

FORGOTTEN ARTISTS
An occasional series by Christopher Howell
25. IAN WHYTE (1901-1960)

I have discussed, during this series, the work of several Italian “radio conductors”, and have had to admit that information is scarce. Any attempt to track down the work of BBC “radio conductors” outside London meets with a virtual black hole. The reason seems to be simple. While the BBC’s flagship Symphony Orchestra gave regular public concerts and was available to make recordings, usually for HMV, the regional orchestras were tied to studio work. Their concert outings were few – the BBC Scottish Orchestra never appeared at the Proms during Whyte’s lifetime, for example – and were allowed to accept non-BBC recording engagements only in the later 20th century. The BBC’s own policy regarding its own recordings has always been to wipe clean and reuse all but the very few of its tapes judged to be of historical importance. So very little of these orchestras’ early work survives. Moreover, a somewhat inbred situation seems to have resulted. Such small evidence as I have heard suggests that the BBC Scottish Orchestra of the 1950s was reasonably comparable to RAI orchestras of that time, yet the lure of Italy and a public concert season enabled RAI to have its orchestras conducted by the likes of Furtwängler, Markevich, Munch, Cluytens, Barbirolli, Kempe and countless other international figures. The BBC kept these for London.



So what can we say of Ian Whyte, Head of Music for BBC Scotland from 1931 to 1945 and Principal Conductor of the BBC Scottish Orchestra from 1946 till his death? The name has always been known to me, but my own listening began in the later 1960s, by which time the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, as it had become, could be distinctly impressive under James Loughran. A little later, in the early seventies, I spent four years studying at Edinburgh University. I suppose there were numerous Scottish musicians up there whom I could have quizzed on Whyte, but you never think of these things until it is too late. It may be of some slight significance that his name was only occasionally mentioned, and in passing. It may be of some significance, too, that the chapter on Whyte in Donald Brook’s “Conductors’ Gallery” is the shortest in the book and the only one to cover a mere two pages¹. Perhaps he was not a man who left a great impression.

For my own part, two phrases stick in my mind. One is from a television interview with (not yet Sir) Colin Davis, I would say in the early seventies when he was fast becoming a national figure. Davis was assistant conductor to the BBC Scottish Orchestra from 1957 to 1959. Asked about this experience, he remarked that he was not allowed to conduct the classics – “those were the property of Mr. Ian Whyte”. He did not say this ruefully, I hasten to add. He was very grateful for the opportunity to get to grips with more modern works that Whyte was happy to relinquish. The phrase does suggest, though, that for Whyte an assistant was just that and not a second in command. Nevertheless, Whyte did well by his assistants, or they by him – (not yet Sir) Alexander Gibson (1952-1954) and Bryden Thomson (1959-1960) also spent some galley years in Glasgow. Thomson’s tenure, indeed, coincided with Whyte’s terminal illness, so for much of the time he was on his own.

The other phrase that stays in my mind is from my own father, an assiduous listener and concertgoer from his teens and a BBC employee throughout his working life. He told me several times that, whenever a concert under Ian Whyte was broadcast, the studio staff always had to grab an extra disc

¹ Donald Brook: *Conductors’ Gallery*, Rockliff, London 1946, pp.146-7. The photograph of Whyte is from this book.

or two to fill the gap at the end, because his tempi were so much faster than those of other conductors. But, beyond a generalized comment that the performances sounded “a bit of a rush”, he had nothing very helpful to add.

However, a small number of Whyte broadcasts have emerged, not so much in commemoration of Whyte as for the unusual repertoire or for the soloists involved. Tentatively, therefore, I am able to put together some sort of account of his life and music. Unless otherwise stated, information is from “Conductors’ Gallery”.

Life

Ian Dunn Whyte was born into a family of blacksmiths² on 13 August 1901 at Crossford, Dumferline, Fifeshire. He had early piano lessons from his mother and was allowed to play the organ at Dumferline Abbey (right) when he was ten or eleven. Schooling in Dumferline was followed by a scholarship to the Royal College of Music. Here he studied composition under both Stanford and Vaughan Williams. According to Brook, “both fascinated him, though Vaughan Williams seemed the more ‘pacific’ of the two” – hardly an impression confined to Whyte! I find no reference to conducting lessons, but the RCM conducting class was run from 1919 to 1930 by Boult, so Whyte must, at the very least, have come under his influence.



After leaving the RCM, Whyte returned to Scotland to become, as he put it, “musical henchman” to Lord Glentanar. This, Brook tells us, “entailed residence at Aboyne, a village near Glentanar House, and a variety of musical duties, ranging from Gilbert and Sullivan to Mozart’s ‘Seraglio’ and ‘Magic Flute’ with local talent, the conducting of local choral societies, acting as organist, and so forth”.



