

# Arnold ROSNER

## ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLUME THREE

TEMPUS PERFECTUM: A CONCERT OVERTURE, OP. 109

SYMPHONY NO. 6, OP. 64

NOCTURNE, OP. 68

London Philharmonic Orchestra  
Nick Palmer

# ORCHESTRAL MUSIC OF ARNOLD ROSNER, VOLUME THREE

by Walter Simmons

During his fifty-year compositional career, Arnold Rosner (1945–2013) produced a body of work that combined diverse influences into a powerful, distinctly personal musical voice. His catalogue comprises works in nearly every genre, including three operas, eight symphonies, numerous other works for orchestra and wind band, several large-scale choral works and many chamber, solo and vocal pieces.

Rosner's musical language was founded upon the harmonic and rhythmic devices of the polyphonic music of the Renaissance and early Baroque. These roots can be found, to varying degrees, in virtually all his music. To them he added a free triadicism and exotic modalities, intensified in some works by more contemporary harmonic dissonance, combining this language with the lavish orchestration and emotional drama of late-nineteenth-century Romanticism. What makes Rosner's music worthy of serious consideration, rather than being merely an integration of earlier styles, is the way he shaped his unusual language to embrace an enormous expressive range – far broader than one might imagine possible – from serene beauty to violent rage. Illustrating the vast range of expression found in Rosner's music, the works on this recording run the gamut: in *Tempus Perfectum* the connection to early music is obvious, despite certain anachronisms; in the fierce modern Romanticism of the Sixth Symphony the connection is barely detectable; and the *Nocturne* reveals traces of early music within an approach that might be termed post-Modernist Impressionism – and yet, despite its fusion of seemingly incongruous elements, most of his music is readily accessible even to untutored listeners.

Born in New York City on 8 November 1945, Rosner took piano lessons as a boy, and soon developed a voracious interest in classical music. Some sounds in particular appealed to him – juxtapositions of major and minor triads, as well as

modal melodies – and before long he was working these sounds into music of his own. His family, fully aware of the remote prospects of success offered by a career in classical music composition, encouraged him to pursue more practical endeavours, and so he attended the Bronx High School of Science, whence he graduated at the age of fifteen, and then New York University, with a major in mathematics. But all the while he was composing: sonatas, symphonies, concertos and more – not that anyone was especially interested in hearing the fruits of his labours. His composer-heroes at the time were Hovhanness, Vaughan Williams and Nielsen, and their influence is evident in much of his earlier creative work.

Graduating from NYU before he turned twenty, Rosner then spent a year at the Belfer Graduate School of Science, continuing his studies in mathematics. But, no longer able to resist the inner drive to pursue musical composition as his primary activity, he entered the University of Buffalo the following September, with a major in music composition. He took this step in 1966, when serialism was the dominant style in university music departments, and young composers were often coerced, directly or indirectly, into adopting it. Rosner often recounted how the Buffalo faculty dismissed his creative efforts with varying degrees of contempt. Later, in describing his educational experience there, he would say that he ‘learned almost nothing’ from these pedants. Although most of his peers capitulated to the pressure to embrace the *style du jour*, Rosner was adamantly opposed to serialism and stubbornly refused to accept a view of music that violated his most fervently held artistic values. And so, in response, his department repeatedly rejected the large orchestral work he had submitted as his dissertation. Realising that they would never accept the kind of music he considered meaningful, he gave up the notion of a doctorate in composition, and decided instead to pursue a degree in music theory, with a dissertation – the first ever – on the music of Alan Hovhanness. He completed this task successfully, and in the process became the first recipient of a doctorate in music granted by the State University of New York.

He devoted the rest of his life to writing the music that represented his personal aesthetic ideals, supporting himself through academic positions at colleges in and around the New York City area. His most enduring position was as Professor of Music

at Kingsborough Community College (of the City University of New York), which he held for thirty years, until his death. During the course of his compositional career, his musical language gradually expanded from its idiosyncratic and intuitive beginnings, as the works on this recording illustrate. Arnold Rosner died in Brooklyn, in 2013, on his 68th birthday.

