began to study music seriously at the Royal Manchester College of Music, where he specialised in piano and composition. He continued his studies on the continent (one of his teachers was Egon Petri) and was later teaching music at the School of Dance Mime at Dartington Hall. Since 1935 he has lived in London. His first international recognition was at the London Festival of the ISCM of 1938, when his Theme and Variations for Two Violins was performed; a year later his Symphonic Studies were produced in Warsaw, and in 1946 his *Cortèges*, in London.

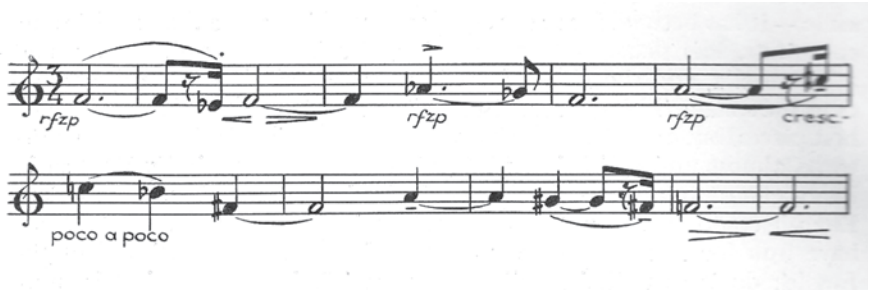
Theme and variations, symphonic studies – here we again have the play element,[3] and we can add to this his Theme and Variations for String Quartet and the central section of his Piano Concerto,[4] which is in the form of a chaconne. For him, more than for the others in whose work we have noted this element, it is the natural form of his musical thought. Not only is the variation form the expression of steadily regenerated musical ideas, and not merely a game of sounds, but in his work as in that of many other composers of today, the sonata form tends to be cast aside – it has become for many composers nothing more than an irksome constraint. His Piano Concerto consists of a toccata,[5] a chaconne and a tarantella, and the form of the toccata approaches more the rondo than the sonata. This concerto is, I believe, not only one of Rawsthorne's best pieces, but one of the best in modern English music. It is an engaging work, almost un-English in its lack of restraint, but typically English in its excellent structural control, and in its instrumentation. All modern English composers of note are skilled in instrumentation. The French have won for themselves the reputation for fine orchestration, but the English do it as well, in a different way. Their orchestration is more stark; they work more by melodic lines and concertante effects than by colours and nuances – with the exception of Britten, who combines the two types.

Reviewers of Rawsthorne's Piano Concerto frequently compared it with Prokofiev's work. It is true that there are links between the chaconne and the Prokofiev of the third piano concerto, but even if we admit that this movement is not of such high standard melodically and harmonically, the comparison is in favour of Rawsthorne. It is interesting that Rawsthorne's music often shows relationship with that of the young Dutch composers. The polytonal combinations in minor thirds (with dominant function) and in major thirds (with tonic function) are also to be found in his work. The melodic parallels are still more obvious. If one compares the following examples of Rawsthorne's Violin Concerto:[6]





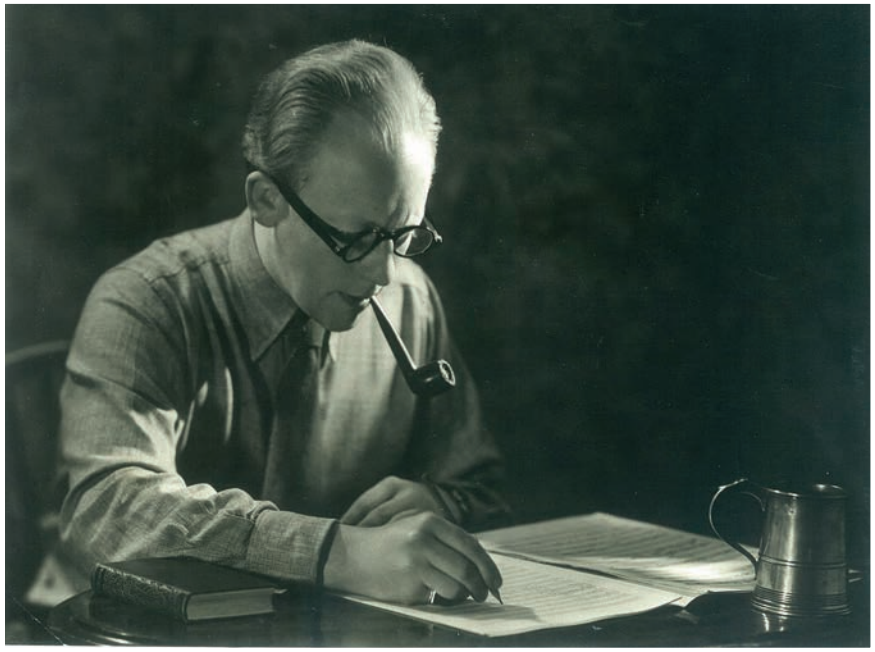
with a theme from the second string quartet of G. Landré (1943)



or the first bars of the *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* of Bartók (1935), the melodic connection is so great that it is possible to say that a new melodic consciousness is being born here.

Chromatic or half-chromatic successions within a rather small compass, with only a few repetitions of tones (a remnant of the doctrine of Schoenberg?) are the chief characteristics of this music. Such agreement in the style of composers from different countries may be of great importance in the future, for a common language, generally understood, is one of the pillars on which a sound musical culture rests.

But in dealing with the Piano Concerto and the Violin Concerto we have upset the Rawsthorne chronology, which must now be restored. Among his oldest works is the Theme and Variations for Two Violins (1937), already noted, a masterly contribution to the scarce literature for this, for the composer, rather thankless combination. Each variation, of which there are nine, has its own title; they are thus, in the strictest sense, 'character variations'. The play element is to the fore, and indeed the combination of two violins does not of itself lead to dramatic conflicts, but there are moments



of repentance and of seriousness, as for example variation 4, 'Rhapsodia', and variation 5, 'Notturno'. Two years after this, Rawsthorne produced a similar work for string quartet.[7] Between these two came the Four Bagatelles for piano (1938), which make us wish for more and greater works for the piano. Pianists have not been overspoilt by modern composers. The list of minor works is concluded for the moment with the publication in 1940 of some songs, 'Away Delights', and 'God Lyaeus' (the poems by John Fletcher), and 'We Three Merry Maidens'; and also the amusing piano suite for four hands *The Creel*.

