

THE SYMPHONIES OF GEORGE LLOYD

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George Lloyd is a prolific opera composer *manqué*, rather than a prolific symphonist: the intensely lyrical, cantabile nature of much of the writing throughout his twelve symphonies serves to endorse this assertion. The intermezzo-like movements, the opera buffa qualities in some of his finales and the feeling for the long line which runs through his most characteristically generous and flexible melodies all point to Lloyd being a born opera composer first and foremost.

He was born in St Ives, Cornwall on 28 June 1913 and was a student at Trinity College, London. He married Nancy in 1937 and they had no children.

He began to compose substantial symphonies rather than full-scale operas initially to restore his health and will to live after the tragic events of 1942: He suffered severe shell-shock whilst serving as a Marine on convoy in the North Atlantic. He suffered from shell shock and was mentally and physically ill for some time. It is highly likely that, had the War not intervened, Lloyd would have gone on to compose operas exclusively so that the early symphonies 1-3 would have been a youthful indulgence, a training exercise in developing orchestral technique before the main task of establishing himself as an opera composer. In the event, his aspirations in the field of opera were cruelly cut short and it is to his twelve symphonies that we must look to follow the development of George Lloyd as man and composer.

The first three Lloyd symphonies were all composed within a short period of time between 1932 and 1933 when Lloyd was a mere 19 years of age. The Symphony no 1 in A (1932) employs an individual use of the one-movement format at a time when this structure was uncommon in English symphonies (but since then taken up by composers such as Brian, Simpson and Rubbra and perhaps reaching its apogee in the superb Maxwell Davies Fifth of 1994).

The structure of Lloyd's First is Introduction (Vivace (A) - Andante (B) - Vivace (A)), followed by five variations on A and then a brief slow movement which develops B. The extended final Vivace section is a very free fugato on A.

Set against the grand late-Romantic symphonic tradition prevalent in England at the time (as exemplified by the opulence of Bax, Bantock, Rootham and Boughton), the brevity, spiky humour and formal originality of this first symphonic essay appears even more strikingly individual. The somewhat pert first subject establishes the overall character of this good-humoured and impish work, whilst the cantabile B theme forms the beautiful centrepiece of the Introduction and makes a welcome return "con fervore", acting as a slow movement before the concluding Vivace, a deft fusion of Scherzo and Rondo Finale set in a variation structure. The First Symphony has a piquant charm and a zestful exuberance which makes up for a certain repetitiveness (to my ears, the will o the wisp nature of the opening theme is made to bear the weight of rather too much variation in the extended Finale). However, no such reservation need be voiced about the excellent Symphony no 2 in E, completed in March 1933. The emotional range of this work far exceeds its predecessor and it is not surprising that this was the first of his early symphonies the composer decided to record. The first subject of the opening Con brio movement is a close relative of the main motif from the First Symphony and just as Puckish though more intrinsically ripe for growth and modification. The second subject, given out by oboe with accompanying pizzicato strings is airy and dance-like, whilst the third subject's opening triadic phrase is soon transfigured into a braying Mahlerian horn-call. Cogently argued and pleasingly proportioned, the first movement's modified sonata-rondo form impresses all the more coming after the First Symphony's deft evasion of traditional symphonic form.

The Largo second movement is a series of vivid variations inter-woven with a heartfelt melody first

heard on clarinets. The ornate, sinuous, arabesque-style writing for solo first violin is perhaps the most striking aspect of the orchestration and it is with this unsettling, densely chromatic sound that the movement comes to rest. The Scherzo-like *Alla marcia* third movement's opening theme has an intricacy of rhythm worthy of Havergal Brian but its elusive nature is firmly counterpoised by the treasurable Trio - a typical Lloydian theme, rich in melody, luxuriant in length and life-affirming in spirit. Its tongue-in-cheek air may be indicative of its composer's gently derisive view of so much sub-Elgar 4/4 time music around in the early 1930s.