Glentanar, shown here in a postcard from around 1920, has an intriguing history³. Originally an unexceptional if extensive – 29,000 acres – estate, it was taken over in 1871 by a Manchester banker and MP, Sir William Cunliffe Brooks. He swiftly replaced the old farmhouse with a 23-bedroom granite mansion and refurbished most of the

outbuildings. True to aristocratic priorities, the dog kennels had central heating and electric lighting some sixty years before such amenities reached the workers’ homes, while stained glass windows were installed in the piggeries. No problem, presumably, for the Prince of Wales – the future King Edward VII – and his mistress Lilly Langtree, frequent visitors who were doubtless offered the best accommodation. Madame Langtry’s preferred pastime, in any case, was sliding down the ample staircase on a silver tea tray.

After Brooks’s death, Glentanar, now called Glen Tanar, was leased, and later bought, by George Coats, a Scottish textile magnate. He received a peerage in 1916, becoming the first Lord Glentanar.

² This information is given in an obituary of Whyte’s son Don(ald), [Scottish] Sunday Herald, 20 April 1996.

³ The following information is from “The Millionaire’s Playground”, an article in The Scotsman, 17 November 2008.

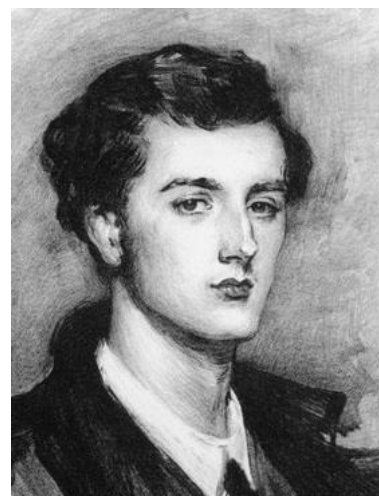
He died in 1918 and was succeeded by his son, Tom Tanar, known as the “Singing Peer”. Hence the need for a “musical henchman” to direct the opera productions in which he took part. Life for the privileged few was a never-ending party in those days. The Dowager Lady Glentanar’s diaries read like screenplay for “The Remains of the Day”. On 28 September 1927, for example – well within Whyte’s period as “henchman” – she “went to the Balmoral Ghillies’ Ball. Maudie and Lottie (her daughters) danced with the Prince of Wales and George, Tommie with the Queen, while I sat on the dais with the King”. Glen Tanar now belongs to the fourth generation of the Coats family. You will not find opera productions there today, but it sounds a good place for a wedding if can afford it⁴.

In 1924, Whyte married Agnes Mary McWhannel. Their son Donald was born in 1926. “Don Whyte”, though crippled by polio from the age of 12, became a leading Scottish journalist, as well as the creator of Bran the Cat for BBC Children’s Hour. A story related in his obituary gives another glimpse of the charmed life on whose fringes his father was living. “While still a healthy little boy, he encountered one day a girl of his own age who came looking for worms to go fishing, gaining the attention of his father but the resentment of the boy. Little Don raised a threatening hatchet but was quickly prevented from changing the course of British history. The little girl on Deeside was none other than the future queen of the realm, Princess Elizabeth!⁵”

Whyte’s next appointment must have seemed unglamorous by comparison with Glen Tanar, though doubtless the musical rewards were higher. In 1931, the BBC named him Head of Music for BBC Scotland. The BBC Scottish Orchestra, the first full time professional orchestra in Scotland, was instituted by Whyte on 1 December 1935. I have discussed in my article on Tibor Paul the unwisdom of being Head of Music of a radio organization and Principal Conductor of its orchestra at the same time. The first Principal Conductor of the new orchestra, in fact, was Guy Warrack, father of the music critic and Rachmaninov expert John Warrack. This did not mean, of course, that Whyte never conducted it. He also appeared as piano soloist – on 9 July 1936, for example, he broadcast Mozart’s D minor concerto with Warrack conducting.

In 1945, the Glasgow Herald⁶ reported changes in the Scottish BBC Music Department. “Mr. Ian Whyte has been freed from other duties to devote his whole time to conducting the BBC Scottish Orchestra, which has now been increased to symphonic strength, and will be heard frequently in the new Scottish Home Service, as well as in the other services of the BBC at home and abroad. Mr. Guy Warrack is leaving the BBC to take up outside work, after nearly 10 years as conductor of the BBC Scottish Orchestra. During that time he has conducted some 2000 broadcast concerts”. Warrack moved to south and conducted ballet at Sadler’s Wells from 1948 to 1951. He also wrote on music⁷. Later, he seems to have moved back to Scotland – he was the examiner for my Grade VII violin exam, which I took in Edinburgh in 1974 or 1975. Whyte took over officially in 1946, remaining in harness till his death on 27 March 1960.

Basically, therefore, Whyte’s biography from 1931 onwards would amount to a list of programmes conducted. It would be interesting to assemble such a list. Unfortunately the BBC Genome site, while listing numerous broadcasts by Whyte, does not normally tell us the works, or even the composers, played. The few glimpses we have show a healthy interest in Scottish composers, of his own generation and earlier.



