SOME MUSINGS ON LENNOX BERKELEY'S *SYMPHONY NO 3*
THE PREMIERE PERFORMANCE, 1969

Half a century ago, on Wednesday 9 July 1969, Lennox Berkeley's *Symphony No. 3* Op.74 was premiered at that year's Cheltenham Festival. Other works heard in the same concert included Albert Roussel's *Piano Concerto* (1927) with soloist Claude Helffer and Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830). Jean Martinon conducted the Orchestre national de l'office de radiodiffusion-télévision française (now the Orchestre national de France). The event was attended by Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester, and several local dignities.

This essay will put the *Symphony* into the context of its première, as well as examining the contemporary critical response. This is neither a technical analysis nor a programme note. In a future essay, I would like to explore the 1973 Promenade Concert performance, as well as the reception of the two subsequent recordings.

On 1 July 1969, the Investiture of Prince Charles as Prince of Wales had taken place at Caernarvon. Three days later Ann Jones, the home favourite, won the Ladies' Singles at Wimbledon against Billie Jean King. Neil Armstrong became the first man on the moon as part of the Apollo 11 space programme on 21 July. *The Daily Telegraph* of 10 July 1969 reported on the threat of rail strikes on British Rail's Southern Region and the likelihood of higher rail fares, and parliamentary trouble over the 'Redistribution of Seats Bill'. Top of the single charts was Thunderclap Newman's *Something in the Air*. The Number One album was Jim Reeves's *According to my Heart*. Competing with the live BBC Radio 3 broadcast of the Cheltenham concert, were *The Good Old Days* on BBC1 and *Coronation Street* on ITV.

Stewart Craggs's Berkeley source book notes that Berkeley began his *Symphony No.3* during December 1968, and, completed it in April 1969. Other works composed around this time include the *Windsor Variations* Op. 75 (1969), commissioned by the Windsor Festival Society. This has not been issued on record or CD, although a recording of a radio broadcast circulates amongst enthusiasts.

During April and May 1969, Berkeley had been on an extended visit to Paris, Monte Carlo and Toulouse. In the early months of the year, he wrote his first setting of *Ubi Caritas et Amor*. A second would follow in 1980. The previous year had seen the completion of the *Magnificat* Op. 71 (1968), the première of the *Oboe Quartet* Op. 70 (1967) and the song *Automne* Op. 60, no. 3 (1963). Towards the end of 1968, Berkeley finalised his *Theme and Variations for Piano Duet* Op. 73. All these have received at least a single recording,

although they can hardly be described as in the general 'classical' repertoire. Berkeley also wrote the unaccompanied choral piece '*The Windhover: To Christ Our Lord'* Op. 72, no. 2 (1968). There was the London première of the choral piece *Signs in the Dark* Op. 69 (1967) which awaits a commercial recording.

The *Symphony No.3* was dedicated to Antony and Lili Hornby. Anthony was a stock-broker and art collector and Lili was a dancer (Powell, 1995, p. 224). The miniature score was published in 1971 by J & W Chester, priced £2.50.

The main critical contention of the *Symphony No. 3* (which is cast in one single movement) is its concentration of material and the subtle balance between aggression and introspection. The work is far removed from the expansive *Symphony No. 1* (1940) and *Symphony No. 4* (1978). The utilisation of Berkeley's own version of serialism has given it 'a greater urgency without sacrificing [its] lyrical qualities.' (Dickinson, liner n ote, Lyrita SRCD.226). As cited by Tony Scotland in his *Lennox and Freda* (p. 431) Berkeley regarded serialism as being 'useful as a means of developing musical ideas.'