The Finale, marked *Andante con Malinconico* is dominated by an atmosphere of introspective brooding. This mood is broken by an unnerving passage: a spry and nimble version of the Trio tune from the previous movement is given out by the piccolo over a perky staccato accompaniment on the clarinets. This tune is transmogrified into a bitter-sweet fleeting reminiscence, its remoteness underlined by its arrival in a different key from the accompaniment, a rare experiment from George Lloyd in polytonality. The effect of this sequence (a chorale tune is interrupted three times by the piccolo's continuing other-worldly snatches of the *Alla marcia* theme) is psychologically disturbing for the listener.

Despite the work's substantial length (around 40 minutes in the composer's recording) there is no hint of prolixity and this symphony marks the summit of George Lloyd's youthful symphonic compositions of the early thirties.

The Third Symphony in F of 1933 is a good deal more compact than its forbears: at around 24 minutes playing time it is the shortest entry in the Lloyd cycle. The economy of gesture is immediately in evidence - there is no introduction and the three movements are continuous, the urgent, onward-rushing nature of the piece precluding any breaks in the musical argument. The first movement is a prime example of cogent, direct and effective symphonic writing, whilst the slow movement's main theme, the heart and soul of the symphony, is one of its composer's most charming and disarmingly innocent inventions. The *Energico* Finale shows Lloyd's love of brass writing at its most exuberant, driving the music on towards a multi-decibel conclusion (a kind of blueprint for the ovation-hungry grand perorations of the later symphonies). Nevertheless, the gorgeous themes from the first two movements linger in the mind long after the last rowdy chords have faded away.

Symphonies 1-3 form a convenient sub-group within the Lloyd cycle not only because they were all written in 1932-3 (with minor revisions in the early 1980s) but also since they share several rhythmic and melodic characteristics: the first of each of the first movements are all liberally sprinkled with semiquaver-dotted quaver rhythms. Also, cantabile second subjects are frequently accompanied by triplet figurations, a Lloydian fingerprint which recurs throughout the cycle. It is fortunate for us that the composer decided to keep these early works as they all contain much to delight the ear and provide enjoyable portents of the great post-war Lloyd symphonies whilst retaining a fresh and vital originality of their own.

The composition of two expertly crafted and successful operas, *Iernin* (1935) and *The Serf* (1938) and the harrowing events of Lloyd's military service in the Second World War separate the Third and Fourth symphonies.

These experiences, musical and extra-musical go some way towards explaining the new maturity and depth of expression to be encountered in the Fourth Symphony, begun in 1945 and finished the following year. The work was composed in Switzerland at a time when George Lloyd knew he had to start writing music again or give up, following a total collapse of his health. So, with the constant support of his wife Nancy, the composer made a slow and painful recovery, the first artistic fruit of this restoration of health being the B major Symphony. Of deep personal significance to Lloyd, it is clear why he regards it as his finest symphonic achievement (he opted for his Albany recording of the work as his special choice when he appeared on Desert Island Discs in 1995).

Though recognisably the work of the same composer of the three preceding symphonies, the Fourth is on a different scale (weighing in at 65 minutes playing time) and the orchestra employed is a large one: a sizeable percussion section is used for the first time since the Symphony no 1. In a reference to his wartime experiences in the Arctic, Lloyd prefaces the Fourth Symphony with the description: "... a world of darkness, storms, strange colours and a far-away peacefulness". The first movement, marked *Allegro Moderato* deals with the darkness and storms of the quotation, but it is not all bleak; with characteristic fortitude and compassion, the composer also finds positive things to say. The themes of the first subject begin with a rising and falling brass and woodwind figure, following an initial portentous drum-roll, all of which seems to signal conflict, but the woodwinds provide a more cheerful motif replete with Lloydian dotted rhythm. Several violent climaxes are separated by icy black pools characterised by sul ponticello strings. In the aftermath of a fortissimo climax, the delayed appearance of the second subject occurs on first flute and oboe, a beacon of hope after the preceding maelstrom, its dolce marking pointing up its soothing effect on the music. This big tune is in the home key of B major and stays there on its second and final appearance later in the movement, Lloyd making the point that though the first and second subjects are polar opposites in character, they inhabit the same world.

