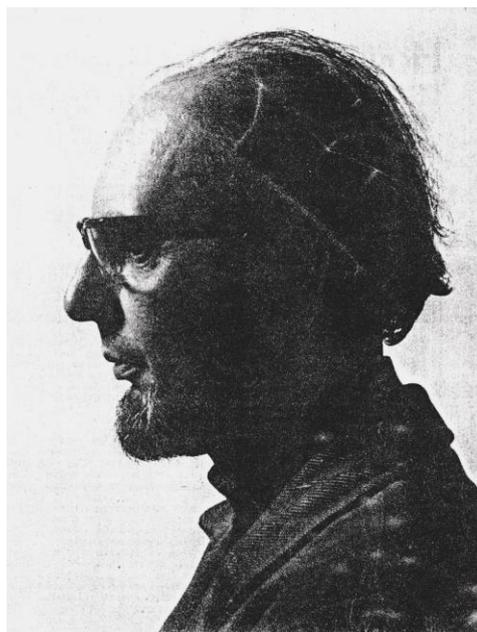


Anthony Hedges - An obituary

While a musician of wide artistic tastes and talents, Anthony Hedges, who died in June aged 88, has long remained one of the more shadowy figures of British musical history. Many may know the name, but perhaps very little more. Sadly, his provincial roots meant that he never received in his lifetime quite the recognition that was perhaps his rightful due. And yet, for many contemporary commentators, he was widely regarded as one of the most naturally gifted and least doctrinaire of all that immediate post war generation of composers who achieved so much in often difficult times.



Born in Bicester in 1931, the son of a children's thriller writer, Anthony John Hedges was initially educated at Bicester Grammar School. While there he became Organist of his local Methodist Church. In 1949, he won a place to read Music at Keble College, Oxford. There, over the course of the next six years, his tutors included H.K. Andrews, Frank Harrison and Thomas Armstrong. Singing with the Oxford Bach Choir, he played timpani in the University Orchestra, and also conducted the University Music Club Chamber Orchestra. In 1958, he served as Joint Editor of Sunday School Praise.

His abiding love of Yorkshire, its wolds, dales and moors, developed during his two years of National Service, from 1955 onwards, when as a member of the Band of the Royal Signals Regiment, he was based at Catterick. Demobbed in 1957 and newly married, he then spent five years as a lecturer at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. Teaching by day, reviewing concerts for various newspapers at night, while also supplying a regular feature column for *The Musical Times*, Sundays were invariably spent playing the church organ. Any spare moments were used for composition.

Hedges move to the East Riding as a Lecturer at the University of Hull in 1962, inspired a number of major works, not least the delightful *Kingston Suite*. *A Humberside Cantata* was completed, prematurely as it turned out, for the opening of the new bridge and sets a poem specially written by his distinguished university colleague, Philip Larkin. *Scenes From The Humber* is another suite which celebrated the bridge's baptism. For the bicentenary celebrations of William Wilberforce in 2007, Hedges created the majestic *Lamp of Liberty* for speaker, bass soloist, chamber choir and orchestra.

As a composer, Hedges constantly sought to work within a community and be an essential part of it. Such a philosophy solidly underpinned his large scale setting of *Psalms 104*, commissioned by York and District Brass Bands Association and bringing together choirs from numerous East Riding schools for its premiere in Beverley Minster, which Hedges conducted. He again worked with young performers on his impressive *Manchester Mass*. A full length opera, *Shadows In The Sun*, written for Lincolnshire and Humberside Arts Association, mixed professional soloists with an amateur chorus.

Family holidays inspired such delightful orchestral works as the *Four Breton Sketches* and the lively overture, *Heigham Sound*. Far more sombre was *October 62*, the composer here reflecting on the tensions of the Cuban missile crisis. From the same period was an early *Symphony*, later withdrawn. Hedges would return to the form in 1975, keen to work on a more expansive canvas. The result is a tautly argued three movement work, first broadcast in 1978 by Bryden Thomson and the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra. A *Second Symphony*, dating from 1997, still awaits a performance.

Not so his extensive range of choral music, both sacred and secular, nor his works designed for young performers of more limited ability. Regularly featuring in service lists both here and America was an early setting of the *Evening Canticles*, together with many popular anthems, everything from the unhurried simplicity of *Even Such A Time* and *Round Me Falls The Night* to the idiomatic intensity of *Open To Me The Gates of Righteousness* and *God Is Gone Up*. Among his numerous partsongs, the precisely imagined *Epitaph* for SATB voices, remains a beautifully judged essay in choral sonority.

Inhabiting a much more austere landscape are many of his early instrumental offerings. Works such as the *Four Pieces for Piano*, the *Sonata for Viola and Harpsichord* and the intensely dissonant *String Quartet*, are all serial in concept. More approachable remain the *Ten Bagatelles for Piano*, each one ingeniously structured and premiered by Martin Roscoe in 2006. Likewise, the delightful *Pieces of Eight*, written in 1982 and scored for eight pianists and four pianos. The elegant slow movement, later rescored and renamed *Cantilena*, becoming a rare example of Hedges' music appearing on disc.

Serving as Chairman of the Composers' Guild of Great Britain in 1972, two years earlier Hedges had founded the Humberside Sinfonia, serving them as conductor for a quarter of a century. Becoming Senior Lecturer at the University of Hull and then Reader in Composition, he retired from academic life in 1995. With his wife of more than half a century, Joy, running her husband's business affairs and publishing company from their elegant Georgian home, set amid the many delights of Beverley, their four children, two boys and two girls, have each made their own mark in the musical world.

Kenneth Shenton