The first of the orchestral works was the Symphonic Studies (1939), in which the idea of variation is interpreted in a characteristic manner. It is a piece of much virtuosity, a sort of Brandenburg Concerto on a larger scale. One gets the feeling that the composer is reconnoitring a territory, one with which he is soon familiar. For there followed the Piano Concerto (1942), the ample overture *Cortèges* (1945) and the brief *Street Corner* (1944). *Cortèges* is made up of various marches. The allegro is a *pas redoublé*, the introductory adagio, which returns later, a *marche funèbre*. All these works are dominated by a strong rhythmical impulse and the frenzied joy of music-making. But the chaconne of the Piano Concerto shows another, more serious side to Rawsthorne, which is continued in the 'Prisoners' March' from the film

music for *The Captive Heart*, and in the Violin Concerto of 1947.

In contradistinction to the sharp outlines of the Piano Concerto we have in the Violin Concerto a structure more rhapsodical in nature. The piece has less virtuosity than the Piano Concerto and the accent is on lyricism in the first of the two movements. The play element is entirely in the background except in a few figure passages and in the cadenza. In the second movement, in which tempo and pace repeatedly change, and much use is made of variation technique, it takes its rightful place again. The piece is dedicated to William Walton and closes with a quotation from *Belshazzar's Feast*.

The most recent work of Rawsthorne is a concerto for oboe and string orchestra (first performed in 1947 by Evelyn Rothwell), and he is at present working on a quartet for clarinet, violin, viola, and cello. He too, it seems, is inspired by English wind playing.[8]

Notes

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1 Robin Hull, 'What Now?' in A. L. Bacharach, ed., *British Music of Our Time* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1946). I cannot verify this, as the words seem to be absent from the 1951 edition, which is the only one I have. They look as if they might have been translated from English into Dutch and then back into English again – perhaps rendering them 'double English' – ed.

2 Lennox Berkeley and Michael Tippett.

3 The 'play element': see the Editorial.

4 Later known as the String Quartet No. 1 and the Piano Concerto No. 1, respectively.

5 Actually 'capriccio', although Mellers, too, refers to its toccata-like qualities.

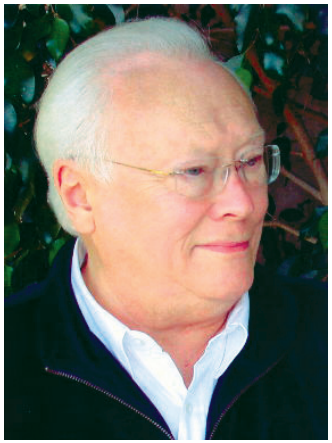
6 Later known as the Violin Concerto No. 1.

7 The Theme and Variations for String Quartet, later known as String Quartet No. 1.

8 Flothuis had earlier drawn attention to the quality of the wind solos in the second movement of Lennox Berkeley's Piano Concerto; earlier still to Bliss' Oboe Quintet and Clarinet Quintet, where Frederick Thurston is mentioned by name.

Alan Rawsthorne and Gerard Schurmann: A Great Friendship

Dimitri Kennaway



Gerard Shurmann

Among the most important and enduring associations in Alan Rawsthorne's life was his friendship with his younger colleague Gerard Schurmann, who has turned ninety this year. Here we recall that friendship, with reminiscences from Schurmann, whom we also celebrate with a look at his long life and career in music.

It was during the Second World War that Gerard Schurmann, recently arrived in England, first encountered the music of Alan Rawsthorne. In particular, he was captivated by a broadcast of the latter's Symphonic Studies, which prompted him to send the composer a letter of admiration, care of the BBC. To his delight, he received a reply some weeks later, which led to a meeting of the two. Initially, there was some merriment, since Rawsthorne had taken it into his head that Schurmann was probably a bespectacled, bearded, middle-aged professorial type from Vienna and not the precocious teenager he turned out to be! For his part, Schurmann was taken aback when the composer whose music had prompted such personal enthusiasm greeted him wearing the battledress of an army sergeant! (Rawsthorne was, in fact, on leave to compose music for two productions by the Army Film Unit). This initial meeting established an immediate and lasting rapport between the two men, and Rawsthorne invited Schurmann to bring along some of his compositions to their next meeting. A few days later, at a favourite Italian restaurant, Rawsthorne introduced Schurmann to Constant Lambert, his closest friend. Schurmann once speculated on his friendship with Rawsthorne:

> At this distance it seems impossible to determine how or why, with the distance of a generation between us, we formed the kind of close, periodically almost inseparable, friendship that endured uninterrupted for over twenty-seven years.

One reasonable conclusion is that Rawsthorne became a kind of father-figure to Schurmann, who had lost his own father at the tender age of four. More of their long friendship in a moment.