⁴ See the official site at <https://www.glentanar.co.uk/about/our-story>

⁵ Obituary of Don Whyte, [Scottish] Sunday Herald, 20 April 1996

⁶ 7 August 1945

⁷ For example, Guy Warrack, *Sherlock Holmes and Music*, Faber & Faber 1947.

Some glimpses of Whyte's conducting

What appears to be the earliest recording on offer is a 1943 rendering of **Hamish MacCunn's "Highland Memories" op.30**. This suite, written in 1896, has three movements – "By the Burnside", "On the Loch" and "Harvest Dance". There is a certain amount of shellac crackle, but the recording is fair for the date and gives us a glimpse of a pre-war style of orchestral playing that Whyte's orchestra evidently conserved while the London-based bands were busy cleaning up their act. Ample use of string portamento and a flexible style of phrasing lead, in the first two movements, to a generous emotional response that, to these ears at least, sounds rather Italianate, rather like two Mascagni intermezzos for an opera on a Scottish theme. Maybe my impression is simply due to the fact that Italian orchestras were still playing Puccini and Mascagni this way into the 1950s. What is certain is that Whyte has one smiling with sheer pleasure at music that looks pretty bland on paper. He also gets plenty of racy bite in the third movement, though here he has a harder job in persuading us there is anything significant on offer.



An earlier Scottish composition is **Sir Alexander Mackenzie's Rhapsodie Ecosaise (First Scottish Rhapsody), op.21**, written in 1879. The BBC Genome site tells us that Whyte and the BBC Scottish Orchestra broadcast music by Mackenzie on 5 March 1953, 27 September 1956, 24 April 1958 and 18 December 1958. Without further details as to which work(s) he played, it is impossible to know which of these I have been listening to. Whyte's orchestra had followed post-war trends and cleaned up its style, but could still recapture the generous warmth of former times in the lyrical middle section. This is an upfront, free-spirited performance that gets the best out of a work that doesn't quite find Mackenzie at his most memorable. The opening section is brisk, but not too much so to prevent proper articulation of the dotted rhythms, while the final dance has a splendid, rollicking kick. Some pretty good articulation, too

John Blackwood McEwen's Three Border Ballads were completed in 1908. The third, "**Grey Galloway**", maintained a toe-hold in the repertoire for as long as McEwen was remembered at all. The BBC Genome site lists a broadcast by Whyte and the BBC Scottish Orchestra on 22 December 1955 – presumably the performance I have heard. Readers intending to download it from Art-Music Forum⁸ are warned that the version there plays an octave too low and stretches the piece to an incredible 24 minutes – the actual timing is 12. There is little point in proceeding unless you are equipped to correct this. Reel-to-reel tape recorders usually offered a choice of two or even three speeds. Evidently, the person who transferred the tape to digital support was mistaken as to the speed at which the original recording was made.

Whyte's timing of 12 minutes is exactly in line with a pencilled note on McEwen's personal copy of the score. Nevertheless, Alasdair Mitchell notes that "Recorded performances by the BBCSSO [conducted by Sir Charles Groves in 1995] of 14.35 minutes and the London Philharmonic Orchestra [the Chandos recording conducted by Mitchell himself] of 15.05 minutes suggest that McEwen's timing (12 minutes) is too short"⁹. Mitchell seems to have been unaware that a tape of Whyte's performance exists. He does mention, though, that McEwen suggested a cut of 8 bars. Without a



⁸ This site requires registration. It is well worth it if you are in search of rare material:

<http://artmusic.smfforfree.com/>.

⁹ Doctoral thesis: Alasdair James Mitchell: An edition of selected orchestral works of Sir John Blackwood McEwen (1868 - 1948), University of Edinburgh, September 2002, p.73

score available, I cannot say whether this cut is observed by Whyte but not by Mitchell. In any case, a mere 8 bars would not account for a difference in timings of 3 minutes. Whyte, as was his wont, produces an impulsive, free-flowing performance. He is expressive in the central section but without undue dallying. On the whole, he manages to avoid a certain laboured feeling that invades portions of Mitchell's reading. If he cannot prevent an impression of over-insistence at the climaxes, this is surely McEwen's fault, not his. Whyte nevertheless creates a big romantic sweep that, as with the Mackenzie Rhapsody, gets the best out of the music.

Moving on to the next generation of Scottish composers, **William Wordsworth's Piano Concerto, op. 28**, was written in 1946 for Clifford Curzon. The soloist at the first performance, in April 1947 in the Royal Albert Hall, was **John Hunt**¹⁰. Hunt was again the soloist, with Whyte and the BBC Scottish orchestra, for a broadcast on 21 April 1954.



