

Chandos

1882-1982  
Centenary Issue

DIGITAL

# STRAVINSKY

## THE THREE SYMPHONIES AND ODE

SIR ALEXANDER GIBSON CONDUCTS THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

Chandos



THIS RECORDING IS SPONSORED BY GULF OIL CORPORATION

CHAN 8345/6

**Chandos**

2-disc set  
**CHAN 8345/6**



Gulf Oil Corporation, a major international energy company, further extends its support for the Scottish National Orchestra with the sponsorship of this recording. Gulf's support of the SNO began in 1976 and in 1980 Gulf entered into a seven-year major covenant with the SNO. Recent involvement with the Orchestra has included sponsorship of the concerts given in Scotland to celebrate the centenary of Stravinsky, and it is, therefore with particular pleasure that Gulf has sponsored the recordings of his three symphonies made by the Orchestra under its Musical Director, Sir Alexander Gibson.

Gulf Oil Corporation is pleased to be supporting the arts in the UK

© 1982 Chandos Records Ltd. © 1982 Chandos Records Ltd.  
Printed in West Germany/Imprimé en Allemagne · Made in West Germany  
CHANDOS RECORDS LTD, LONDON, ENGLAND

# STRAVINSKY

## THE THREE SYMPHONIES AND ODE

SIR ALEXANDER GIBSON CONDUCTS THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA





## RECORD ONE

### **SYMPHONY IN E FLAT Op. 1** (TT = 33:14)

- 1 I Allegro Moderato (10:13)
- 2 II Scherzo: Allegretto (5:40)
- 3 III Largo (9:45)

### **SYMPHONY IN E FLAT Op. 1**

- 4 IV Finale: Allegro molto (7:23)
- 5 **ODE, Elegiacal Chant in three parts** (TT = 9:49)
  - I Eulogy (3:29)
  - II Eclogue (3:11)
  - III Epitaph (2:58)

## RECORD TWO

### **SYMPHONY IN C** (TT = 29:05)

- 1 I Moderato alla breve (10:02)
- 2 II Larghetto Concertante (6:22)
- 3 III Allegretto (4:58)
- 4 IV Adagio - Tempo giusto, alla breve (7:26)

### **SYMPHONY IN THREE MOVEMENTS** (TT = 22:02)

*Piano Soloist:* Raymond O'Connell

- 5 I First Movement (untitled) (9:43)
- 6 II Andante: Interlude (6:12)
- 7 III L'istesso tempo - con moto (5:59)

Stravinsky's works, as everybody must know, are divided like Caesar's Gaul into three parts - Russian, neoclassical and serial. But these divisions are not watertight compartments; his whole output, the total sum of his creativity, forms a steadily progressing unity, to which each work makes a distinctive, varied, unique contribution. Three of the four orchestral works here represented fall within a seven year period (1938-45) of the second, neoclassical, phase, and come after the composer's move to America. The *Symphony in E flat* is one of his earliest works, and stands apart for that reason.

The neoclassicism of Stravinsky's second phase has frequently been criticised, even dismissed as irrelevant and reactionary, by the more radical European avant-garde. Never mind that it lasted for 30 years, and covered the central period of the composer's working life, from the age of 40 to 70; in spite of this there are many (such as Pierre Boulez) to whom it seems unacceptable that a new 20th century music could rest on, or evolve from, an old 18th century or classical foundation. This criticism is usually based on a misunderstanding of Stravinsky's creative purpose, which was one of order, and the revitalizing of tradition (a purpose, incidentally, which he shared with Webern, which partly explains the affinity Stravinsky felt with the latter's work). For him neoclassicism was not simply a retreat into the past, nor a form of academic pastiche, nor just quotation - or misquotation - of other composers' ideas, rather it was a re-thinking, and a re-application of certain aesthetic principles of the classical period.

Many of his neoclassical works are for the concert hall rather than the theatre, and they include some of his best-known and most performed scores, such as the *Symphony of Psalms* (1930), the *Violin Concerto* (1931), and the *Duo Concertant* (1932); they culminate in the two great orchestral works, the *Symphony in C* and the *Symphony in three movements*, first heard in Chicago and New York respectively. Indeed, after the Russian works of the first phase, the interest in Stravinsky's new compositions after 1925 was stronger in America than it was in Europe - which was one factor in his deciding to take up residence in that country.