What of Gerard Schurmann's early background? A descendant of the German baroque composer Georg Caspar Schürmann and great nephew of the Dutch author and playwright Willem Frederik Schürmann (who is commemorated in Rotterdam both by a statue and a street named after him), Gerard was born in Kertosono, Java (in the former Dutch East Indies) on 19 January 1924. His father Johan, a Dutch businessman, died of a heart attack at the age of 35, so he and his older brother were largely raised by their mother, Elvire Dom, who was of Dutch, Hungarian and Javanese descent. She was a highly accomplished pianist, having studied both with Bartók and the legendary Josef Hofmann, and Schurmann's earliest musical memories were of her playing. She was his first piano teacher and together they played through much of the orchestral repertoire in piano-duet arrangements, including the symphonies of Beethoven and Schumann. Following his father's death, it was necessary for his mother to resume professional life as an accompanist, and they moved first to Amsterdam for two years (Schurmann was aged four at this point) and then for some months to Paris, where she worked part-time as a repetiteur at the Opera. When he was about seven, they returned to Java, to live in its cultural centre Jogjakarta. Here, his mother taught and was a sought-after accompanist, touring with various artists. One of them, he recalls, was the famous dancer Anna Pavlova, who rehearsed 'The Dying Swan' in their drawing room. Later, in his early teens, he began to study piano with James Zwart for a period of about two years. This was in Batavia (now Jakarta), where the young musician stayed with cousins and cycled to his lessons. It was at about the age of 15 that he began to earn some money from his pianistic skills. He had a two-piano duo with a 25-year-old Dutch pianist: they played popular piano concertos, each on a grand Steinway, in the lounge of the Hotel des Indes at weekends, with the 25-year-old playing the solo part and Schurmann the orchestral. The indigenous music of Java was a formative influence for the young musician, who later recalled:

> We lived within earshot of the resident gamelan orchestras at the Sultan's Palace (Kraton) where, at Festival time, the music continued uninterrupted for several days and nights, the players taking over imperceptibly from one another in relays. The sound of these gamelan orchestras has planted itself indelibly in my memory. To be more specific, it is the intervals of the basic pentatonic scales

> – Pelog and Slendro – coupled to the intricate rhythms, rather than the general tintinnabulation and clatter, which continue to haunt and stimulate me below the surface to this day. My first attempts at composition were little more than improvised imitations of what I had heard of Javanese Gamelan music.

Perhaps due to her own experience of the musical profession's difficulties, Schurmann's mother ceased to offer him encouragement in his aspirations, instead insisting that he should retain music as a hobby and qualify in a more dependable field (a somewhat familiar scenario!). This, however, spurred him on to become independent at the earliest opportunity and head to Europe. He was sent to England, in 1941, in the care of two uncles (one each from the maternal and paternal side) who lived in London. It was thus that he enlisted in the War, by volunteering for military service at the age of 17. During his first two years here, his squadron – Dutch 320, part of RAF Coastal Command – flew many missions over occupied enemy territory. He recalls that: 'During my initial training as a wireless operator/air gunner, it was discovered that my musical ear gave me the ability to transmit and receive morse code signals at a very fast tempo!' It was during this period that he formed another piano duo, this time with a British sergeant named Harry Cole. He often played for charity, and also to entertain the troops, as part of morale-boosting efforts during wartime. He also accompanied his uncle, Carl Schurmann, on musical lecture tours, where he would illustrate musical examples at the piano. A lifelong association with Sir Adrian Boult stemmed from this period, after Schurmann performed the piano concerto by the Dutch composer Willem Pijper (1894–1947) at a Winter Prom, with Boult conducting.

Unavoidably, Schurmann's wartime duties kept him away from music for much of the time but, thanks to a perceptive woman at the British Council, named Seymour Winyates – who had heard him perform at a charity concert in Croydon – he was able to obtain six months' leave in order to give concerts and make recordings for the troops overseas, through ENSA and CEMA. These were a mixture of music, plays and poetry readings, and were recorded on the empty stage at Drury Lane Theatre (which, according to Schurmann, created a ghostly atmosphere). It was during this period that he composed the song-cycle entitled *Pacific*, using poems about Java, which enabled him to indulge his fascination with gamelan music. This was his first work performed in England, under the auspices of the SPNM (Society for the Promotion of New Music), by the soprano Joy McArden with John Wills. There followed a string quartet, dedicated to the exiled Queen Wilhelmina and performed in her presence, by the Hirsch Quartet. This received exposure at, among other venues, the Wigmore Hall and the National Gallery Lunchtime Concerts founded by Dame Myra Hess. As Schurmann recalls:

> The Dutch Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences (in exile) had, by that time, become aware of my existence and although I had first to rejoin my squadron for a few months, it was eventually arranged for me to be transferred to a division of the Army, referred to as Military Government, in charge of Cultural Affairs. Back I came to London, to work part of the time with Elizabeth Poston at BBC Bush House, for wartime Radio Orange. It was not such an unlikely development after that for me to become Cultural Attaché at the Netherlands Embassy, when the War ended.

Apart from his interest in Bartók, Stravinsky, and the (second) Viennese School, the music that most captivated Schurmann during this time was that of Rawsthorne (the Symphonic Studies, as mentioned earlier), and Michael Tippett (the Second String Quartet). Britten had yet to return to England from America, but Schurmann was highly excited when he got to hear the first performance of *Peter Grimes* in London, *The Rape of Lucretia*, at Glyndbourne and the *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo* (performed by Pears and Britten at the BBC). He came to know all three composers, and was initially offered lessons in composition by Tippett. However, the latter, on discovering Schurmann's close affinity with Rawthorne's style and method, suggested that another teacher would be more suitable. The two remained friends nevertheless, with Tippett retaining an interest in his younger colleague's career.

It was Rawsthorne, in fact, who was to become Schurmann's mentor and teacher. This began when the former gave Schurmann his copy of Hindemith's *The Craft of Musical Composition*, in several volumes, in 1950. By degrees, Rawsthorne showed his protégé how to utilise this to enhance his technique. However, Rawsthorne emphasised what he considered to be the importance of Schurmann composing as instinctively as possible, using 'method' more as a backup, 'if and when in doubt'. Schurmann has written:

> The fact that I was a fluent improviser at the piano, however, was

considered somewhat dangerous in that he believed excessive improvisation, even if practised with pencil on paper, spelled the death of composition. He urged me to cultivate a more sustained and flowing lyrical style, because I was sometimes inclined to use undue fragmentation that tended, he felt, to interfere with the thrust of ideas.

Schurmann was subject to bouts of depression and self-doubt, and Rawsthorne's great encouragement and support were critical factors in helping him over such hurdles.