Rosner composed his *Nocturne* [1] in 1978, dedicating it to his former student Louis Blois, who later became a published authority on the music of Shostakovich and other Soviet composers. During the late 1970s Blois had been studying astronomy, and so Rosner sought in this work to suggest the movement of planetary bodies within the vastness of space. It begins by evoking a mysterious, swirling atmosphere, irregularly interrupted by sudden vehement outbursts. Gradually, melodic fragments begin to emerge, at first tentatively, then slowly taking shape within the ethereal backdrop. About halfway into the work, the melodic fragments coalesce into a passionate melody in the strings, still surrounded by the swirling gestures and textures. The melody develops further, achieving more prominence by the support of the rest of the orchestra. After a climax is reached, the intensity of the music gradually recedes into the eerie atmosphere with which the piece began.

*Tempus perfectum* is a term from the late Mediaeval period that referred to the rhythmic metre designated today by the time signature  $\frac{9}{8}$ . It indicates a metre of three beats per bar, each of which is subdivided into three smaller units. Rosner's *Tempus Perfectum* [2], composed in 1998, is a modern adaptation of the instrumental *canzona*, a genre that existed – with evolving meanings – for centuries. The point of departure for this piece is the type of *canzona* that flourished in Italy during the late Renaissance, and so the connections between Rosner's style and early music are clearly evident here.

Not surprisingly, *Tempus Perfectum* maintains a  $\frac{9}{8}$  metre virtually throughout, as the *canzona* theme pursues its course in a Neo-late-Renaissance manner. What is most unusual are sequences of triads – often in a different tonality from the *canzona* theme – that are superimposed over that theme at various points during the piece. These harmonic sequences, although written so as to conform to the  $\frac{9}{8}$  metre, audibly contradict it, as well

as conflicting with the tonality.<sup>1</sup> These harmonic sequences follow a course of their own, as each reappearance is successively longer and more fully orchestrated, until a climax of sorts is reached, after which the music diminishes in volume and speed.

Rosner composed his Symphony No. 6 in 1976, three years after its predecessor. The Symphony No. 5, *Missa sine Cantoribus super Salve Regina*, Op. 57, an orchestral Mass based (as the subtitle suggests) on the plainchant *Salve Regina*, is a work of transcendent spiritual ecstasy, an apotheosis of Rosner's unique adaptation of Renaissance polyphony.<sup>2</sup> Its successor is largely the emotional and spiritual antithesis of that work – an expression of the rage and bitterness that were significant components of Rosner's personality, musical and otherwise. Unlike much of his music, this symphony may be described as an example of the distinguished canon of American Neo-Romantic Symphonies, as represented by such composers as Samuel Barber, Ernest Bloch and Nicolas Flagello. The work is replete with so many striking events that a description such as that which follows can reveal only the broadest outlines.

The opening *Allegro agitato* [3] is an overwhelming expression of emotional turbulence that offers virtually no respite during its ten-minute duration. Revealing only the most remote connection to traditional sonata-allegro form, this movement displays some of the most ferocious and explosive music Rosner ever composed. The element of tonality – often irrelevant to his music – is largely absent. The movement opens with a bold statement of a motif, Ex. 1(a), characterised by a chromatic angularity unusual for this composer, with prominent dotted-note rhythms. This motif immediately launches a free development that spins off several related motifs. Among the most significant are Ex. 1(b), which features the 'Scotch snap' rhythm (a short–long pattern with accent on the short note), (c) a stepwise rising-and-falling motif, and (d) another stepwise motif that revolves chromatically around a pivot-note.

<sup>1</sup> Rosner's *Gematria*, recorded by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by David Amos, on Volume One of this series (Toccata Classics TOCC 0368), applies this technique much more thoroughly.

<sup>2</sup> Recorded by the National Radio Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, conducted by John McLaughlin Williams (and coupled with Nicolas Flagello's *Missa Sinfonica*), on Naxos 8.559347.

Ex. 1

(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



These four motifs are the essential thematic elements of the movement and are subjected to extensive development. This development proceeds through sections displaying marked dynamic contrasts, until a running passage builds gradually to a cataclysmic climax in which all four motifs are combined, with additional emphasis provided by generous contributions from the percussion. This climax is followed by a moment of relief featuring Ex. 1(c), before Ex. 1(a) brings the movement to a powerful conclusion.