### **Symphony in E flat Op. 1** (1905-7)

The first decade of the twentieth century, that pre-revolutionary period, was all-important in Stravinsky's life. Not until the material just coming to light has been closely considered can a biography be written; meanwhile we can only take the external evidence. In the early 1900s we see Stravinsky, in his early twenties, feeling his way as composer

with derivative piano pieces; in 1910 he stakes his claim to international recognition with *The Firebird*. His progress towards this spectacular flowering was a gradual one, and his *gradus ad Parnassum* begins with this *Symphony*, Op. 1. It marks the end of his apprenticeship.

The influences are clear; Glazunov, Tchaikovsky, and above all his teacher Rimsky-Korsakov. Yet when all such allowances have been made, there remain traces that are recognisably Stravinsky's own; for instance after the unexceptional and very ordinary sonata form of the first movement, the scherzo effects a switch to the world of the ballet, again in spite of the somewhat pedantic rondo-finale, one can detect a certain flexing of the young composer's technical muscles. He revised the scoring during the summer of 1907 after the première in April of that year,<sup>1</sup> and it was performed in its revised form thereafter. Stravinsky was not quite so dismissive and critical of his first symphony as he was of some of his other early works, he himself conducted and recorded it.

### **Symphony in C** (1938-40)

The symphony was commissioned in 1938 by Mrs Robert Woods Bliss, who the year before had also commissioned the *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto*. The work that Stravinsky was invited to write was destined (ultimately, not at first) for the Chicago Symphony, who under their German-born Director Frederick Stock were due to celebrate their fiftieth anniversary season in 1940/41. This challenging task came at a particularly difficult moment in the composer's life, when not only his first wife Catherine, but both his daughters Ludmilla and Milena, and finally himself, were afflicted with tuberculosis. He goes so far as to state<sup>2</sup> that he accepted the commission under pressure of medical debts, and that when in November 1938 his elder daughter Ludmilla died, he survived the weeks that followed only by working on the symphony - "which is not to say that the music exploits my grief".

Far from it. During these months he wrote the brilliant, rhythmically incisive first movement, which was finished on 17 April, 1938. Meanwhile, however, he suffered another bereavement, with the death of his wife Catherine on 2 March. Thereupon for the next five months he himself became an out-patient at the same sanatorium (at Sancellemoz, near Geneva). Finally in this most tragic year, he lost his mother on 7 June. It was against this background of personal loss that the pastoral

<sup>1</sup> *Dialogues and a Diary*, 134

<sup>2</sup> *Stravinsky: Themes and Conclusions*, 47-51



second movement of the symphony was begun on 27 March, and finished on 19 July.

A gap followed the completion of the second movement. Following the outbreak of war in September, Stravinsky sailed for America on 25th of that month. He travelled not as an immigrant, but to fulfil concert engagements all over the United States; and to give the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard, starting on 18 October. (These were later published as *Poetics of Music*). Then in January, 1940, he was joined in New York by Vera de Bosset, who after arranging a divorce from her husband Serge Sudeikin (a Russian painter and designer), became Stravinsky's second wife on 9 March.

Meanwhile, in spite of all these disruptions, Stravinsky had a deadline for the symphony; the premiere was due on 7 November in Chicago, and he himself would conduct. So the third movement was completed on 28 April, and the finale on 17 August – by which time the newlyweds were in California, after extensive travels through Mexico and Arizona.

The *Symphony in C* thus bridges two worlds – half-written in Europe, half-in America a year later – and as one would expect, change and tension are everywhere apparent; but not at the expense of the consistency of the four movements, which use the same material throughout. As if to underline this continuity, Stravinsky marks *attaca* between the second and third movements. And the underlying *motif* of the whole work, the three notes B-C-G, sums up the twin aspects of Stravinsky's musical thinking hitherto, namely the semitone, which lends itself to chromaticism, and the open fourth, which lends itself to more explicit tonality. This *Symphony in C motif*, so called because it occurs in this symphony in a more developed form, and as more of an inherent and primary factor than is the case elsewhere, also colours a number of other works at this time, notably the *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto*, and the *Concerto in D* for strings. It was a central thematic pattern (for the word "laudate") in the *Symphony of Psalms* (1930).