I am not one to rubber stamp every obscure British work as a masterpiece, so I hope this will make me all the more credible when I say this really is at the top level of British piano concertos. It has a haunting gravity alternating with massive power and an atmosphere all of its own. The end is particularly striking. Why ever Curzon did not take it up, I cannot imagine. Fortunately, I do not see how the composer could possibly have been disappointed with John Hunt's performance if he played it as well in 1947 as he does here. He is fully in command, with rounded tone, never hard, in the forte passages, and beautiful voicing of the gentler moments. If there is enough material around, it sounds as if Hunt deserves "Forgotten Artists"

treatment. Whyte is fully sympathetic and, apart from a few horn slips, the orchestra plays well, with some crisp rhythms in the faster sections. The recording distorts in the climaxes but is reasonable for an off-air taping from 1954.

Leaving Scottish composers, a performance of **Gordon Jacob's Piano Concerto no. 1** (1927) is available on YouTube and at Art-Music Forum. This was a live broadcast given in Glasgow on 20th June 1956. The pianist is **Iris Loveridge**, with Whyte conducting the BBC Scottish Orchestra. Doubts were raised about this performance, on YouTube and on MWI's own message board, by Dr. Geoff Ogram, who knew Jacob from 1958 onwards and has made a study of his work. He has also contributed a valuable article to MusicWeb¹¹. Moreover, Alan Poulton's *Dictionary-Catalog of Modern British Composers* states that the first broadcast performance of this concerto was given in 1958 by Peter Wallfisch with the BBC Northern Orchestra under George Hurst. This claim was made



on the basis of information provided by Jacob's widow who, assisted by Dr. Ogram, made use of notes kept by Jacob himself, which made no mention of an earlier broadcast by Loveridge and Whyte. These doubts have now been cleared up by Christopher M. Dale of BBC Scotland, who has confirmed the above date from the archives of the orchestra¹². It seems strange that Jacob himself kept no record of this performance – maybe the broadcast was confined to Scotland and the composer never heard it. Dr. Ogram has informed me that the opening phrase of the YouTube/Art-Music Forum performance is played quite differently from the Wallfisch/Hurst one, of which he has a shellac copy originally in Jacob's own possession. There is no reason to suppose, therefore, that it is not that by Loveridge and Whyte.

¹⁰ Information from http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2009/Jan09/Wordsworth_Conway.htm#ixzz4x5rOKYwC

¹¹ http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2004/feb04/gordon_jacob.htm

¹² In an e-mail to Len Mullenger, forwarded to me, of 27th May 2021.

After stating above that the Wordsworth is at the top level of British piano concertos, I must say this one by Jacob, though shorter and lighter, rates pretty highly too. Jacob is thought of as a conservative, yet in 1927, this music must have struck a modernist note in a British context. There is a certain amount of post-Ravel, slightly gritty impressionism – Roussel comes to mind. There are also suggestions of the more melodic Prokofiev in third concerto vein. The finale contains hints that a big theme *à la* Rachmaninov is on the way, but this is wryly deflated to conclude in high spirits. Described this way, it may seem there are a lot of influences, but they all add up to a consistent voice – a voice we would probably recognize as Jacob’s own if we knew him better. The performance is excellent, scintillating, romantic and strongly felt as required. The finale opens with some snappy string articulation that I am beginning to recognize as a Whyte characteristic.



A performance of **Benjamin Britten’s Violin Concerto** by **Antonio Brosa** and the BBC Scottish Orchestra under Whyte was preserved on acetates and issued privately. It can now be downloaded from a blog called The Music Parlour¹³. The Spanish violinist Antonio Brosa (1894-1979) (see photograph) is held in considerable awe by violin fanciers, but unfortunately his recorded legacy is meagre indeed. What most people know about him is that he advised Britten over writing the violin part for this concerto, at a time when both men were living in the USA, and gave the first performance of it in 1940 with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Barbirolli.

The exact date of the BBC performance seems uncertain. The BBC Genome site shows that Brosa, Whyte and the BBC Scottish orchestra broadcast programmes on 15 January 1950, 9 April 1952, 30 September 1953 and 9 November 1953. As mentioned above, the BBC Genome site does not always list programmes or even composers, but we do know that Brosa played Mozart at the earliest of these, while the latest was a “Music to Remember” broadcast on the Home Service, so something popular would have been given. Presumably, therefore, the Britten was played on one of the middle two dates. The recording is not bad for its age and provenance and, as is their wont, The Music Parlour have not compromised it with ill-conceived attempts at “restoration”.

