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CHAN 4522

CHANDOS BRASS

BLACK DYKE MILLS BAND plays VOLCANO

and other famous test pieces

conducted by
Major Peter Parkes

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Robert Simpson (1921–1997)

1 **Volcano** (1978) **10:50**
Symphonic Study for Brass Band
Test Piece of the British National Championship 1979

Paul Huber (1918–2001)

2 **Symphonic Music** (1979) **9:10**
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Gilbert Vinter (1909–1969)

3 **John O'Gaunt** (1968) **9:29**
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Morley Calvert (1928–1991)

Introduction, Elegy and Caprice (1978) **10:32**
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4 Introduction 2:54
5 Elegy – 5:08
6 Caprice 2:30

Edward Gregson (b. 1945)

7 **Connotations** (1977) **11:56**
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TT 52:05

John Foster Black Dyke Mills Band
Major Peter Parkes

Volcano

Volcano
Born in Leamington Spa in 1921, but living and working in London for many years, Robert Simpson was one of Britain's leading composers. He completed numerous symphonies and string quartets, among other works, and was also well known for his books on Nielsen and Bruckner, together with a notable study of Beethoven's symphonies. He was drawn naturally to symphonic writing, and this work, completed just before Christmas 1978, is Simpson's second Symphonic Study for Brass Band. The first, *Energy*, was written in 1971. *Volcano* is in one continuous movement and draws most of its material from the interval of a perfect fifth, heard at the outset, quietly sustained. A cornet solo, over the fifth, maintains the mood, but gradually various stirrings begin, to rise eruptively and culminate in an immense explosion (marked *fff*). After this tremendous climax the music dies away mysteriously, with solos for cornet and soprano cornet, before ending quietly, in a sinister mood, with staccato notes on trombone and side-drum as if to suggest that, having happened once, the eruption could well happen again. The basic tonality is D, and the writing demands great skill and stamina.

Dr Simpson himself said, 'the Black Dyke Mills Band provided even more than I could imagine!'

Symphonic Music
The Swiss composer Paul Huber was born at Kirchberg, St Gallen in 1918. His first musical studies were undertaken at the Zurich Conservatory, and later he continued his studies under the distinguished Swiss composer Willy Burkhard, and with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. From 1951 Paul Huber was Director of Music at the Classical Grammar School in St Gallen, and during this time he emerged as one of the most distinguished of contemporary Swiss composers. His compositions include much choral music, especially a number of settings of the Mass, as well as an important Requiem. In addition, Paul Huber wrote several operas and much chamber music, but his symphonic works are perhaps his most important. Like Robert Simpson, Paul Huber was a serious and dedicated musician, and his *Symphonic Music* – written for the 1979 European Brass Band Championship as Test Piece – is a powerful work, of strong and direct character, which does not preclude moments of lighter texture and mood.

John O'Gaunt

Gilbert Vinter (1909–1969) was for several years conductor of the BBC Midland Light Orchestra, and was himself an accomplished and gifted composer and arranger of light music. The best of his serious work, however, is found among his compositions for brass band, of which *The Trumpets* (a big cantata for bass soloist, large chorus and brass band) perhaps is the most striking. Another major work, *Variations on a Ninth*, has also entered the standard brass band repertoire. *John O'Gaunt* is a tone poem inspired by the life of the younger brother of Edward, the Black Prince. John of Gaunt was one of the most interesting figures in British history of the thirteenth century, and his life clearly drew from Gilbert Vinter a colourful programmatic piece. The form of the work is straightforward, and is bound by a fanfare-like figure heard shortly after the beginning (itself a variation on the familiar chimes). It is possible to hear both the clash of battle and quiet, reflective moods in this effective work. The brief reference to 'Oranges and Lemons' before the reprise of the fanfare is a further connection with old London.

Introduction, Elegy and Caprice

Morley Calvert, born in Ontario in 1928, was one of the leading figures in Canadian music, as an educationist, conductor and composer. One of his main interests was music for bands, and this work, commissioned for the 1978 European Brass Band Championship as the Test Piece, was part of a series of major works. These include *Suite from the Monteregian Hills*, *An Occasional Suite*, *Suite on Candian Folk-Songs* and *Romantic Variations*.

Introduction, Elegy and Caprice begins dramatically with a figure in the horns above ostinato timpani. This leads to a boisterous *allegro* which uses the same material (much speeded-up). The slow movement, Elegy, is simple in structure: a lamenting theme is repeated four times, each occasion with different contrapuntal and harmonic colouring, and it leads without pause into the final movement, a rondo full of good humour and bustling activity.

Connotations

This work was commissioned for the National Brass Band Championship of Great Britain in 1977, and the performance during that championship by the Black Dyke Mills Band enabled the Band to complete three successive years as National Champions (only the fourth time in almost eighty years that a band had won three consecutive championships). It is one of the most striking and attractive works written for brass band, and is, in form, a theme and variations. However, the fact that the first variation actually *precedes* the theme (in the manner of Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*), that several variations run into one another without a break, and that ideas are recapitulated towards the end of the piece, means that *Connotations* is a much more subtly constructed piece than the typical 'theme and variations' work. The range of timbre and colour which Gregson (a prolific and successful composer for a variety of media, not just brass band) conjures from the brass band is very wide, and it is no wonder that this piece quickly entered the repertoire of the world's leading bands. There are nine variations, easy to follow, but in particular one should mention the semiquaver staccato writing in Variation 2, the tricky yet catchy 7/8 rhythm of Variation 5, the lyrical cadenzas for cornet, horn and euphonium of Variation 6, and the lively fugato of Variation 8. The final Variation is a powerful recapitulation of the theme before a brief reference to Variation 1 brings the work to an exciting conclusion.

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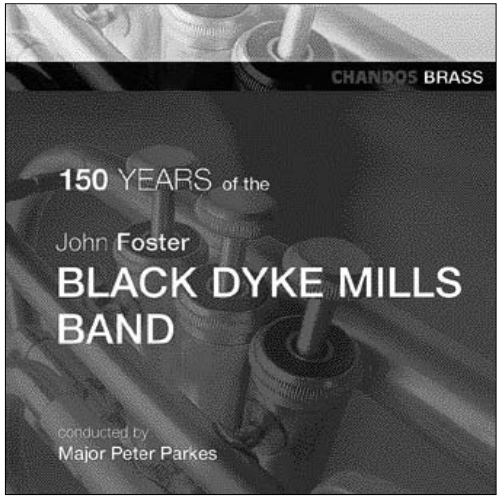

150 Years of the John Foster
Black Dyke Mills Band
CHAN 4516

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BRASS

VOLCANO - Black Dyke Mills Band/Parkes

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