The *Lento tranquillo* is an ear-catching evocation of the frosty calm of the Arctic seascape, though the beauty of the place is just as forcefully conveyed as its alienating chilliness. The ethereal opening and conclusion on icy strings, conveying a glacial stasis, frame a cantilena, perhaps originally destined for a projected opera - even without accompanying words, the beautiful melody first ushered in by the clarinets is eloquent and moving. This serene movement ends with a sublime coda, the message underlying the symphony revealed as one of optimism, an astonishing achievement for a shell-shocked war victim.

The elfin antics of the dancing *Allegro scherzando* third movement betrays Lloyd's Celtic roots (he is a Cornishman, born in St Ives). The Holstian magical opening themes achieve their quirky shiftiness by deft, abrupt changes of key and an absence of heavy brass. The leisurely second subject has a fantasy-like old-world charm about it, like a Lloydian interpretation of Mallarmé's *l'après-midi d'un faun*. It makes a welcome nostalgic second appearance complete with solo violin ornamental arabesques before the return of the opening balletics, the movement as a whole being in modified rondo sonata form.

The Finale provides a true catharsis – it is the longest of the four movements, lasting a good 20 minutes in performance. Its succession of brisk marching tunes provides a positive counterweight to the symphonic strength of the *Allegro moderato*, the profundity of the *Lento* and the goblin energy of the *Allegro scherzando*. The rousing conclusion does not sound a hollow note, its triumphant coda, as insistent as that of Beethoven's Fifth, has been fought for at no little cost.

A substantial amount of the Fifth Symphony (1947) was written in a barn at Corcelettes on the Lake of Neuchâtel in Switzerland. Lloyd speaks of this time during one of the hottest summers ever recorded as one of the happiest of his life and some of this restorative contentment and recuperative joy translates itself into the five-movement Fifth. Certainly, it is one of the sunniest of the Lloyd symphonies, mostly genial and benign in mood. The opening *Pastorale* eschews both heavy brass and percussion and the composer has admitted that it is the most difficult of all his symphonic movements to get right from a conductor's point of view, its mood of unrest clothed by surface serenity tough to pull off. The second subject is characterised by wide intervallic leaps and chromaticism, a perfect contrast to the mellow first subject whose themes proceed in a calm, flowing stream of consciousness. The following *Corale* uses a rather ecclesiastical-sounding theme underlined by a solemn cadential benediction from the clarinets, bassoons and lower strings (violins and violas are omitted in this movement). On its second appearance, the stately progress of this processional theme is underpinned by staccato bass clarinet and bassoons and pizzicato cellos and basses contrasted with more vital material marked by an urgent, tense horn motif punctuated by timpani strokes. At one point, a military style trumpet call

transports us back briefly to the world of the Fourth Symphony and the movement ends with a final warning from the horn motif resonating in the mind.

The dance-like central Rondo marked *Delicatamente scherzando* is second cousin to the scherzo of the Fourth Symphony. The delicate writing is almost Mendelssohnian in its gossamer textures, enhanced by the subtlety of the orchestration (only strings, woodwind, horns and trumpet are used) and subdued dynamics. Frequent markings of *leggiero* and *staccato* give a flavour of the pixie-like first theme. The less hectic Trio is spiced with celeste and harp colouring and has a Latin feel to it, emphasised on its fandango-like final appearance.

The fourth movement, entitled *Lamento* uses the full orchestra for the first time to add full symphonic weight to its *cri de coeur*. There is a culminating climax of great emotional power; like a tragic operatic aria, this true lament employs deeply human feelings. It is song-like movements like this which remind us forcibly of Lloyd's foreshortened career in opera writing and render its termination all the more regrettable. The end of the movement is especially magical - hushed strings alternate with woodwind underpinned by a repeated rising scale on the harp; as ever with this composer, the simplest of musical means packs the greatest of emotional punches.