For a time – open to different compositional methods – Schurmann experimented with the twelve-note (dodecaphonic) Schoenbergian technique, which he studied with Elisabeth Lutyens. He found it limiting, however, and abandoned it, though not before composing a wind quintet which drew praise from the late Hans Keller (a great proponent of the technique), who was also to become a supportive friend.

Once hostilities had ceased in Europe, Schurmann was involved with inviting Sir Adrian Boult to become the first post-War guest conductor of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, for concerts both in Amsterdam and The Hague. Schurmann and Rawsthorne, not yet out of uniform, were to accompany him. The programmes began with Rawsthorne's Fantasy Overture *Cortèges* and included Elgar's Enigma Variations. As Schurmann recalls:

> The public's enthusiasm was overwhelming but a disconcerting situation arose when we arrived in Amsterdam to find that accommodation was scarce owing to the fact that the temporary Military Government had requisitioned every decent hotel in town for the exclusive use of officer personnel. The orchestra, full of apologies, had barely managed to secure one room for Sir Adrian in a more modest hostelry in the vicinity of the railway station. Undaunted, Alan and I made our way to the American Hotel in the centre of town, reputed to be the best, where we presented ourselves to the administration. I should add that I had by then attained the rank of lieutenant. 'Ja … but what to do about Sergeant *Rashon*?' came the question. As if by telepathy, we managed to concoct a half-mumbled reply between us, to the effect that we were in Amsterdam for important 'ceremonial duties', the nearest comprehensible military equivalent, and that it would be unthinkable for me to be separated from the services of my batman! The outcome was a splendid, large double room, with balcony and full board which we shared and happily made use of for ten days.

During subsequent years, the two shared many holidays abroad, including many visits to Amsterdam. Such was their friendship that when Schurmann first married, to the violinist Vivien Hind, in 1948, Rawsthorne was best man and then became godfather to their daughter Karen, born the following year. At the heart of this great friendship lay not only their shared involvement in music but also a shared sense of humour (often of the ridiculous kind). For example, among Schurmann's further recollections of Rawsthorne:

> His infectious sense of humour was easily stimulated by, for example, the unintentional misuse of words, the thought of unlikely confrontations, or the way his surname, a formidable tongue-twister to most Europeans, was pronounced in different countries on the continent. An official guide in Pidgin English to the night-life of Bangkok was a prized possession, as was the memory of a production of Hamlet (or 'Omelet') in Dutch, that had thrown us into barely controllable, tear-drenched convulsions.

During the post-War years, Schurmann studied piano with Kathleen Long and had lessons in conducting with Franco Ferrara in Rome. He had dropped the umlaut from his surname (and was also briefly known as Gerbrand, rather than Gerard) owing to anti-German sentiment during and following the War. When his stint (1945–48) as cultural attaché to the Dutch embassy in London came to an end, Schurmann, encouraged by Eduard van Beinum, accepted a two-year appointment as conductor-in-residence at Radio Hilversum in Holland. It was early on in this stint that Rawsthorne went to hear a performance of his Symphonic Studies, conducted by Schurmann, with the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, and also attended the rehearsals he took with a string orchestra in Amsterdam, that had been created especially to showcase some of the best soloists and chamber groups in Holland at that time. So impressed was Rawsthorne with their playing that he proposed composing a new work for them, resulting in the Concerto for String Orchestra which they premiered the following year, soon after its completion. 'The slow movement of this work is particularly beautiful,' recalls Schurmann.

> Written like a string of reflections on an initial theme, reminiscent of a chaconne, it maintains a remarkable and intense continuity. I had corrected a few doubtful mistakes in the manuscript score, prior to performance, and wrote the words 'Surely, Alan!' into the margin, as a mild rejoinder. Afterwards, Alan was highly amused when the Oxford University Press librarian called him into his office to point out that some conductor had actually managed to identify a passage as typical Rawsthorne with a triumphant 'Surely Alan!'

At the end of his two-year contract with Hilversum Radio, Schurmann returned to England, determined to concentrate on his career as a composer. Like many illustrious colleagues, he found it necessary to work in films in order to make a decent living. This, he found in common with others, was a great opportunity for experimentation, where the results of musical labours could be heard often within a few hours of completion, due to the speed with which newly written cues were dubbed to soundtrack. In this way, invaluable feedback was available with little delay, and the craft of composition and orchestration could be honed rapidly.

It was, in fact, due to Rawsthorne that Schurmann got his introduction to working on scores for British films. At first, Schurmann assisted Rawsthorne on a number of his own film scores, often as orchestrator (as in the case of *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* and *Where No Vultures Fly*, both in 1951) and, sometimes, as contributor of original music for various cues. One such cue, written for an action scene in *The Cruel Sea* (1953), attracted particular praise from the film's director Charles Frend. When he approached Rawsthorne about working on a subsequent project, the composer recommended his younger colleague instead. This elicited the usual objections about taking a chance on one whose experience and credentials were considered insufficient. When Rawsthorne, in his generosity, told Frend that the music cue he had so admired in *The Cruel Sea* had, in fact, been written by 'Gerry', the director was sold, and thus began Schurmann's own long and distinguished career as a film composer in his own right. (See below for more on Schurmann's film music).

The kinds of difficulties that composers can encounter in film music are well illustrated by an occurrence that came early on in their friendship and professional relationship. Rawsthorne had invited Schurmann to stay with him and his first wife, Jessie Hinchliffe, for the first time, at their London home in Ormond Terrace, to help out with a film score. There was intense pressure to get things done quickly (as is so often the case, since the score is nearly always the last thing to be done to prepare a film for exhibition). The

timed music cue sheets for an extended action sequence, requiring a profusion of notes, were to be delivered by studio messenger early that evening. The plan was to work all-out, through the night, in order to prepare the score for the copyist the next afternoon. Rawsthorne had managed to obtain a supply of Benzedrine tablets and decided that they should both take a good dose of them half an hour prior to the messenger's arrival. Alas, instead of the messenger, there was a phone call with the news that additional changes were to be made and the cue sheets would not arrive for another twenty-four hours! The two, now hyped up, had nothing to work on and had to spend a sleepless night, sitting opposite each other at the cleared dining-room table, until Jessie came to their rescue with breakfast in the morning. While on the subject of films, another of Schurmann's reminiscences is of considerable interest:

> I should here make it clear that it was not always just a case of I who helped Alan, but also that he reciprocated, although not as often, by helping me, and I remember that he assisted and rescued me very willingly on two of my films. Perhaps I need to explain that many composers in England at that time wrote film music in part because it allowed one to remain independent financially, without the need for another job, or teaching. We really used to consider it an almost anonymous activity, and thought little of stepping into another composer's shoes to lend a hand when needed. What has happened since was totally unforeseen by anyone. Many studios destroyed orchestral scores of their films because they took up room and were considered of no further use or interest. Not many composers bothered to ask for a photocopy at the time of production. The great and still growing interest today in film music of the past seems truly extraordinary. However, I agree that recordings of old film music do sometimes seem to stimulate interest in one's concert music – a belated, but happy turn of events.

Further:

> I am sometimes asked about the degree of my involvement with Alan's music. I was always pleased when he needed my help in one way or another and asked me to come and stay for a while. I really believe that I learned more technique by assisting him with his material than in any other way. I also learned early on to model my own music notation on his impeccably clear manuscript, to the extent that he found it sometimes difficult to distinguish between his writing and

mine! He used to roar with laughter in the early days when I teasingly asked him why he was 'messing up my beautiful score' as I watched him make corrections in my orchestrations of his sketches. Later on, at least in the case of film music, his trust became more absolute and he would no longer look at what I had done before it went off to the studio or the copyist.

In July 1971, Rawsthorne was taken seriously ill at the University of Essex, where he had gone, with his wife Isabel, to receive an honorary doctorate. He was taken to hospital in Cambridge, where Schurmann visited him and was shocked by his sudden frailty. Says Schurmann:

> It all seemed desperately sad and moving when, after a little while, he took my hand and clung to it as if for help and strength, until the nursing staff decided it was time for us to leave. I told him that he had to get well, that there was still much to be done and reminded him of the opera for which the commission from the English National Opera company had at long last materialised, after years of frustration. His response was a weak and utterly exhausted 'Opera? …Oh … you mean still to be written.' He seemed to cheer up considerably when I said I would be back in two days' time to see him again, and repeatedly pressed me to keep my promise. But it was not to be.

Rawsthorne died on 24 July. Among Schurmann's many recollections of him, the following is aptly poignant:

> There were some who found Alan reserved, and perhaps not too many knew him really well, but his outward formality was of the studied kind cultivated by an essentially private person. It would often mask a pervasive dry wit, coupled to a conspicuously caring, warmly generous and compassionate nature. He had a fine, lively and very agile mind. Personal characteristics seem to me so clearly present in his music as to be almost graphic, while his absolute integrity allowed no room for meretriciousness or pretence.

Some ten years after Rawsthorne's death, in August 1981, Gerard Schurmann and his second wife, Carolyn Nott (a fine writer on music), uprooted themselves from London and settled in Los Angeles. This was both an upheaval and a gamble, although there were good reasons behind it. One of these was a desire to work in a country that offered many more possibilities for a composer, both by being more open to different styles and by being of

far greater geographical size. Without doubt, of course, so far as undertaking more film work was concerned, Los Angeles was the place for any composer to be. (However, one project on offer – an invitation from Disney Studios to become music director for a sequel to *Fantasia*, called *Musicana* – did not come to fruition, the project being cancelled after five years of preparation.) A very successful tour of American orchestras and universities under the auspices of the British Council and US State Department, during 1980–81, was another factor that prompted the move. Schurmann has said that he would probably not have taken this step if Rawsthorne had still been alive, since he felt that his mentor would have thought 'the idea of moving to America at my advanced age quite absurd!'

In the long run, and despite bouts of homesickness, the decision was to prove rewarding, with many fine and important works, mostly composed for prestigious commissions, flowing from the Schurmann pen. In a delightful modern house, set in the Hollywood Hills, with commanding views over the valley and city below, the composer has a wonderful music studio (actually a few yards from the house itself) complete with Steinway grand piano and splendidly stocked bookcases of music and books.

Author's reminiscence

My own friendship with Gerard and his wife Carolyn has developed especially during the past decade, although I recall meeting Gerard first when I was probably no more than twelve, in about 1970. He had come to the house where I grew up, in north-west London, to visit my stepfather-to-be, Benjamin Frankel, and my mother, Xenia. At that stage, my exposure to modern music was limited to concerts of, or including, Ben's music. I would not have heard Gerard's music by that point (except, of course, some of his very fine film scores). Even so, I recall a charismatic figure with dashing, exotic looks and, of course, his pipe, of which he was very fond! He and Ben were 'new' friends (although they might easily have met many years earlier), as Gerard had championed Ben's Fifth Symphony in Ireland, where he had taken up the post of principal guest conductor of the RTE Orchestra. Although perhaps unaware at the time, they were also connected,

at second-hand, by the Hammer Film *The Lost Continent* (1968). Ben had been commissioned to score the film but had been insulted by Philip Martell (the music director), when he came to discuss the project one afternoon. Martell was shown the door and Ben withdrew his services. Gerard, unaware of all this, was then approached to score the picture and, indeed, did a fine job (far better than the film itself, which was far from Hammer's finest hour). Gerard and Carolyn also stayed with Ben at his flat in Locarno at one point.

Concert music

A complete survey of Schurmann's output for the concert hall will probably have to await a detailed biography, but certain works should be mentioned here.

Schurmann, by his own admission, has not been among the most prolific of composers, although his sizeable output for film must also be taken into account, not just for its artistic merit but because, of course, it took time and energy to produce it. However, in his case, relative scarcity has led to a nonetheless impressive body of beautifully crafted, heartfelt work, whose quality more than makes up for lack of quantity. Indeed, one might ask, where some of the most prolific composers are concerned, how much of their output is worthy of their best. Schurmann's active catalogue would, in fact, be larger than it is, had he not decided to set aside many of his earlier, youthful works which, in his view, were not of sufficient quality for his own high standards. So, it is really those works written from the 1960s onwards (and forming part of the Novello catalogue) that he is happy with.