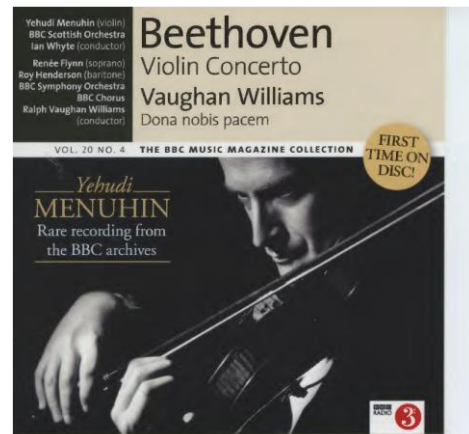
I compared the Brosa/Whyte performance with a 1969 live recording by Riccardo Brengola and the Milan RAI SO under Sergiu Celibidache, principally because I had been intending to listen to the latter for some time and this killed two birds with one stone. The Brosa performance is considerably faster – 27:11 as against 32:41. One is struck immediately by the passionate commitment of Brosa’s opening movement, though the music can well take the slower Milan performance, which has an elegiac elegance. For the rest, Brosa gives greater point to the scherzo and cadenza and gives greater direction to the Passacaglia, which sounds overlong in Milan.

We all know that Celibidache went in for slow tempi, but this is not a question of authenticity versus a personal slant. Brosa had every reason to know what Britten wanted, but so did Barbirolli, and the Olof/Barbirolli/Hallé version – 1948 but not issued until many years later – takes 31:12. Moreover, Olof had played the work at a Hallé concert on 2 July 1947 with Britten himself conducting, so he, too, should have known what Britten wanted. So, one supposes, did Britten himself, and his 1970 recording with Mark Lubotsky takes 32:17 – virtually the same as the Brengola/Celibidache. A glance through the recordings reviewed in MusicWeb-International shows that several recent performances take longer still – almost 36 minutes in one case. Only one version, a 1967 live performance at the Royal Festival Hall by Wanda Wilkomirska and a visiting Warsaw PO under Witold Rowicki, takes less than half an hour – and that by a mere 12 seconds.

¹³ http://themusicparlour.blogspot.it/2010/05/antonio-brosa-violin-plays-britten_21.html

So Brosa's forward-moving, passionate interpretation is on its own. Was this a result of Whyte's predilection for swift tempi, or did Brosa play it that way already in 1940? One thing we do know is that in the 1950s, Britten revised the violin part, with the help of Manoug Parikian, essentially removing Brosa's contribution. So had Britten moved away from Brosa's interpretation, too? This is not impossible. My own preference for Brosa's taut, virile conception, accompanied with a good deal of point by Whyte, should be read in the light of the fact that I do not really care for the work, except perhaps the first movement. Maybe those who feel differently are glad to savour it to the utmost. All the same, the fact that the violinist who gave the first performance played the work differently from later violinists is something to ponder over.

The question of the conductor's influence over a soloist's performance is raised once more by a performance of **Beethoven's Violin Concerto** which **Yehudi Menuhin** gave with Whyte and the BBC Scottish Orchestra at the second Edinburgh International Festival on 29 August 1948. This recording was briefly available as a CD supplement to the BBC Music Magazine¹⁴.



Menuhin's interpretation of this concerto took a fairly consistent trajectory over the years. The previous year, 1947, he had taken 44:11 with Furtwängler – they took just ten seconds longer in 1952. His last recording, with Kurt Masur in 1981, stretched to 46:56. Midway performances show midway timings: 45:09 with Klemperer (1966), 45:14 directing his own Menuhin Festival Orchestra (1977). With the more volatile Constantin Silvestri (1960) he breaks the mould – up to a point: 43:20. Yet here he is with Whyte despatching it in 40:31 – including about half a minute of applause. So the question is, did Whyte frogmarch the poor man through the concerto in record time, or did Menuhin, a great chamber musician and collaborator as well as soloist, relish the challenge of adapting to a different concept from his usual one?

Everything about the performance points in the latter direction. In the first movement, Whyte is terse, peremptory in fortes but not lacking flexibility, even poetry in the gentler moments. Menuhin fits serenely into this concept and does not give the impression that he would rather do it differently. The middle movement is grave, and the relatively flowing tempo means that they do not have to speed things up later. The finale dances exuberantly – and it is the violinist who sets the pace at the beginning. I recall attending a latish Menuhin performance in Edinburgh – around 1972 or 1973 – in which his tempo for the finale was so slow he had to speed up for some of the passagework, which simply wouldn't have made sense at his original tempo. He has no need to do that here. If any part of the performance seems over-hasty, oddly enough it is Menuhin's last movement cadenza. This, then, is a Menuhin performance *sui generis*, a curious anticipation of HIP trends many years later. If, like me, you think that the noble serenity of this concerto can be overdone, you should find this refreshing.

In the context of an international festival, the BBC Scottish orchestra emerges as a creditable local band. There is some trenchant articulation from the strings and the clarinet contributes expressively to the second movement. The drawback is a brace of queasy horns who make their presence felt wherever one might least wish them to. I must add, though, that, while I admired Whyte's forthright handling of the first movement, the finale *tutti* brought an air of tub-thumping. I wonder, therefore, whether a Beethoven symphony under Whyte, if one were to emerge, would not prove plain-speaking and energetic to a fault.