The concluding *Vivace* is one of Lloyd's most exhilarating Finales, brightly and imaginatively scored and successfully banishing the grief of the preceding *Lamento*. A busy *Petroushka*-esque opening includes an important woodwind motif sounding like some form of Morse code. There are plenty of contrapuntal high jinks as in the Finale of Mahler's Fifth Symphony. The *cantando* second subject, first given out by flute and oboe, hints at self-mockery with its hesitant gait. Dramatic side-drum rim-shots exhort the orchestra to ever greater virtuosity, serving the same purpose as the cracking whip in the equally exciting Finale of the Eighth Symphony. The second subject is transformed into a noble melody of breadth and dignity before the final race for the tape in one of George Lloyd's most impressive codas, notable for its hair-raising acceleration. An impressive large-scale symphony, the Fifth effectively employs Sibelian continual development and a varied orchestral palette, the composer's generosity of spirit enshrined in his unique brand of symphonism.

On a much smaller scale than its exalted neighbours (both in duration and orchestration) the three-movement Sixth Symphony bids fair to being the most formally satisfying of all Lloyd's symphonies. A Mozartian grace and economy of gesture disarms the listener and should please those faint-hearted critics who shy away from the massive *tutti* pile-ups in the larger-scale symphonies. Dispensing with an introduction, the *Allegro* first movement plunges straight in with a business-like *staccato* theme on strings and lower woodwinds. A stalking, syncopated rising figure on lower strings, bassoons and bass clarinet is countered by another key figure on first violins covering two octaves, an effective but naively simple melody, absolutely typical of its composer. The remainder of this perfectly proportioned movement is a working out of this initial thematic group by means of varied orchestration. The hesitant conclusion to the movement is charming and perfectly appropriate, demonstrating a Ravelian restraint in its jewel-like orchestration.

The central *adagio* is cast in the simplest of forms, being a juxtaposition of two song-like themes. Once again, the keynote is simplicity, though of course this does not preclude depth of feeling. This music was written at a particularly low point in Lloyd's life and beneath the surface beauty of the opening F minor theme lurks a gentle melancholy all the more affecting for its reticent and accepting nature.

The closing *Vivace* movement successfully combines elements of *Scherzo* and *Finale*, its elfin character calling to mind Cornish legend; this is clearly the same composer who penned *Iernin*. The third subject is rather like a Cornish folk-tune and after a hair-raising flutter-tongued trumpet trill ushers in the final *tutti* restatement of this folk-like tune, the brilliant coda is brief and culminatory without being overblown or outstaying its welcome.

George Lloyd's Sixth Symphony is a model of formal perfection and emotional restraint, demonstrating a refinement of taste occasionally lacking elsewhere in the cycle (such as the codas to the Finales of the Third and Eleventh Symphonies). Whilst it is not on the epic scale of its neighbours, the Sixth is by any standards a fine symphonic achievement and is easily the best of Lloyd's small-scale orchestral works. No wonder the moving Adagio was chosen to be played on Classic FM during the composer's 80th birthday interview - it is the perfect introduction to George Lloyd's individual sound-world, encapsulating its rare brand of resilience without acrimony and a courageous message of hope for all who listen with open ears.

The three-movement Symphony No. 7 (written in 1957-9 and orchestrated in Summer 1974) is influenced by the story of the Greek mythological figure of Proserpine. However, it is fair to assume that something more personal than the Proserpine legend lies behind this deeply moving and tragic work and perhaps it is in this symphony rather than the Fourth that Lloyd fully grapples with his horrific experiences of 1942 and gives artistic expression to his inner torment: after completing this monumental work, the composer wanted to die and was taken off to hospital.

The Misterioso Introduction sets out the thematic material which will be more fully explored in the ensuing *Vivo ma leggiero* section starting with an unforgettable dry, ticking xylophone. There is a manic edge to the familiar dance-like theme in this first movement. A stern horn call provides another significant motif, whilst angular, falling clarinet passages precede a crescendo set in motion by winding strings. A *moto perpetuo* passage is initiated by solo flute, soon joined by the rest of the orchestra. A massive *tutti* climax collapses and sinks down back into the opening material from whence it came. The central *Largo*'s opening bare, exposed lines for clarinets, bassoons and violas is similar in mood and timbre to the opening material of the first movement of Mahler's Tenth Symphony. An important solo clarinet theme accompanied by murmuring strings and harp is taken up in turn by the oboe, violins and horn. The whole movement is a model of restraint, beautifully orchestrated, the Rosenkavalier-like high woodwind, celesta and harp effects looking forward to the last symphonies and the Symphonic Mass (1993).