Among the earliest of these – and one of his most important compositions – is the *Six Studies of Francis Bacon*. The two had become good friends during the 1960s, when neighbours in Henley-on-Thames. Schurmann was deeply taken with Bacon's work and, in 1968, a commission for an orchestral work from Radio Telefis Eireann was the catalyst that prompted the composition to be written. Bacon, Irish by birth, was delighted to learn of the plan. The composer explains:

> The musical motto came to me straight away as FBAC and the six movements, after a brooding introduction, incorporate a deliberate plurality of styles, held together by shared material and an arch form. I did not follow a storyline, as if each picture had a programme. Rather, I used one or more aspects of each painting as a stimulus for musical development, such as the scream of the Pope figure and the brutality of the Crucifixion scene. "George and the bicycle" is a scherzo movement based on a large picture of George Dyer riding a bicycle, which I found suggestive of a variety of scenarios. The movement called "Isabel" (no. 4), consisting of a theme with variations, was based on a number of portraits of Isabel Rawsthorne, including my favourite, *Isabel in Soho*.

Schurmann himself conducted the first performance, at the inaugural Festival of Contemporary Music in Dublin, in 1969, with the RTE Symphony Orchestra (later recording it with the BBC Symphony Orchestra for Chandos, on CHAN 9167). In 1981, Lorin Maazel (who was to champion Schurmann's music in the USA) gave the first American performance, with the Cleveland Orchestra.

1970 saw the production of another important work – *Variants* (dedicated to Rawsthorne) – which was composed for the classically sized orchestra of Schubert's Fifth Symphony. The work's genesis can be traced to a complaint by Harry Blech that there was little in the way of contemporary music suitable for his ensemble, The London Mozart Players. Schurmann, seeing this as a kind of musical gauntlet-thrown-to-the-ground, surprised Blech by producing a work that was ideal for his forces, and they gave the first performance at Guildford Cathedral in 1971 (the work having been commissioned by the Guildford Festival Committee). Again, the first American performance was given by Maazel and the Cleveland Orchestra, in 1977. Schurmann later recorded it for Chandos, with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and it is coupled with the *Six Studies of Francis Bacon*.

The Piano Concerto (1972–73) was written for the late John Ogdon, one of Britain's finest and most celebrated pianists, who came to prominence with his success at the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, in 1962, where he shared joint first prize with Vladimir Ashkenazy. The Concerto, in two movements, was first performed complete at the Guildhall, Portsmouth, the Winter Gardens, Bournemouth, and the Royal Festival Hall, London, on 21, 22 and 23 November 1973. John Ogdon was the soloist with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra under Paavo Berglund.

Ogdon's battle with terrible mental illness has been well documented. Gerard and his wife, Carolyn, took an active role in trying to help him through it and he lived with them for some months.

The next major orchestral work, composed during the years 1975–78, was the Violin Concerto (again in two movements), written to commemorate Ruggiero Ricci's Golden Jubilee. It was commissioned by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society, with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain, and first performed on 26 September 1978 by Ricci with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under Walter Weller, in Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall. There is a fine recording (on Chandos 9915), with soloist Olivier Charlier and the BBC Philharmonic, conducted by the composer (and coupled with his Concerto for Orchestra – see below).

Piers Plowman (1979–80) is an opera-cantata in two acts. The text is by the composer after William Langland, and the work was commissioned by Netherlands Radio, Hilversum, for their Jubilee year. The first performance was on 22 August 1980, and given by Felicity Lott, Sarah Walker, Anthony Rolfe-Johnson, Norman Welsby, the Festival Chorus and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under John Sanders, at the Three Choirs Festival, Gloucester Cathedral. This is the composer's largest-scale work to date and regarded as being of central importance in his output. At the age of about twenty, he was given a copy of Langland's poem by a member of his family who suggested that he might consider setting excerpts from it one day. When he received the above commission, he returned to his copy of the poem and re-read it, somehow knowing that this was to be the subject matter of the work in prospect. Describing the Crucifixion in the setting of a jousting tournament in medieval England, the poem made a huge impression on Schurmann, who wrote his own text, on the advice of dramatist Robert Bolt. The composer states that:

> Soloists and orchestration are deliberately identical to Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, the only difference being my use of a mixed choir. I have always hoped, and still do, that one day somebody will have the courage to programme the two works as a double bill in the theatre.

The Gardens of Exile, (1989–90) is a cello concerto, and was commissioned by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. First performed in 1991, by Peter Retjo, with the BSO conducted by Howard Williams, it is dedicated to Michael Tippett. Schurmann writes:

> The condition of exile referred to is internal as well as physical, and the metaphorical gardens are places where one plants and cultivates memories of the past, back to childhood. These tend to evoke a feeling of wistful nostalgia and occasional sadness, but on the other hand, to quote William Wordsworth, there is also joy 'That in our embers/Is something that doth live/That nature yet remembers/What was so fugitive.' Superimposed on this notion were my recollections of semi-wild tropical gardens in Java, where I played freely and happily as a child during the holidays.

The Concerto for Orchestra (1994–96) was yet another important commission, this time from the Pittsburgh Symphony for their 100th Anniversary season. The first performances were given on 29, 30 and 31 March 1996 by them, under Edo de Waart , in Heinz Hall, Pittsburgh. A fine recording, with the composer conducting the BBC Philharmonic, is coupled with the Violin Concerto (see above), on Chandos 9915. According to the composer:

> The Concerto for Orchestra was the first work I wrote after a lengthy recovery from major surgery. The tremendous feeling of relief and renewed energy certainly helped to make this a celebratory piece. Some of the ideas for it came to me when my wife Carolyn and I were on holiday in the South of France, where we visited Saint-Paul and the Fondation Maeght with its choice collection of contemporary paintings and sculptures. I particularly remember being amused and stimulated by the Joan Miró femme-oiseau paintings and his sculpture of a large moonbird in the garden.