¹⁴ Vol. 20 no. 4

The only opportunity I have had to hear Whyte at work on a symphony is provided by his performance of **York Bowen's Symphony no.3, op. 137**.



Bowen's career as a symphonist has an unusual pattern. His first two symphonies were written in 1902 and 1909. They were appreciated at the time, and were appreciated again more than a century later in a Chandos recording conducted by Sir Andrew Davis. Not much had been heard of them in the intervening years. Meanwhile, in 1951 Bowen returned to the symphonic fray with this third essay. A fourth was still in short score at the time of his death. Given the post-Webern climate prevailing in 1951, it probably required more courage for Bowen to take up the story where he had left it 42 years earlier than it would for him to have reinvented himself as a purveyor of serialism. The issue for us today is whether these were warmed-up leftovers or whether he was still fired by a creative urge. It is the middle movement of the three that is most likely to convince listeners of the latter. It opens with a plangent cor anglais theme and builds up satisfyingly. I did not find it especially memorable, but it may stick in the mind with further hearings. The first movement starts impressively and then makes its point by being unusually succinct for a romantic symphony – more like a prelude than a full-blown traditional first movement. The busy finale is a less convincing proposition, nor does the contrasting lyrical theme achieve such heights of eloquence as to save the day.

Back in 1951, Bowen was still enough of a name for his new symphony to get a broadcast premiere that same year by the BBC Northern Orchestra under Maurice Miles. I do not know if this survives, but at least two later outings do. The same orchestra played it again under Vilem Tausky in 1954 and the BBC Scottish Orchestra broadcast it under Whyte some time in the 1950s. Unfortunately the BBC Genome site offers no clues to the date. Unspecified programmes by Whyte and the BBCSSO show up almost weekly, and the Bowen might have been in any of them. It is fortunate that at least two performances survive, albeit in crumbling sound – the Whyte sounds slightly better than the Tausky – since the score is now lost.

It will come as no surprise that Whyte, at 27:23, is somewhat swifter than Tausky, who takes 29:28. This timing hides, however, the fact that Whyte is marginally broader in the middle movement – 11:15 compared with Tausky's 11:09. In the first movement Whyte is passionate and forward-moving, taking 7:20. Tausky has a lighter touch at times and is more ready to relax when lyricism breaks out. He takes 8:04. Given that this is a tautly constructed movement, I would say that Tausky's approach is not unwelcome. Even points, probably.

In the middle movement, Whyte gives greater prominence to the cor anglais theme at the beginning and builds up steadily and inevitably. He brings considerable poetry to the final bars. Tausky is more fluid, even elegant. Just as he was ready to slow down at key points in the first movement, so is he inclined to speed up at key moments here. I'd be happy enough with Tausky if I had nothing else, but I think Whyte brings out the strength of this movement.

In the finale, Whyte seeks to convince us by sheer energy, and keeps things going when the lyrical theme comes along. Tausky is not much slower in the swift sections but he slows right down for the lyrical theme. He takes 10:15 as against Whyte's 8:47 – and a couple of seconds should be added to Tausky since the tape cuts short the final chord. Frankly, I do not think the lyrical theme is distinguished enough to justify Tausky's lingering. However, while I prefer Whyte, I am glad to be able to hear this rare work in two such different interpretations, especially given the unlikelihood of my hearing any other performance of it.

Even if a substantial cache of Whyte recordings were to emerge, I doubt if it could yield anything of greater value than the performance of **Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto no. 4** which was broadcast on

22 June 1965. The soloist was **Sergio Fiorentino** (below right) and Whyte was conducting, for a change, the BBC Northern Orchestra. This recording, in historical sound that one soon forgets, was originally circulated by the “Fiorentino man” Ernst Lumpe on a private discussion group. It is now available on YouTube.

Michelangelo’s description of Fiorentino as the “only other” pianist will be vigorously rebutted by fans of Horowitz, Rubinstein and others around in the 1950s and 1960s. When it comes to Rachmaninov’s Fourth Piano Concerto, this really does seem the only version that can stand up to Michelangelo’s famous recording, the only other one – of those known to me – that makes the work sound a masterpiece. Michelangelo adopts a tone of aristocratic, ironic detachment not unlike the composer’s own, and perhaps does it even better. Fiorentino is the passionately, personally involved romantic. He is freer than Michelangelo but, as I discussed in my article on Tibor Paul, there is a type of freedom which arises naturally and does not disturb the musical structure. Fiorentino’s textures, moreover, are as keenly analytical as Michelangelo’s – countermelodies are not lost in the general welter.



Fiorentino’s admirers may certainly regret that they cannot hear this enthralling interpretation in sound reasonably commensurate with Michelangelo’s studio recording of less than two years later. Fortunately, the orchestral support is nothing to complain about. The BBC NO strings obviously do not have the plush of the Philadelphia, or the fullness of the Philharmonia, which partnered Michelangelo finely under Ettore Gracis. Granted the thin sound, they are nevertheless secure and know their way about the style. Whyte, to judge from his Bowen, might have preferred the Michelangelo approach but, if so, he does not show it and collaborates fully and strongly.