In this symphony, two main materials are used to exploit the *motif*: first the rhythm that Stravinsky derives from it, which occurs at the opening of the work, next an ascending scale implied in it. This is heard near the opening, starting at 2, and again in the fugato theme of the finale.

Ten years earlier, when he wrote the *Symphony of Psalms*, Stravinsky had sought to avoid the constraints and conventions of symphonic forms, as bequeathed by the 19th century. Now he no longer feels such hesitancy. The first movement of the *Symphony in C* is strict in its observance of classical principles of construction. The repeat of the main theme at 45 is exact. The slow movement is a regular A-B-A

structure, and in spite of the decoration, the pulse remains regular. The solo theme is again given to the oboe, recalling the first movement. But if the first two movements are orthodox in structure and tonality, the other two complement them. Metrical complexities appear in the third movement, which is a scherzando, if not a scherzo; a loosely stitched-together suite of dances, predominantly in triple rhythm, though this fact is anything but obvious, and the pulse-unit making up the triplets constantly varies between semiquaver ( $\frac{1}{8}$  note), quaver ( $\frac{1}{4}$  note) and crotchet ( $\frac{1}{2}$  note). The bustling bassoon solo at 104 came to him, he says, "with the neon glitter of the Californian boulevards from a speeding automobile."

The fugato theme of the finale is a massive one, combining the keys of C and G. The reprise of this, at 169, is shorter, varied, and tonally about as remote as it could be, based on D flat, the flattened supertonic. Stravinsky maintains this key-centre unchanged as long as he dare, while the tension builds and increases progressively. The release, when it comes, provides the structural climax of the entire work; a harmonic ellipse, at the anacrusis to 173, with just the alteration of B flat to B natural. This wholly Stravinskian modulation leads straight to a recall of the opening bars of the first movement, and thereafter to the customary coda-apotheosis.

Stravinsky's codas properly form a study in themselves. In the case of the *Symphony in C*, Stravinsky is here taking a retrospective glance at a whole world from which he had receded. As this coda is based on the same *motif* as the *Symphony of Psalms*, it can hardly fail to remind us of that work. Did not the composer inscribe both these works "À la Gloire de Dieu", thus associating them together in his mind? But of all his codas, this to the *Symphony in C* has a more intense poignancy than others (such as, for instance, that to *Apollo*, or indeed the *Symphony of Psalms*), because it has a personal as well as a musical meaning. Sustained, chordal, it uses the simultaneous key centres of C and G, like the finale theme itself.

Looking back on this work later (1965), when the serial style of his third phase had led him into fresh tonal discoveries, Stravinsky considered that "the key centres may be over-emphasised". That was one way in which the works of his second phase differed from those of his third.

### Symphony in three movements (1942-45)

The *Symphony in three movements* took over three years to write; sketches were begun in early April, 1942, and the first movement was completed by June, and scored by October. Other tasks then intervened. As Stravinsky was now living in Hollywood he had several contacts with film makers, some of

which led to his writing music with a view to a film. One such project occurred in 1942, when a proposed film about the Nazi invasion of Norway led to his *Four Norwegian Moods*. More relevant to the symphony was Franz Werfel's invitation to Stravinsky to contribute music to his film *Song of Bernadette*. It eventually transpired that the terms of the contract offered to the ever-watchful composer were "too much in the producer's favour", so this particular film proposal proved abortive. But Stravinsky used the music he had written up to then (for the "Apparition of the Virgin" scene) as the middle movement of the symphony. This was sketched out in a matter of four weeks (15 February – 17 March, 1943).

Thereafter a two year gap separates the third movement from the first two. It was not completed until 7 August, 1945 – the day after the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, thus ending the second world war. The premiere of the symphony was given on 24 January 1946, with the composer conducting the New York Philharmonic.

Whether or not the *Symphony in three movements* is a war symphony, there is no doubt that world events made a deep impression on Stravinsky. But it is not programmatic. He puts it this way: "Composers combine notes. That is all. How and in what form the things of this world are impressed upon their music is not for them to say."