Gaudiana (Symphonic Studies, composed during 2000–2001) is about the architecture of Antoni Gaudí. It was commissioned and first performed by the Orquestra Simfònica de Barcelona i Nacional de Catalunya at L'Auditori Barcelona (Spain) and conducted by Rumon Gamba on 2, 3 and 4 December 2005. Quoting the composer, once again:

> While thinking about the work, I revisited Gaudí's great unfinished cathedral La Sagrada Familia, and was unexpectedly overwhelmed by a feeling of intense sadness and prescient drama. The sight of the bare bones of this huge building, like an enormous empty carcass, reminded me of a primitive version of Piranesi's most compelling *Carceri*. Gaudí himself was intensely religious, a pious devotee of the Marian sect of Catholicism …

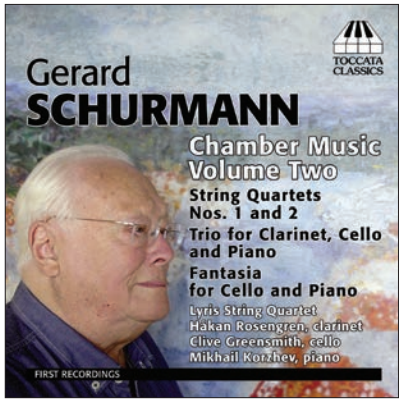
Among the composer's chamber and instrumental works, mention should be made of *Music for Violin and Piano* (Duo, Autumn Leaves, Leotaurus and Contrasts), released by Toccata Classics (on TOCC 0133) and the two lovely

String Quartets; the Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano and a Fantasia for Cello and Piano (all recently released, again by Toccata Classics, on TOCC 220).

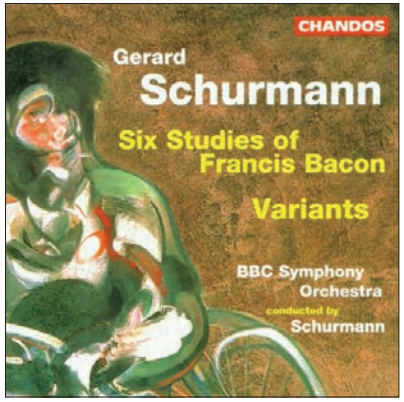
The song cycle *Chuench'I* for high voice and piano (1966, orchestral version 1967) is a setting of seven Chinese poems translated by Arthur Waley, commissioned by Marni Nixon and first performed by her, with Wilfred Parry, on 28 June 1966, at the Wigmore Hall, London. The title means, more or less, spirit of the Spring, and the poems convey various emotions engendered by the season.

Suggested listening

Music for Violin and Piano
(Toccata Classics Tocc 0133)



Chamber Music Vol. 2
(Toccata Classics Tocc 0220)



Six Studies of Francis Bacon
Variants (Chan 9167)

Violin Concerto
Concerto for Orchestra (Chan 9915)

The Gardens of Exile
(Silva Classics SILCD 6011)

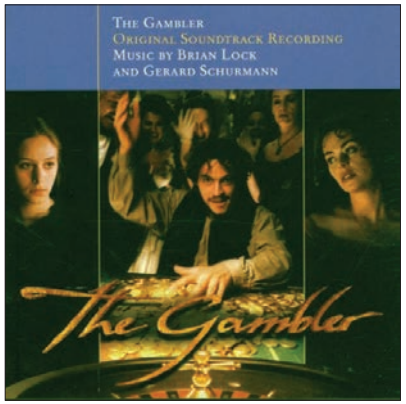
Film music

Aficionados of film music will certainly know of Gerard Schurmann through his many memorable contributions to the genre. He scored the music for, among others, *Man in the Sky*, *The Two-Headed Spy*, *Attack on the Iron Coast*, *The Bedford Incident*, *Horrors of the Black Museum*, *Konga*, *The Camp on Blood Island* and *Cone of Silence*. He was also notably involved with various major productions as orchestrator, including *Exodus* and *Cross of Iron*, composed by Ernest Gold, and David Lean's epic *Lawrence of Arabia* (starring the young Peter O'Toole in his breakthrough role), composed by Maurice Jarre. Scores for both *Exodus* and *Lawrence of Arabia* won the Oscar in their respective years, in no small measure due to Schurmann's majestic orchestrations. The latter score, however, deserves more than a passing reference, and anyone interested in learning more of the controversy surrounding it is recommended to read the article at: www.mvdaily.com/articles/2009/01/lawrence.htm

Schurmann's fine concert piece *Attack and Celebration* is adapted from two of the above scores (*The Two-Headed Spy* and *Attack on the Iron Coast*) and has been recorded by Cloud Nine Records, on Silva Screen / BMG FILM CO72/FILM CD072 / FILMXCD 309. It was written for the BBC Concert Orchestra, who gave the first performance in 1971, under Ashley Lawrence. In addition, his *Man in the Sky* – Overture (from the film of that name) has been released on Silva Screen LC7371. It was first performed by the Royal Ballet Sinfonia, under Kenneth Alwyn.

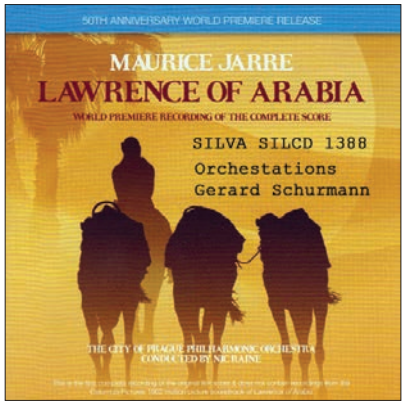
Suggested listening

The Lost Continent
GDI Records GDICD 015



The Gambler
Virgin Classics 5 45312 2

Claretta
CBS 70253



Lawrence of Arabia
Silva SILCD 1388

The Film Music of Gerard Schurmann. Cloud Nine Records CNR 5005

In conclusion

The main challenge facing contemporary composers is to find an original voice, without resorting to empty gimmickry, and to be accessible, without resorting to clichéd gestures. Gerard Schurmann has met this challenge with enviable success, with a steady flow of beautifully written, deeply felt works that place him at the forefront of modern music (although his music is still far less well known than it should be – an unhappy fate suffered by a number of distinguished composers). The good news is that, at the age of 90, he remains remarkably youthful, so we may still look forward to new masterpieces from him.