The BBC’s embargo on recording work by its regional orchestras does not seem to have applied in the earliest years. On 4 February 1937, the BBC Scottish String Orchestra, conducted by Whyte, set down a number of sides for Parlophone dedicated to **traditional Scottish tunes**, many of them in arrangements by Whyte himself. The list is as follows¹⁵.

CE-8140-1	Inverness gathering (trad. arr. Whyte)	Par F-726
CE-8141-1	Glasgow Highlanders (trad. arr. Stephen); Keel row (trad. arr. Ian Whyte)	Par F-711
CE-8142-1	Flowers o’ Edinburgh (James Oswald; arr. Ian Whyte)	Par F-711
CE-8143-1	The red house (trad. arr. Ian Whyte)	Par F-726
CE-8144-1	Mulguy braes; Cameron’s lilt – strathspeys. Luggie Burn; Merry Andrew - reels (all trad. arr. Ian Whyte)	Par F-728
CE-8145-1	Circassian circle (trad)	Par F-727
CE-8146-1	Come o’er the stream, Charlie – waltz country dance (trad)	Par F-712
CE-8147-1	Moffat lassies – jig (trad); Teviot Bridge – jig (Alexander Givan); Jack alive – jig (trad) (all arr. K. Stephen)	Par F-712; Ariel Z-4982
CXE-8148-2	Eightsome reel - part 1. Kate Dalrymple (trad); High Road to Linton (trad); Loch Earn (Nathaniel Gow)); Mrs. Macleod (trad); Rachel Rae (John Lowe) (arr. Whyte)	Par E-11316(12’)
CXE-8149-2	Eightsome reel - part 2. Soldier’s joy; Far up the glen; Clean pease strae; Muileann Dubh (all trad)	Par E-11316(12’)

¹⁵ From William Dean-Myatt. 'Scottish Vernacular Discography, 1888-1960'. Draft. December 2012. Preview copy, retrieved here: <http://docplayer.net/56926152-March-of-the-black-watch-on-tammaai-trad-barren-rocks-of-aden-james-mauchline.html>. Dean-Myatt also notes that the orchestra set down other works of no Scottish interest.

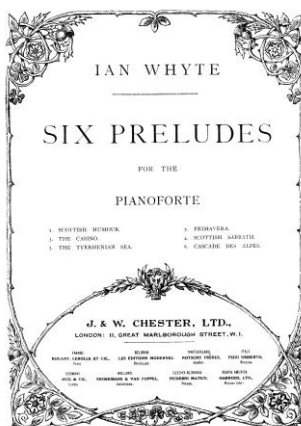
- CE-8150-1 The dashing white sergent; What's a' the steer; Sherremuir
(all trad) Par F-728
- CE-8151-1 Lord MacDonald's reel (Alexander MacDonald); Moray's rant
(trad) (arr. Whyte) Par F-727; Ariel Z-4982



One of these, Circassian Circle, can be heard on the net¹⁶ in a very clear-sounding transfer. Whyte's strings prove to be a nimble body, but if this is typical, it is definitely music for dancing, not for listening. The numerous unvaried repetitions, doubtless necessary to work out the dance figures, are wearisome to the armchair listener who, having duly admired the musicians' verve, is soon ready to pass on to the next thing.

Whyte the composer

Whyte's compositions include two symphonies, a piano concerto, two intriguingly entitled overtures, "The Treadmill" and "The Bassoon Factory", an opera, two operettas, a ballet, chamber music and over two hundred Scottish melodies arranged for various forces. One work which has occasionally been heard in recent years is the tone poem "Edinburgh", written in 1945. Readers who are registered with Art-Music Forum will find two versions of it there, both played by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, under **Bryden Thomson** on 13 July 1975 and under **Martyn Brabbins** on 28 March 1994. The music has a certain breadth and rolling grandeur, without quite breaking out into anything memorable. Brabbins is lively and does not short-change the listener, but it is Thomson, granitic and powerful, who manages to suggest there may be a further dimension to the music. Also to be found on the net are two of Whyte's SATB settings of traditional Scottish tunes with words by Robert Burns – "Auld Lang Syne" and "Ye banks and braes". They are sung by the University of Glasgow Chapel Choir¹⁷. They come under the useful rather than the essential category, but a choir with a good tenor section will surely welcome this version of "Ye banks and braes".