The *Symphony in three movements* is more ambitious, and employs a slightly larger orchestra, than the *Symphony in C*; a third clarinet, double bassoon, bass drum, as well as piano and harp. Certain similar features link the two symphonies: the theme starting with a semitone, the use of scale passages, similar rhythmic patterns, the use of solo strings in the slow movement, like a *Concerto Grosso* (an idea that was to be developed in a later work, the *Variations*). But otherwise the later symphony is made of sterner stuff, and represents a further evolutionary stage. When Stravinsky played through parts of the first movement to the Polish composer Alexandre Tansman in 1942, he saw it as a Concerto for Orchestra, with a concertante part for the piano. Structurally it is a succession of small *Concertini* groups, in chamber music style, like the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*. The instruments divide at the development, starting at 38 with the horns, and the climax consists of all the groups coming together at 69, whereupon they separate again. A similar principle of construction may be seen later in *Movements*.

At the recapitulation at 88, Stravinsky reverses the order of themes. This procedure, unlike the *Symphony in C*, recalls the *Piano Sonata*. The first theme, when it is eventually reached

at 105, marks the point of arrival of the entire movement. Some of the scoring recalls *Le Sacre*, which Stravinsky was revising at this time. Harmonically, tonally and instrumentally the first and third movements are harsh, astringent, the slow movement is gentle, with the brass reduced to quiet horns only, the piano giving way to the harp, and chords made up of semitone clashes giving way to chords of whole tones.

If not specifically a war symphony, it was written during the war. The mood is tragic, indignant, and this is reflected in the semitonal harmony of the first and third movements. The comparative harmonic repose of the middle movement is gradually dissolved by an interlude consisting of a succession of chords, gradually re-introducing the semitone clashes, and thus preparing for the fury of the finale.

The events that activated Stravinsky's musical imagination were specific. Thus he tells us that "the first movement was inspired by a war film... of scorched-earth tactics in China. The middle part of the movement – the music for clarinet, piano and strings, which mounts in intensity and volume until the explosion of the three chords at 69 – was conceived as a series of instrumental conversations to accompany a cinematographic scene showing the Chinese people scratching and digging in their fields."

The third movement comes the nearest to having a war plot.<sup>3</sup> The beginning of the movement was suggested by newsreels of goose-stepping German soldiers. The square march-beat, the brass-band instrumentation, the grotesque crescendo in the tuba. The march music is predominant until the fugue, which is the stasis and turning point. The immobility at the beginning of the fugue is comic, so to Stravinsky was the overturned arrogance of the Germans when their machine failed. The exposition of the fugue, and the end of the symphony, were associated in his mind with the rise of the Allies. The conclusion of the work is tragic in its intensity; the final shattering chord, though grounded on D flat and not the expected C, is built from material already heard at the opening. The D flat itself springs from the Phrygian D flat of the second bar. The symphony is all of a piece.

### Ode (1943)

Sergei Koussevitzky commissioned two works from Stravinsky, the *Symphony of Psalms* and the *Ode*. He was conductor of the Boston Symphony, 1924-49, and frequently invited Stravinsky to appear as guest conductor of the orchestra. His Stravinsky premières included the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*

<sup>3</sup> Stravinsky & Craft: *Dialogues and a Diary*, 50-52.



(1921) and the *Piano Concerto* (1924). He commissioned the *Ode* in April, 1943, in commemoration of his wife Natalie, who had died two years previously. Stravinsky already had a short piece recently finished (intended as music for the hunting scene in the Orson Welles film *Jane Eyre*, which proved an abortive project); so he took this piece, and surrounded it on either side with slow, expressive music to make an orchestral Triptych. The liveliness of the middle movement was excused by the composer as 'a *concert champêtre* suggesting an outdoor 'musical', an idea cherished by Natalie Kussevitzy and brilliantly realised in Tanglewood by her husband'.

This refers to the country venue near Stockbridge, Massachusetts, which Kussevitzy made the summer home of the Boston Symphony since 1936. The audience sat in the open, on the grass, in an expansive estate overlooking the Berkshires and the Stockbridge Bowl. The summer concerts are now an annual festival.