The second movement, *Adagio* [4], evokes a hushed atmosphere before presenting a mysterious introductory theme played by the cor anglais (English horn), answered by the harp, followed by the clarinet. This theme develops slowly, gradually building to the presentation of the emotional highlight of the movement, a mournful melody first suggested softly by a muted trumpet, then stated in full by the strings. A second section follows, with a subdued melody characterised by trills and other ornamentation. This melody bears a slight connection to the rising and falling motif of the first movement. As it develops, the melody builds to a statement of some grandeur before it subsides. The introductory theme returns, first in the horn, then in the flute. A dynamic eruption highlights the introductory theme, now forcefully stated by the trombones, leading to a passionate restatement of the mournful melody heard earlier, building to a tremendous climax, extended considerably by a varied restatement of the introductory theme. As the climax recedes, the ornamented melody returns, bringing the movement to a hushed conclusion. Clashes of major versus minor harmony (one of Rosner's favourite devices) are heard throughout this movement, as are striking orchestral effects that contribute to the evocation of a mood of hushed solemnity.

The third movement [5], the most complicated portion of the Symphony, comprises several sections: *Grave*, *Allegro*, *Grandioso* and *Grave*. It opens with a full orchestral statement of a stern, stately theme, rife with major – minor conflicts. A variant of this theme is played softly by the flute, followed by a further variant by the solo trumpet. An *Allegro* follows, transforming the opening theme into a rapid pattern that starts with only a few instruments against an agitated running pattern that functions along the lines of a counter-subject. As other instruments enter, the first violins and trumpet initiate a *fugato* that builds in intensity and volume. After some development of the material, the

trumpets and lower brass follow with a canon featuring rhythmic augmentation of the main theme. The texture becomes more complex as additional elements are added, some in contradictory rhythmic patterns, as the fugal texture dissipates. Soon a more peaceful, flowing motif, hinted at earlier, is introduced by the cor anglais, followed by variants of both themes in the (French) horn, then trumpet, against a subdued background texture. These two themes are treated in alternation until the counter-subject reappears in *stretto*. Further development of all three ideas continues, leading to a grand return of the stately opening gestures, but with a remote variant of that theme, which increases in intensity until it stops abruptly. The final *Grave* section opens with a dramatic statement of anticipation, followed by an ethereal reminiscence of the various motifs of the movement. A series of strident, cataclysmic eruptions follows, in alternation with further hushed reminders of the previous themes in woodwind and brass solos. This alternation suggests a conflict between outbursts of rage and attempts at a self-soothing serenity. After a lengthy trumpet valediction, the symphony comes to a sombre conclusion.

*Walter Simmons, musicologist and critic, has written extensively on American composers who maintained an allegiance to traditional musical values. He is the editor of a series of books, 'Twentieth-Century Traditionalists', published by Rowman and Littlefield. He wrote the first two volumes himself (under the Scarecrow Press imprint): Voices in the Wilderness: Six American Neo-Romantic Composers (2004), which treated the lives and works of Barber, Bloch, Creston, Flagello, Giannini and Hanson, and Voices of Stone and Steel: The Music of William Schuman, Vincent Persichetti, and Peter Mennin (2011). As a staunch advocate of the music of Arnold Rosner, he is deeply familiar with much of his output; he and Rosner were close associates for more than forty years.*



**Nick Palmer** is the distinguished recipient of the Helen M. Thompson Award as America's most outstanding young music director. He is currently the music director of the Lafayette Symphony in Indiana, North Charleston Pops in South Carolina and the 'Evening under the Stars' music festival in Massachusetts; the principal pops conductor of the Altoona Symphony in Philadelphia; and the distinguished conductor-in-residence at Kentucky Wesleyan College. In addition, he has conducted the Detroit, Greenville, Huntsville, Jacksonville, Nashville, Salt Lake, Santa Barbara, Springfield, Tucson and Virginia Symphonies, the Boulder and Naples Philharmonics, the Chicago Sinfonietta, the Louisville Orchestra and other orchestras across the USA. Nick Palmer has also been active in Europe, where he has conducted the Europa Philharmonie, the Milano Classico Orchestra and the West Bohemia and Lausanne Symphony Orchestras, and in South America and Mexico, where he has conducted the San Remo Symphony, the National Orchestra of Bolivia, the Sophia Symphony, Sinaloa (OSSLA) and Monterrey (UANL) Symphony in Mexico, and the Medellín (EAFIT) Symphony in Colombia.