The Finale, marked *Agitato* provides the necessary dynamic contrast. There is an impressive unwinding of the thematic material, broken down into its constituent parts before muted strings begin a terrifying *accelerando*, building up to a climax of such density it is almost tangible. A beautiful Epilogue of Straussian amplitude ensues and the hesitant ticking xylophone breaks through the texture; the magical *diminuendo a niente* ending is the complete antithesis of the usual Lloydian multi-decibel conclusion.

In many ways the work is uncharacteristic of its composer: there is a tragic intensity in the writing which eclipses the usual life-affirming qualities to be encountered in Lloyd's output; there is also no humour, an omission all the more striking and at times terrifying from this most genial and fun-loving of twentieth-century symphonists. The Seventh is, to my mind, the greatest of the Lloyd symphonies and an uncompromising masterpiece which cries out for performance. Exploring the darkest side of his psyche, it is Lloyd's tragic symphony in all but name and if that epithet evokes late Mahler, such an association is apt in such an overtly Expressionistic composition.

The Eighth Symphony, written in 1961 and orchestrated in 1965, is one of its composer's most characteristic utterances (composed yet again at a time when Lloyd's spirits were less than soaring - the wartime-inspired Scapegoat Piano Concerto no 1 was written between this Symphony's conception and orchestration). The Symphony makes a suitable introduction to George Lloyd's music as an appealing example of the composer's golden middle period.

The work begins with a slow Introduction consisting mainly of variations on a rising and falling six-note motif which recurs at the conclusion of this first movement, the main *Allegro* of which is a quixotic, quicksilver parade of contrasting dance-like and lyrical material. The slowly-beating heart of the symphony is an expansive and moving *Largo*, a close relative of the slow movements of the

Fourth and Seventh Symphonies. Episodic and restless, its frequent changes in tempo and time signature create a disturbing impression of a troubled mind seeking solace. A funeral march pervades the movement like a half-remembered horror time has rendered indistinct. The third movement Finale, a romping, fleet-footed Vivace in tarantella rhythm brings the symphony to an affirmative and life-enhancing close, but not before a brief but telling reminiscence of the slow movement marked Lento reminds us that the symphony has given expression to the darker side of its composer's imagination as well as his good humour.

Like Shostakovich before him, George Lloyd avoided a mighty Ninth in the manner of Beethoven, Schubert, Bruckner and Mahler and chose instead to write a short and colourful work, though not without its weightier moments, notably in the grim central slow movement. The Ninth Symphony, written in December 1969, employs a large orchestra with delicacy and finesse, the percussion section (requiring four players) used to vary the orchestral palette rather than providing displays of technical virtuosity. The composer writes in a prefatory note at the beginning of the score: "the first (movement) is about a young girl, she dances and is a little sentimental; the second is about an old woman who reminisces – grief-stricken; and the third is the merry-go-round that just keeps on going round and round".

The first movement is marked *Allegro con delicatezza* and is notable for its elfin breeziness. Both first and second subjects do not appear fully-armed, but grow into themselves, a subtlety ignored by those who regard Lloyd's symphonies as merely a string of "tunes". The movement ends quietly, the strings divided into eleven parts, including a solo violin and cello.

The central Largo comes as a shock: containing some of Lloyd's most dissonant music, this movement is a bitter comment upon the preceding high spirits. The composer even goes so far as to quote the second subject of the *Allegro con delicatezza* in a poignant flute solo over pulsating harp accompaniment. George Lloyd has tried this effect previously in the last movement of his Second Symphony where the central theme from the previous *Alla marcia* is recalled, but in the Ninth, the impression is far more powerful and disturbing, a simple tune being transformed into a haunting memory. The reminiscences of the old woman mentioned by Lloyd in his introduction are presumably of herself as the young girl of the first movement. This brief, fragmentary remembrance of things past is brutally cast aside, never to reappear, unlike the opening strident chords which recur throughout the Largo like a doom-laden reminder of some terrifying event (it does not require much psycho-analysis to deduce that the composer's wartime experiences are still being exorcised in his symphonies and it is perhaps George Lloyd rather than a fictional old woman who is reminiscing, grief-stricken here).