The two piano works that have come my way seem less attractive. The Six Preludes (Chester 1926) are dated November 1925 and are individually entitled "Scottish Humour", "Primavera", "The Casino", "Scottish Sabbath", "The Tyrrhenian Sea" and "Cascade des Alpes". Whyte was married in 1924, so perhaps the cosmopolitan titles are evidence that the couple travelled southward for their honeymoon. One wonders if they heard music by Casella or Malipiero along the way. Whyte's rather overwritten pieces seem to reflect the gritty post-diatonic manner of the former in particular. More than two decades later came "An Edinburgh Suite" (Ascherberg, Hopwood & Crew 1949). The three movements are "St. Giles", "Holyrood" and "Princes Street: Waltz-Reel". The suite is less attractive than the orchestral poem just mentioned, or maybe it is a matter of a skilful orchestral technique enabling him to disguise his not very distinguished material. The third movement, however, is rather

¹⁶ https://archive.org/details/78_circassian-circle_strings-of-the-bbc-scottish-orchestra-ian-whyte_gbia0024913a

¹⁷ <http://www.burnschoral.glasgow.ac.uk/ian-whyte/>

fetching, so a careful trawl through Whyte's output might not be fruitless. Anyone wishing to make such a trawl will find plenty to do. The Scottish Music Information Centre holds 668 Whyte manuscripts, mostly unplayed¹⁸.

Final thoughts

Brook's "Conductors' Gallery" chapter, brief as it is, did at least enable Whyte to share a few of his artistic credos. He believed that "music is a message from God to man, the composer and the executant being the channels through which it must come". Though he was opposed to government control of music and "the use of his art for propaganda purposes", since music is in any case "spiritual propaganda", he felt that a state subsidy for all the professional orchestras was necessary. Of the prominent conductors of the day, he commented: "Beecham for physical thrill; Boult for architecture and a good deal of spirituality; Barbirolli for energy – both physical and spiritual – and for orchestral tone building; but Toscanini – 'God's musician – for all! Toscanini is the complete summit for me". His advice to would-be conductors was: "(a) don't 'play' with 'temperament,' but concentrate on learning every detail of your job, and (b) learn the score and don't think of yourself!"

In an earlier article, I described Luigi Toffolo as a "good local man". Though I had slightly more material to go on with Toffolo, it may be fair to say that Whyte was another "good local man", one who did for Scotland what Toffolo did for Trieste. That he had a strong and wholesome influence on the development of classical music making in Scotland cannot be doubted. Whether a later generation would find in him an interpreter worthy of study, as opposed to an energetic and well-intentioned one, cannot be ascertained at the moment.

Yet some small evidence exists. The British Library Sound Archive catalogue lists the following (I have not relisted recordings discussed above):

Bantock: Hebridean Symphony, 1951? (incomplete due to gaps between side changes)
 Bax: Phantasy for viola and orchestra, Bernard Shore, date not shown
 Brahms: Serenade no.1, 30 August 1950, Edinburgh Festival
 Delius-Fenby: La Calinda, c.1959
 Dvořák: Symphony no. 5 (probably no. 9), date not shown
 Goetz: Violin Concerto, Louis Kaufman, 1956 (this has been issued on CD by Dante Lys)
 Harty: Violin Concerto, Marie Wilson, 27 January 1951 (incomplete, but duration 27:42)
 Mendelssohn: A Midsummer Night's Dream, Overture, 29 August 1948, Edinburgh Festival
 Parry: Overture to an Unwritten Tragedy, 1948?
 Rubbra: Morning Watch, 27 July 1956
 Rubbra: Viola Concerto, Frederick Riddle, 17 December 1955
 Schumann: Piano Concerto, Adelina De Lara, 29 May 1951, live
 Sibelius: Symphony no. 6, 13 June 1954
 Stanford: Irish Rhapsody no.5, 22 May 1948 (excerpts, but duration of 15:33)
 Stanford: Symphony no. 3 (fragment of slow movement, duration 01:21), 6 January 1942 (other parts of the middle movements in Leech collection)
 Stevens: Lion and Unicorn, 1953
 Stevens: Violin Concerto, Max Rostal, BBC Welsh Orchestra, date not shown
 Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto, Nathan Milstein, 30 August 1950, Edinburgh Festival
 Vaughan Williams: The Wasps, Suite, 27 August 1945 (incomplete, duration 14:17)

The orchestra is the BBC Scottish Orchestra unless otherwise stated. Whyte's speaking voice is heard in a tribute to Harry Lauder, 24 August 1949.

¹⁸ Reported in the (Scottish) Sunday Herald, 28 May 1993

The actual state of completeness and conservation of these recordings remains to be seen – the generally acceptable quality of the Beethoven concerto with Menuhin suggests that at least some of them should be on a par with contemporary offerings from other European radio networks. Maybe a Scottish-based company should look into this. Given the presence of rare British (and particularly Scottish) works and notable soloists, a 3-CD tribute to Ian Whyte and the BBC Scottish Orchestra including some of these plus (at least) the Brahms Serenade and Sibelius 6 would seem a just act of homage to a notable Scottish musician.

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[Index of all articles in this series](#)