Before the Cheltenham concert, Michael Berkeley contributed a detailed discussion of the *Symphony No. 3* to *The Listener* (3 July 1969), putting his father's new work into context. The Symphony, he wrote, still 'carries the marks of a style that is intricate and subtle, rather than grand or declamatory'. Yet there was no resemblance, either formally or stylistically, to its symphonic predecessors. The new work was characterised by 'a broadening of the emotional range,' and 'a stricter economy of material', first seen in the one-act opera *Castaway* (1967). It was striking for the use of thematic development prevalent in that work. Likewise the 'adventurous and striking' scoring was apparent in the *Magnificat* (1968). Although Debussy, Fauré, Ravel and Poulenc were all in 'evidence' in Berkeley's music, these influences had been 'severely censored, and directed into a private channel that now, more than ever, has its own individuality.' It had become a 'very personal' style which was never 'sensational.' The remainder of Michael Berkeley's article was largely redrafted into the première's programme notes.

Writing in the *Birmingham Post* (11 July 1969) K. W. Dommett reported that Berkeley's *Symphony* 'is a model of clarity of the kind commonly associated with the other side of the channel.' This repeats the commonly-held view that Berkeley is a francophile composer. On the other hand, Dommett was inclined to believe that the work had 'a quiet, distinctive Englishness' which was difficult to define. Dommett picks up on the monothematic construction of the *Symphony* and reiterates the programme note's statement that the material for all three sections of the work is derived from the 'triadic motto heard at the outset.' This

is based on six notes from the chords D minor and B major. Dommett felt that Berkeley's 'manipulation of this material is most ingenious, and the scoring is felicitous throughout.' Yet, there was a downside: 'the final impression is of a polite dissertation delivered in impeccable style, but without much inner conviction.' And the critics gave as an example the slow middle section, where 'the succession of ascending and descending figures fails to generate any real tension, or to convey any true sense of inevitability.' In contradistinction to Dommett, I find this section one of the most magical parts of the whole *Symphony*.

The *Guardian* ran two reviews of the Lennox Berkeley première. Edward Greenfield, writing on 10 July 1969, began by noting the 'sterling work' done by the Cheltenham Festival in commissioning new symphonies from British composers. He understood that Berkeley's *Symphony* stood in the Cheltenham Tradition and was 'highly professional', albeit taking a 'safe' approach to formal structure. Greenfield suggested that it was written with French orchestral players in mind, hence the 'strong and dramatic first performance' under the baton of Jean Martinon. He felt that the *Symphony* was actually 'more refined and French-sounding' than the Roussel *Piano Concerto*, which accompanied it on the programme. Berkeley's 'lessons' with Nadia Boulanger had been well learned.

I think that this is a fair assessment. I disagree with Greenfield's assertion that the slow middle section 'is disappointingly lacking in rhythmic interest': this sounds 'impressionistic,' and most contributes to the undeniably Gallic mood.

Peter Heyworth (*The Guardian,* 13 July 1969) gave an overview of the recent Cheltenham Festival. Commenting on Berkeley's *Third Symphony*, he remarked that the composer 'uses the well-tried device of a single movement that embraces three sharply defined sub-movements…[and] does so with undeniable mastery.' It produced a work where 'the argument is unfailingly coherent; the sound is full and lucid and nicely varied.' On the other hand, Heyworth wondered if the *Symphony* 'seem[s] to emerge from pre-packaged formulas' generated over a 150-year period. Berkeley's 'take' on this tradition was to create a piece that 'is a well-turned piece of precision machinery.' In Heyworth's view, this contrasted with Peter Maxwell Davies's 'harsh, angular and sometimes awkward … attempt to take possession of a new world of feeling and experience …' in his remarkable *St. Thomas Wake – foxtrot for orchestra on a Pavan by John Bull* (J. 78).

Martin Cooper (*The Daily Telegraph*, 10 July 1969) understood that Berkeley has created a symphony that upholds many of the traditions of 'strict intellectual coherence and fundamental unity … that mark symphonic thinking.' Like all the other critics, he had read Michael Berkeley's programme note. Cooper noted 'the clash of tonalities in the opening bars

is effectively the works germ or motto' which was often reprised either explicitly or 'lightly disguised.' He recalled 'openly lyrical sections', such as the 5/8 'meno vivo' introduced by three flutes. This, he wrote, was a 'happy … memory of a French musical upbringing.' Another lyrical moment was the 'full-throated Lento with its contrast of woodwind and divided strings'. Cooper's only censure referred to the 'excessive reliance on two-bar (question and answer) structures' in the final Allegro. This, he felt, was 'another legacy from the French school and more remotely from the Russians.' The performance under Jean Martinon was 'boldly eloquent and well-nuanced.'

