

Derek Bourgeois (1941-2017)
An obituary by Kenneth Shenton



A ubiquitous presence in British musical life for more than half a century, Derek Bourgeois, who died on 6 September 2017, was a prolific composer with an unerring ability to write seriously in a style that had immediate appeal. In successfully developing a highly personal post-Romantic idiom that, though reactionary, remained grounded in tradition, he created everything from small occasional pieces to an extensive series of large scale symphonic essays. While this suggests that composition came easily to him, nevertheless the high degree of craftsmanship was of an order not lightly won nor casually expressed.

Born on 16 October 1941, Derek David Bourgeois spent his formative years in Kingston upon Thames. Educated at Cranleigh School, his prodigious musical talents first came to the fore when, in 1958, he joined the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain as a tuba player. For four years, from 1959 until 1963, he read Music at Magdalene College Cambridge, studying with Philip Radcliffe and Raymond Leppard. In the company of Herbert Howells and Sir Adrian Boult, he further refined his talents when undertaking postgraduate studies at the Royal College of Music.

Two years later, Bourgeois began his professional career as an assistant master at his old school, moving to the University of Bristol in 1971. While there he conducted the Stanshawe Band, later serving as Artistic Director of the Bristol Philharmonic Orchestra. He also served as member of the Arts Council Music Committee and as Chairman of the Composers' Guild of Great Britain. In 1984, he became Artistic Director of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, founding the National Youth Chamber orchestra four years later. In 1994 he moved to St Paul's Girls' School as Director of Music.

Much that Bourgeois taught he practised in his own compositions. This was never truer than in his extensive symphonic output. Of the early works both the Fourth Symphony and the Sixth are programmatic. In the nine-movement *Symphony No. 4*, commissioned by Harveys of Bristol and subtitled, *A Wine Symphony*, all the main themes are associated with grape varieties. Like many good ideas it came to Bourgeois when in the bath trying to match his favourite wines with appropriate extracts from classical music. It opens fittingly with the sound of corks being drawn.

In a similar vein was the 1979 *Cantata Gastronomica*, written for mezzo soprano, chorus and orchestra. Here, setting a varied selection of poems on the subject of food, the work offers a characteristically comprehensive, if seemingly haphazard, anthology of twentieth century techniques. Earlier, he had created a stir with his first published composition, *Jabberwocky*, a choral extravaganza for Baritone,

Chorus and Orchestra. This setting of four poems from *Alice Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll, formed the centrepiece of Cranleigh School's centenary celebrations.

The directness that characterises so much of Bourgeois' music remained a prime feature of his instrumental writing. An early *Concertino for Clarinet and Strings*, composed in 1967, and first performed in Copenhagen by Radley College Musical Society, was the first of some seventeen such offerings. A *Concerto for Bass Tuba and Orchestra*, created in 1972 for John Fletcher, is a virtuosic *tour de force*. No less daunting were the many challenges inherent in the once popular *Euphonium Concerto*; this fine work was inspired by the playing of its dedicatee, Wendy Picton.

In 1974, Bourgeois was among the composers invited by Elgar Howarth, then Artistic Director of the Grimethorpe Colliery Band, to help modernize the brass band repertoire. The result was *Concerto No. 1 for Brass Band*, its three movements reflecting the composer's highly idiosyncratic approach. A *Second Concerto* soon followed, as did two challenging championship test pieces, *Blitz* and *Diversions*. Less demanding were a whole series of lighter occasional pieces, of which *A Barchester Suite*, adapted from incidental music to an earlier television series, proved a popular concert piece.

Six years later, Bourgeois was commissioned by Frank Battisti to write a major new work for the International Conference of Wind Bands held in the summer of 1981 at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. The resulting work, *Sinfonietta for Concert Band*, proved highly successful and attracted worldwide interest. Suitably emboldened, the composer went on to supply the wind band movement with a whole raft of similarly imaginative and triumphant offerings. These ranged from the more cerebral, *2001-A Wind Odyssey*, to the joyously ebullient, *Hafabra Overture*.

Maintaining the populist outlook is *Metro Gnome for Concert Band* and an ebullient dance suite, *Felanitz Fandango*. Contrast comes in the form of the much more ruggedly hewn *Concerto for Percussion and Concert Band* and, more unusually, a *Concerto for Piano and Concert Band*. Nestling neatly in between is the rumbustious *Lliria Celebration*, which in true Bourgeois tradition, puts a contemporary slant on the well-worn and traditional. Individual instrumental music of more moderate outlook regularly found its way into the practical syllabi of the major examination bodies.

For the organ, Bourgeois has contributed a number of distinctive essays. These include everything from an early idiomatically intense *Prelude and Toccata* to a restrained set of *Variations on a Theme of Herbert Howells*. Central to his output remains the magisterial *Symphony for Organ*, each of its movements cleverly and precisely imagined, its structures handled with care. From 1965 comes a delightful *Serenade*, dedicated to his first wife, the violinist, Jean Barry. Married that year, they first met during the 1950s when they were both members of the National Youth Orchestra.

In 2002, the couple retired to Mallorca. Sadly, she was increasingly stricken with the onset of motor neurone disease that, in 2006, would ultimately claim her life. While devotedly caring for her, Bourgeois sought release by returning to composition. Throughout these fifteen years, he added a remarkable 109 symphonies to the seven he had completed in the last century. These ranged from *Symphony No. 8*, subtitled *The Mountains of Mallorca*, to *Symphony No. 43*, written as a wedding present for his second wife, Norma Torney. They were married in New York in 2008 and she survives him.