For more information about Gerard Schurmann, including news and complete work listings, visit:
www.gerard-schurmann.com

For publishing information, visit:
www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer/short-bio/1404

RAWSTHORNE WEEKEND 2014

Royal Northern College of Music, 124 Oxford Rd, Manchester M13 9RD

All events, and the Saturday evening buffet, are free: no need to book. All events will take place in the Carole Nash Room.

SATURDAY 25th OCTOBER

4.15 p.m. TALK by Peter Dickinson: 'Alan Rawsthorne and Me.' Peter Dickinson's edition and completion of Rawsthorne's arrangement for piano of his popular *Practical Cats* (the poems, of course, by T. S. Eliot) will be performed at the concert on Sunday morning, by **Eleanor Bron** (narrator) and Harvey Davies (piano).

5.30 p.m. CD launch by Prima Facie Records (Steve Plews)
A buffet will be provided between the CD launch and the concert, substantial enough to take the place of the traditional Rawsthorne weekend dinner; all without leaving the premises!

RNCM bar open 5.00–11.00 p.m.

7.30 p.m. CONCERT
New World Ensemble (Andy Long, Katie New, Katie Stables, Zöe Long) with Linda Merrick (clarinet); John Turner (recorder); Peter Lawson (piano)

String Quartet No. 3	ALAN RAWSTHORNE
Quartet for clarinet and strings	ALAN RAWSTHORNE
Rhapsody for piano quartet	WILLIAM ALWYN
Quintet for recorder and strings *(first performance)*	PATRIC STANDFORD
Snowfall in Winter for piano (Study No. 9)	JOHN McCABE
String Quartet No. 3	ANTHONY GILBERT

An exhibition of Rawsthorne manuscripts from the RNCM archive will be on display during the weekend.

SUNDAY 26th OCTOBER

RNCM cafeteria available for hot and cold drinks and snacks from 9.00 a.m. until 2.00 p.m.

11.00 a.m. CONCERT
Eleanor Bron (narrator); Lesley-Jane Rogers (soprano); John Turner (recorder); Linda Merrick (clarinet); Rosie Burton (bassoon); Harvey Davies (piano)

Practical Cats *Arranged for piano solo by the composer, completed and edited by Peter Dickinson*	ALAN RAWSTHORNE
Tzu-Yeh Songs	ALAN RAWSTHORNE
Clarinet Sonata	WILLIAM ALWYN
Moonbird, for solo recorder	GERARD SCHURMANN
Six Blake Songs	GERARD SCHURMANN
Moonsongs for soprano, recorder, and piano *(first performance of the complete version)*	JOSEPH PHIBBS
Moonlight, Op. 8, No. 1, for piano	EDWARD ISAACS
Fantasy for clarinet and piano	PETER DICKINSON
Sonatina for solo bassoon (*first performance*)	PETER DICKINSON
Bach in Blue for recorder, clarinet, and piano (*first performance of this version*)	PETER DICKINSON

Accomodation available just across the road at the Manchester Business School. Single B&B £40+VAT; Twin/Double B&B £60+VAT. 0161 306 1320 reception@mbs.ac.uk

Recent Appearances of Rawsthorne's Music on CD and DVD

Andrew Knowles

British Works for Cello and Piano vol. 3 – Chandos (CHAN 10818); released 28 April 2014

- Rubbra – Cello Sonata in G minor, op. 60 (1946)
- Rawsthorne – Cello Sonata (1948)
- Moeran – Cello Sonata in A minor (1945–47)

Paul Watkins – Cello
Huw Watkins – Piano

Ealing Studio Rarities vol. 11 – Network (7953987); released 5 March 2014

- *Lease of Life* (1954); music by Alan Rawsthorne. (A clergyman [Robert Donat] finds that he has only a year to live, and resolves to make the most of it.)

Also contains:

- *Lorna Doone* (1934); music by Ernest Irving and Armstrong Gibbs
- *Calling the Tune* (1936); includes a cameo appearance by Sir Henry Wood and the Queen's Hall Orchestra
- *Return to Yesterday* (1940); music by Ernest Irving

The William Alwyn Festival 2014

SUNDAY 5th & THURSDAY 9th – SATURDAY 11th OCTOBER

SOUTHWOLD ~ BLYTHBURGH ~ ALDEBURGH ~ ORFORD

Artists Include:

THE BLYTHBURGH SINGERS CONDUCTED BY ELLIS BELL

NATHAN WILLIAMSON (PIANO) • FENELLA HUMPHREYS (VIOLIN)

THE TIPPETT QUARTET • JOHN TURNER (RECORDER)

ILONA DOMNICH (SOPRANO) • SIMON WALLFISCH (BARITONE)

NIGEL FOSTER (PIANO) • ELEANOR BRON (SPEAKER)

JONATHAN RUTHERFORD (PIANO) • PHILIPPA DAVIES (FLUTE)

THE PROMETHEUS ORCHESTRA DIRECTED BY EDMOND FIVET (CBE).

BERNARD SAINT (SPEAKER) • LISA CASSIDY (SOPRANO)

Alwyn will be represented by instrumental, chamber and orchestral works, which highlight the wide diversity of his craft. Alongside these works will be music from the standard repertoire. Also, given that Alwyn was a highly respected film composer of some two hundred scores there will be a screening of one of his classic films.

For further details please contact Festival Director, Elis Pehkonen.
Tel: 01728-830531
E-mail: elis.pehkonen@mypostoffice.co.uk
or visit www.williamalwyn.co.uk