After reviewing Alun Hoddinott's 'succinct and closely woven' *Sinfonietta No.2* Op. 67 (1969), Robert Henderson, writing in *The Musical Times* (September 1969) reported that: 'Perhaps even more compact and economical [than the Hoddinott] was the … specially-commissioned *Symphony* in one movement of Lennox Berkeley. Again, its three interlocking sections are each vividly defined in mood and colour but create a firm sense of inner coherence. For all three are based on the same simple conflict between one major and one minor triad, a conflict that is treated with considerable variety and resource, but with a deliberate concentration of thought and a typically Gallic lucidity of texture and expression.'

It seems that this 'Gallic' connection is always brought to the fore. Henderson added that Berkeley's *Symphony* 'sounded amiable, optimistic in tone and even rather benign in the presence of Peter Maxwell Davies's challenging and much more pessimistic *St Thomas Wake*.'

In addition to his *Birmingham Post* notice, Kenneth Dommett also contributed a review to the now-lamented *Music and Musicians* (September 1969), where he reported that of all the 'novelties' presented at the Festival, the Berkeley 'remains freshest in the memory.' This, he explained, was because of 'the assurance of its workmanship and the skill with which the composer manipulated his two basic triads and constructed from them a symphonic movement that, apart from the attenuations of the slow middle section, was concisely argued.' Alas, Dommett's final comment seemed to contradict what he had already said: that it had 'somehow failed to carry conviction' was its 'principal source of failure – although that is a relative term.'

Nevertheless the Berkeley *Symphony No. 3* remains the only symphony from 1969 that remains (tentatively) in the repertoire.

Finally, E. M. Webster (*Musical Opinion*, September 1969) was enthused by the new *Symphony*. He reminded his readers that the concert on Wednesday 9 July 'was largely a French evening', and that 'it was a gala occasion with royalty and civic dignitaries present'.

Webster felt that the music 'was suitably sparkling.' Turning to the Berkeley premiere, he began by suggesting that 'one has come to regard Berkeley as a composer of gentle etchings and sly pastiche.' However, this symphony revealed him in 'stronger mood' and 'at last he permits certain fierce emotional impetus to dominate his tightly-conceived construction.' It was 'much tougher and more forthright … than is usual from this composer's sensitive pen.'

Webster picked up on one of the key attributes of the *Symphony* – that , despite the six-note series, the 'argument progresses towards traditional tonality rather than away from it.' And he went on to describe this progress:

> *After a sharp, clear-cut opening statement, the conflict builds up to a restless, unresolved tension (with warring major and minor chording) and leads into a contrapuntal slow section in which there is some poignant and deep-centred lyric feeling. The third section is brought in by a massive orchestral exclamation and some swift excitable string scurries punctuated by fierce, orchestral tutti chords. But here the impetus unexpectedly slackens, and the orchestration becomes a trifle diffuse and fussy. However, a powerful climax ensues which brings back some of the strength that was lost, and the work ends with a fairly obvious and cheerful reconciliation.*'

Webster reports that the French orchestra 'had clearly taken trouble over [the *Symphony*] so that it came over clear and strong.'

In conclusion, a few years ago in an interview with Peter Dickinson on 27 November 1990 for Dickinson's *Lennox Berkeley and Friends* (2012, p. 266), Michael Berkeley stated, 'the *Third Symphony* is very powerful because it's muscular and taut. At that time, I was working a little bit with him and I can remember trying to tempt him to push out even further. I suggested the side-drum rim shot [a drum stroke in which the stick strikes the rim and the head of the drum simultaneously] on the last chord.'

In my own view this makes an effective coda to an absorbing symphony.