Recognised today as one of the finest orchestras on the international stage, the **London Philharmonic Orchestra** was founded in 1932 by Sir Thomas Beecham. Since then, its Principal Conductors have included Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. In 2017 Vladimir Jurowski celebrated his tenth anniversary as the Orchestra's Principal Conductor.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra has been performing at the Royal Festival Hall in the Southbank Centre since it opened in 1951, becoming Resident Orchestra in 1992. It also has flourishing residencies in Brighton and Eastbourne, and performs regularly around the UK. Each summer it plays for Glyndebourne Festival Opera, where it has been Resident Symphony Orchestra for over 50 years. The Orchestra also regularly tours abroad.

In summer 2012 the London Philharmonic Orchestra performed as part of The Queen's Diamond Jubilee Pageant on the River Thames, and it was also chosen to record all the world's national anthems for the London 2012 Olympics.

The Orchestra broadcasts regularly on television and radio, and has recorded soundtracks for numerous blockbuster films, including *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. It has made many distinguished recordings over the past eight decades and in 2005 began releasing live, studio and archive recordings on its own CD label.

Its website can be found at [lpo.org.uk](http://lpo.org.uk); its Facebook page is at [facebook.com/londonphilharmonicorchestra](https://www.facebook.com/londonphilharmonicorchestra); and its Twitter feed is [twitter.com/LPOrchestra](https://twitter.com/LPOrchestra).

*First violins*

Kevin Lin  
Vesselin Gellef  
Ji-Hyun Lee  
Geoffrey Lynn  
Sarah Streatfeild  
Catherine Craig  
Yang Zhang  
Rebecca Shorrocks  
Non Peters  
Jeff Moore  
Lasma Taimina  
Alice Hall  
Jacqueline Roche  
Rasa Zukauskaitė  
Eleanor Bartlett

Alberto Vidal  
John Dickinson  
Sioni Williams  
Kalliopi Mitropoulou

*Violas*

David Quiggle  
Laura Vallejo  
Richard Cookson  
Daniel Cornford  
Stanislav Popov  
Naomi Holt  
Martin Fenn  
Susanne Martens  
Isabel Pereira  
Fay Sweet

Helen Rathbone  
Philip Taylor  
Tom Roff

*Double basses*

Tom Martin  
Laurence Lovelle  
Charlotte Kerbegian  
Laura Murphy  
Jakub Cywinski  
Samuel Rice

*Flutes*

Joshua Batty  
Ian Mullin  
Stewart McIlwham

*Second violins*

Alison Kelly  
Joseph Maher  
Fiona Higham  
Harry Kerr  
Sheila Law  
Alison Strange  
Rebecca Dinning  
Kate Cole

*Cellos*

Josephine Knight  
Elisabeth Wiklander  
Santiago Carvalho  
David Lale  
Sue Sutherley  
Jane Lindsay  
Leo Melvin  
Alex Barnes

*Piccolo*

Stewart McIlwham

*Oboes*

Alun Darbyshire  
Jennifer Brittlebank

*Cor anglais*

Ild Jones

*Clarinets*

Anthony Pike  
Thomas Watmough  
Tom Lessels

*Bassoons*

Simon Estell  
Emma Harding  
Angharad Thomas

*Horns*

David Pyatt  
Martin Hobbs  
Stephen Nicholls  
Gareth Mollison  
Adam Howcroft

*Trumpets*

Philippe Schartz  
Anne McAneney  
David Hilton  
Paul Beniston

*Trombones*

Mark Templeton  
David Whitehouse

*Bass trombone*

Lyndon Meredith

*Tuba*

Lee Tsarmaklis

*Timpani*

Simon Carrington

*Percussion*

Andrew Barclay  
Oliver Yates  
Keith Millar  
Karen Hutt  
Feargus Brennan

*Harps*

Sue Blair  
Stephanie Beck

*Piano*

Catherine Edwards



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All music available from the Estate of Arnold Rosner; for further information,  
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