After the curdling sounds of the rather acrid Largo, the leap on the "merry-go-round" seems rather abrupt: perhaps there is an element of frantic farce here which goes deeper than mere high spirits - A Lloyd equivalent of Mahler's *Rondo Burleske* from his own Ninth Symphony perhaps? The scoring for this final *Allegro con Brio*, incidentally, is highly imaginative and effective even from this colourful composer - the opening bars, for percussion only, could be mistaken for a minimalist composition by John Adams before the brass chords burst in with a theme which starts off as though it could be a relation of the first subject of the concluding *Allegro* in Beethoven's Fifth (thus giving us a sly hint of what a monumental Ninth by Lloyd might have sounded like). The second subject is so typical of its composer it might be a self-portrait in music - deft, charming, warm and, above all, resilient. The movement confirms Lloyd's continuing interest in experimenting with and developing the range of his orchestration, allowing himself ever more exotic colours with which to clothe his melodies. Whilst not on the same level of inspiration as the great middle period symphonies, the Ninth is wholly Lloydian and demonstrates the breadth of expression his music encompasses. The disparate moods inhabited by the three movements lie side by side with scant regard to homogeneity yet somehow the whole symphony does hang together by dint of the unmistakable hallmarks of its composer's sound-world throughout the piece; this is perhaps Lloyd's greatest achievement in this inimitable work.

The Tenth Symphony, completed in March 1981, is scored for brass only (1 Piccolo trumpet, 3 B flat

trumpets, 1 Fl gelhorn, 3 Horns, 3 Trombones, 1 Euphonium and 1 Tuba). It is subtitled *November Journeys*, a reference to the visits to various cathedrals the composer made about the time he received a commission from the BBC for a piece for the Northern Brass Ensemble. It is a bold move on Lloyd's part to include a work solely for brass instruments within a symphonic cycle (Malcolm Arnold's *Symphony for Brass* of 1978, though roughly the same length as Lloyd's Tenth and equally taxing on its players resources is not included in that composer's nine examples in the genre). Yet, with hindsight it seems perfectly natural that George Lloyd should have written such a symphony since he has written many successful pieces for brass band over the last couple of decades, including *A Miniature Triptych* (1981), *The Forest of Arden* (1987), *English Heritage* (1989) and most recently and spectacularly, *King's Messenger*, first broadcast on Radio 3 in the summer of 1995. The first movement is an *Allegro moderato* in modified sonata form, What initially appears to be a first subject turns out to be but the raw materials for a fully-fledged theme which eventually emerges intact in the midst of the development section as a piccolo trumpet theme. The second subject is a sonorous melody on euphonium and the first movement consists of a working out of both themes in constantly changing instrumentation (the variety of sound achieved by Lloyd within the confines of the self-imposed limitations on his orchestration is truly remarkable).

The *Calma* second movement is a carol without words, an effective contrast to the sophistication of the previous movement. It is repeated three times, the coda to the carol theme being sufficiently distinctive to suggest an ABABA pattern. The following *Andante grazioso* contains two *Presto* outbursts within its intermezzo-like progress. At one stage, both the *Presto* material and that of the *Andante* are combined, a satisfying feat of imagination. The *Finale* is an *Energico* in 6/4 time with an ostinato-like theme on trumpets as its first subject and a Lloydian trumpet tune as second subject. A striking solo trumpet cadenza announces the coda which affirms B flat as the symphony's tonal goal, concluding a movement which began in B minor (the freedom in his use of tonality throughout the cycle is blithely ignored by those who persist in calling George Lloyd a 19th Century composer - a patently absurd epithet in any case!).

On its own terms, the symphony is a success and should be very popular with brass band players and enthusiasts and yet, the work is diminished by a comparison with its predecessors. Aside from a moment of dissonant pile-up towards the end of the *Finale*, there is little to threaten the genial, relaxed atmosphere of the Tenth Symphony, an accomplished piece of light music, its many felicitous touches making it a pleasure to listen to and, especially, to perform.