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Discography

Lennox Berkeley, *Symphony No 3* in one movement Op. 74, London Philharmonic Orchestra/Lennox Berkeley (includes Elizabeth Maconchy's *Proud Thames Overture*, Geoffrey Bush's *Music* (1967) for orchestra and William Alwyn's *Four Elizabethan Dances*, from the set of six), Lyrita SRCS.57 (LP) (1972). Symphony reissued on CD Lyrita SRCD.226 (1992)

Lennox Berkeley, *Symphony No 3* in one movement Op. 74, BBC National Orchestra of Wales/Richard Hickox (includes *Sinfonia Concertante* and Michael Berkeley, *Oboe Concerto* and *Secret Garden*), Chandos CHAN 10022 (2002).

Appendix I

Listed here are works commissioned or premièred at the 1969 Cheltenham Festival. Some of these have been recorded and others can be found on *YouTube* (accessed January 2019). Apart from Berkeley's *Symphony* and Peter Maxwell Davies's *St. Thomas Wake – foxtrot,* none seem to have established more than a toe-hold in the repertoire half a century later. Several have simply disappeared.

Lennox Berkeley, *Three Pieces for organ*, op.72 no.1 (first complete performance)
Lennox Berkeley, *Symphony No.3* in one movement Op. 74 (Festival Commission)
André Boucourechliev, *Archipel II* for string quartet (British Première)
Brian Brockless, *Fantasia, Adagio and Fugue* for organ (Commissioned by Sir Arthur Bliss)
Alan Bush, *Time Remem*bered, Op .67
Tristram Cary, *Continuum* (Festival Commission)
David Cox, *Out of Doors* for a cappella choir

Peter Maxwell Davies, *St Thomas Wake – foxtrot* for orchestra (British Première)
Jonathan Harvey, *Laus Deo* for organ
Alun Hoddinott, *Sinfonietta* No. 2 Op. 67 (Festival Commission)
Heinz Holliger, *Mobile* for oboe and harp (British Première)
Gordon Jacob, *Suite for bassoon and string quartet*
André Jolivet, *Controversia* for oboe and harp (British Première)
Daniel Jones, *The Ballad of the Standard Bearer* for tenor and piano
John Metcalf, *Chorales and Variants* (Festival Commission)
Jiří Smutný, *Two Pieces for oboe and harp*
Christopher Steel, *Anthem 'O Praise the Lord of Heaven'* (Special Commission)
Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Spiral*, for oboe and radio (British Première)

Appendix II

Most commentators assumed that by 1969 the symphony would have been dead – to be replaced by free-form works as promulgated by the leading composers of the avant-garde. In fact, the year 1969 saw at least ten British, Commonwealth or émigré symphonies composed, completed or performed:

Benjamin Frankel, *Symphony No. 5*
David Barlow, *Symphony No. 2*
Wilfred Joseph, *Symphony No. 3 'Philadelphia'* Op. 59
Roberto Gerhard, *Chamber Symphony 'Leo'*
Alun Hoddinott, *Symphony No. 4* Op. 70
George Lloyd, *Symphony No. 9* (première Manchester, December 1982)
Raymond Warren, *Symphony No. 2*
Malcolm Williamson, *Symphony No. 2*
Oliver Knussen, *Symphony in One Movement* (revised 2002)
Lennox Berkeley, *Symphony No.3* in one movement Op. 74
It is a sad fact that virtually all of these have disappeared from the current symphonic repertoire. Fortunately, about half of them have been recorded.

John France *became interested in classical music after performing as a 'pirate' in a Grammar School production of 'The Pirates of Penzance' in 1971. After hearing 'Down Ampney' at church he discovered the world of Ralph Vaughan Williams and the then largely undiscovered country of British music. Usually sympathetic towards the lesser-known composers, he regularly contributes reviews and articles to MusicWeb International and a variety of musical journals and magazines and has written programme notes for many concerts. Currently he maintains a British Music Blog – The Land of Lost Content [http://landofllostcontent.blogspot.com/]*