Discography of Derek Bourgeois Symphonies

(from Michael Herman's British & Commonwealth Symphonies Discography)

Symphony No. 4, Op. 58 "*Wine Symphony*" (1978)

Norbert Nozy/Royal Symphonic Band of the Belgian Guides
HAFABRA MUSIC ES 47.367 CD

Symphony No. 6, Op. 109 "*A Cotswold Symphony*" (1988)

Norbert Nozy/Royal Symphonic Band of the Belgian Guides
(+ Borodin: Polovtsian Dances)
HAFABRA MUSIC ES 47.409 CD (2002)

Symphony No 8, Op.184a "*The Mountains of Majorca*" (2002)

Norbert Nozy/Royal Symphonic Band of the Belgian Guides
HAFABRA MUSIC ES 47.427 CD

Symphony of Winds, Op. 67 (1980)

Pieter Jansen/Marine Band of the Royal Netherlands Navy
(+ Alto Sax Concerto, Fribourg, March Winds and
Double Concerto for Trumpet, Bass Trombone and Band)
MUSICA MUNDANA MUMU 30T9 (2005)

Timothy Reynish/Ithaca College Symphonic Band
(+ Ranki: King Pomade Suite No. 2, Richard Rodney Bennett: Elegy for Miles Davis, Carroll:
Blackwater and Connor: Tails aus dem Vood Viennoise)
MARK CUSTOM RECORDING SERVICE 6733 (2006)

Sinfonietta for Winds, Op. 85

Rolf Schumacher/Sinfonisches BlasOrchester Bern
(+ Heins: Overtüre for Wind Band, Jaeggi: Triumph March, Weber: Concertino for Horn, Rossini:
Introduction, Theme und Variation for Clarinet, Grainger: Country Gardens and J. Williams: The
Cowboys)
TONSTUDIO LANZ CD 920629

The unrecorded Symphonies are: Nos. 1 in G minor, Op. 10 (1961), 2, Op. 27 (1968), 3, Op. 57 (1977),
5, Op. 68 (1980), 7, Op. 158 for Tenor Solo, Chorus and Orchestra "The First Two Thousand Years"
(1999), 9, Op. 185 (2003), 10, Op. 190 (2003), 11, Op. 195 (2003), 12 in C, Op. 197 (2003), 13, Op. 199
"The Unlucky" (2003), 14 in One Movement , Op. 200 (2003), 15, Op. 201 (2003), 16, Op. 207 for
Soprano Solo and Orchestra "Songs of Mallorca" (2004), 17, Op. 208 (2004), 18, Op. 214 (2004), 19,
Op. 216 (2004), 20, Op. 218 (2005), 21, Op. 219 (2005), 22, Op. 224 (2005), 23, Op. 226 (2005), 24, Op.
230 (2005), 25 in One Movement, Op. 232 (2005), 26, Op. 233 (2005), 27, Op. 235 (2005), 28, Op. 237,
(2006), 29, Op. 238 (2006), 30, Op. 241 (2006), 31, Op. 244 (2006), 32, Op. 245 (2006), 33, Op. 247
(2006), 34, Op. 249 (2006), 35, Op. 250 (2006), 36, Op. 252 (2007), 37, Op. 254 (2007), 38, Op. 256
(2007), 39, Op. 258 (2007), 40, Op. 259 (2007), 41 in C major, Op. 261 "Sinfonia Andaluca" (2007), 42,

Op. 262 for Soloists, Chorus and Orchestra "Life, the Universe and Everything" (2008), 43, Op. 270 "A Wedding Present for Norma" (2008), 44, Op. 273 (2009), 45, Op. 275 "What Ho! Symphony" (2009), 46, Op. 276 "A Dorset Symphony" (2009), 47 in One Movement, Op. 278 (2009), 48, Op. 280 (2009), 49, Op. 281 (2009), 50, Op. 284 (2009), 51 in A flat minor, Op. 286 (2009), 52, Op. 287 "The Halfway" (2009), 53 in C minor, Op. 288 "Sinfonia Semplice" (2010), 54, Op. 289 (2010), 55, Op. 290 (2010), 56, Op. 292 (2010), 57, Op. 294 (2010), 58 in One Movement, Op. 296 (2010), 59, Op. 298 "Percussion Symphony" (2010), 60, Op. 299 (2010), 61, Op. 300 (2010), 62, Op. 302 (2010), 63, 2012), 75, Op. 326 (2012), 76,), 91 Op. 334 (2012), 77, Op. 335 (2012), 78, Op. 336 (2012), 79, Op. 337 (2012), 80, Op. 338 (2012), 81, Op. 339 (2013), 82, Op. 341 (2013), 83, Op. (2013), 84, Op. 344 (2013), 85, Op. 348 (2013), 86, Op. 350 (2013), 87, Op. 351 (2013), 88, Op. 353 (2013), 89, Op. 354 (2013), 90, Op. 355 (2014), Op. 356 (2014),,, 92, Op. 357 (2014),,, 93, Op. 359 (2014), 94, Op. 360 (2014),,, 95, Op. 361 (2014), 96, Op. 363 (2014), 97, Op. 364 (2014), 98, Op. 365 "Organ Symphony" 2014, 99, Op. 366 (2014, 100, Op. 368 (2014), , 101, Op. 369 "The Sundial" (2015), 102, Op. 370 (2015), 103, Op. 372 "The Swiss Roll" (2015), 104, Op. 373 "The Esterhazy" (2015), 105, Op. 374 "Symphony of Classical Forms" (2015), 106, Op. 375, 107, Op. 376, 108, Op. 377, 109, Op. 379 (2015), 110, Op. 380 (2016), 111, Op. 382 "The Nelson" (2016), 112, Op. 383 (2016) and 113, Op. 385 (2016). There is also a Sinfonietta for chamber Orchestra, Op. 93 (1984), a Symphony for Chamber Orchestra, Op. 8 (1960) and a "Symphony for William" for Concert Band, Op. 212 (2004).