"Where's the Big Tune?" asked Daily Telegraph critic Geoffrey Norris reviewing a Barbican performance of George Lloyd's Eleventh Symphony conducted by the composer in September 1994. In fact, the question seems redundant since, by 1985, when this work was written, Lloyd appeared to be more concerned with working out motto themes and widening his orchestral palette than providing full-blown melodies. The symphony opens with two aggressive flourishes juxtaposed with an insistent triplet rhythm drawn from the depths of the orchestra which metamorphoses into a horn call, an important motto theme. What follows looks like the unthinkable - a Lloyd 12-tone row, but the composer remains faithful to his Romantic ideals, merely choosing the sequence of notes for their ear-catching, colouristic value rather than as representatives of any structural musical theory. A fleeting hint of the *Witches Sabbath* from the *Symphonie Fantastique* by Berlioz (a Lloyd favourite) leads to a massive climax from which the second subject emerges and is proudly passed around the orchestra. Just as a typical Lloyd peroration seems to be in the offing, the composer cleverly pulls the plug on the heated proceedings; clearly, the powerful conflict in this impressive opening *Vivo* will have to be dealt with in the *Finale*, whose mighty, deafening payoff is the conclusion so deftly postponed here.

The *Lento* second movement is virtually monothematic. Its agitated, chromatic theme is heard initially in the violins, arching over accompanying brass chords and the movement unfolds as a leisurely meditation upon this theme. It is one of the few movements in the cycle that does not feel quite symphonic: it could have wandered in from a light orchestral suite such as Lloyd's *Charade Suite* of

1969. The Scherzo-like third movement, marked *leggiero e brillante* is a gossamer piece of fairytale-telling with more than a hint of hispanic warmth in its main theme. A charming Fauré-esque solo for bass clarinet over accompanying harp and strings ushers in the beautiful Trio section, blessed with perhaps the most memorable tune in the whole work. The fourth movement (Grave) must be one of the least solemn funeral marches ever written. Echoes of a military band (vague memories of the composer's war service as a Marine bandsman?) are almost totally overshadowed by passionate string writing. A menacing rhythm returns but is soon banished. Perhaps George Lloyd is consciously attempting to bury the horrors of his past: if so, he succeeds in musical terms - the demons which are so terrifyingly real in his Seventh Symphony never really threaten to dominate this elusive and reflective movement.

A trumpet call heralds the arrival of the *Finale con esultazione* with a motto theme of stark simplicity. The exultant nature of much of the treatment of this theme is eventually tempered by a promising unison second theme for flute, oboe and clarinet. A variant of this theme is shared between first oboe and cellos and after a *ritardando* over a G pedal on timpani and double basses, a reminder of the tone row-like episode from the first movement appears on high woodwinds, glockenspiel and vibraphone - an eerie effect presaging similar passages in the Twelfth Symphony and the Symphonic Mass. A final statement of the second subject ushers in the percussion-led, multi-decibel coda, the biggest of all the Lloyd perorations. However, biggest is not always best and though the symphony's ending makes a impressive sound, the journey has not been so rewarding, as in the Fourth Symphony for example, to merit such a monumental final gesture.

With the Symphony No. 12 of 1989, George Lloyd returns to the one movement format of his First Symphony, bringing his series of symphonies full circle: thus, Lloyd's is a genuine symphonic cycle in every sense. After the huge climax at the end of the Eleventh, it is a relief to find that the Twelfth Symphony occupies a different world, more relaxed and calm (the opening is marked *tranquillo*). The A motif is given out by the violins in the second bar; its resigned and wistful air characterises the work as a whole. After a typically free cadenza-like clarinet solo, the B theme appears, also on clarinet, with murmuring strings and harp accompaniment. This graceful melody is passed to flute and violins, continually varied and imbued with new orchestral colouring. Of the four variations, the final *Vivo* has a festive, carnival atmosphere thanks to the participation of both xylophone and marimba, the actual material employed being a transformation of the previous Grave variation's lament. The extended *Adagio* section, the glowing centre of the symphony, contains a beautiful cello passage using the B theme, suggesting the same serenity to be encountered in late Richard Strauss. The A theme makes a dramatic entrance at the final climax of the *Adagio*. The scoring of the *Finale* is highly imaginative, bringing the extensive percussion into play. Another seismic conclusion to rival that of its predecessor is shrewdly avoided and a quiet *Lento* coda is substituted, its texture coloured by the unearthly sounds of celesta and harp, a foretaste of the more celestial parts of the Symphonic Mass of 1993.

The Twelfth is a gentle conclusion to George Lloyd's symphonic odyssey, its links with the composer's first essay in the form underlining the homogeneity of the cycle as a whole. Nonetheless, the serene nature of much of the writing renders the work contemplative rather than culminatory and the whole piece seems like a mellow Epilogue to the series, inhabiting a world far removed from the stirring epic journeys traversed in the great middle period symphonies.

When George Lloyd claims "I write what I have to write." (in an interview in the July 1993 issue of the BBC Music magazine), the statement rings true: so many of Lloyd's works were written without any prospect of their being performed that they must be the product of an inner compulsion to create, to communicate, to make a personal statement and, in some cases at least, to come to terms with his own terrifying wartime experiences. The stature of the Fourth, Fifth, and Seventh Symphonies, the peaks of the cycle, owes much to the thinly-veiled autobiographical nature of these works, all produced at no little cost to the composer's health as evinced by his hospitalisation shortly after completing the death-haunted Seventh.

It is perhaps significant that the least convincing, to my ears, of the symphonies (numbers 10, 11 and 12) were all commissioned works. Commissions are something of a mixed blessing for an intuitive composer like Lloyd and without the obsessive need to write coming unbidden from within, in my view, the composer cannot quite match the moving conviction which blazes through the middle symphonies, the commissioned works sounding more rhetorical than self-revealing. However, those critics who dismiss the later symphonies out of hand are probably the same people who find the Finale of Mahler's Seventh Symphony too cheerful. The truth is that if someone can go through what George Lloyd has endured (pain, years of suffering and illness topped off by thirty-odd years of professional neglect inflicted by the musical Establishment) and still produce a piece of knockabout comedy as charming but earthy as the Buster Keatonesque second subject of the Finale of the Ninth Symphony, then he must be the possessor of an uncommon spirit; the humour itself is of a rare order, hard-won and born of a fiercely determined will to survive.

Perhaps the bleak Seventh really is the true inner voice of George Lloyd and the later symphonies sometimes guilty of being something akin to autumnal divertissements or doodles from the pen of a master craftsman (though at nearly an hour's duration and employing the largest orchestra ever required for a Lloyd symphony, the Eleventh is certainly some doodle). Two of the composer's favourite scores are Strauss's *Elektra* and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*; both these works stretched their composers' technique to the limit and they turned away gladly from these extreme, terrifying precipices, Strauss re-embracing Romanticism with *Der Rosenkavalier*, Stravinsky moving on to neo-classicism. In Lloyd's case, the Seventh Symphony represents his abyss and since he has chosen to haul himself out of it by writing melodic, charming and good-humoured music, it seems churlish to say the least to want to throw him back down into the pit of his own depression to re-create his nightmares for the benefit of certain morbid critical tastes. Personal tragedy may be overcome in many ways, and George Lloyd has responded with courage, unfailing geniality and uncompromising integrity, providing in his works a welcome positive message of hope for those who find most contemporary music impenetrable and elitist.

Like Dvorak before him, Lloyd has turned with great success from the Symphony to choral works (the great Symphonic Mass (1993) and *A Litany* (1995)) and tone poems (*Floating Cloud* (1993) and *The Dying Tree* (1994)), but, notwithstanding the high quality of his three operas, it is his courageous and life-affirming series of symphonies which most comprehensively charts the progress and the recovery of George Lloyd as man and composer and is thus his greatest and most personal testament. He also composed four piano concertos, two concertos for violin and one for cello.

There is a George Lloyd Society which, among other things, lists all his works .

Throughout his life he was very hostile to 'modern' music and remained a tonal and traditional composer.

He died on 3 July 1998.

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