The restrained dignity of this *in memoriam* piece is achieved through the solemn chromaticism of the opening; the expressive content is concentrated in the final Epitaph, with much use of characteristic bitonality, and Stravinskian modulations. The highly expressive modulation already mentioned in the Symphony in C (at 173) is reproduced exactly in the Epitaph of the *Ode* at 41.

In spite of Kussevitzy's great services to Stravinsky as publisher and patron, his abilities as a conductor were frequently the cause of much criticism.<sup>4</sup> The premiere of the *Ode*, on 8 October, 1943, was a near disaster. In the Epitaph not only was the trumpet solo at 39 wrongly transposed, but the parts were wrongly copied at the end, with the results that 'a simple triadic piece concluded in a cacophony.'

©1981 Francis Routh

<sup>4</sup> *Themes and Conclusions*, 228-9

**The Scottish National Orchestra**, whose history dates back to 1891, is acknowledged to be of the highest international standard and its remarkable success story achieved recognition in 1978 with the grant of Patronage by Her Majesty the Queen, closely following the award of a Knighthood to Alexander Gibson in the Jubilee Honours List of 1977.

Apart from his work with Scottish Opera and the SNO, which includes many recordings for different companies, Sir Alex has travelled extensively in Europe and the USA – where his visits to Houston have become annual events – as well as in Australia and South America. Many awards and honours have been conferred upon him, including Honorary Doctorates from the Universities of Aberdeen, Glasgow and Stirling; Honorary Fellowships of the Royal Academy, Royal College, Scottish Royal Academy of Music and the Royal Society of Arts; the ISM Musician of the Year Award 1976; the Sibelius Medal in 1978. In 1964 his home town of Motherwell made him a Freeman of the Burgh.

**Sir Alexander Gibson** celebrated his twenty-first season as the Musical Director of the Scottish National Orchestra during 1980. When he was appointed in 1969 he became the first Scotsman to have held the post.

His career prior to 1959 had been outstandingly successful, following his studies at Glasgow University and the Royal College of Music in London where, in 1951, he was awarded the Queen's Prize, he studied at the Salzburg Mozarteum and then went to Siena to work at the Accademia Chigiana. At the 1962 Besançon Festival he was awarded the Enesco Prize in the competition for young conductors.

Between 1951 and 1957 he held posts as répétiteur and later Staff Conductor at Sadler's Wells, and was assistant to Ian Whyte with the BBC Scottish Orchestra in Glasgow from 1952-54; in 1957 he became Music Director of the Sadler's Wells Opera Company and two years later returned to Scotland and the Scottish National Orchestra. Within his first five years he not only enhanced the prestige of the orchestra at home and abroad, but he was founder and instigator of the now world-famous Scottish Opera in 1962.

**The Compact Disc Digital Audio System** offers the best possible sound reproduction – on a small, convenient sound-carrier unit. The Compact Disc's superior performance is the result of laser-optical scanning combined with digital playback, and is independent of the technology used in making the original recording. This recording technology is identified on the back cover by a three-letter code.

**DDD** = digital tape recorder used during session recording mixing and/or editing, and mastering (transcription).

**ADD** = analogue tape recorder used during session recording, digital tape recorder used during subsequent mixing and/or editing and during mastering (transcription).

**AAD** = analogue tape recorder used during session recording and subsequent mixing and/or editing; digital tape recorder used during mastering (transcription). In storing and handling the Compact Disc, you should apply the same care as with conventional records. No further cleaning will be necessary if the Compact Disc is always held by the edges and is replaced in its case directly after playing. Should the Compact Disc become soiled by fingerprints, dust or dirt, it can be wiped (always in a straight line from centre to edge) with a clean and lint-free, soft, dry cloth. No solvent or abrasive cleaner should ever be used on the disc.

If you follow these suggestions, the Compact Disc will provide a lifetime of pure listening enjoyment.

**WARNING:** Copyright subsists in all recordings issued under this label. Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording thereof in any manner whatsoever will constitute an infringement of such copyright. In the United Kingdom, licences for the use of recordings for public performance may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd., Ganton House, 14-22 Ganton Street, London W1V 1JL.

Recording producer: Brian Couzens

Sound engineer: Ralph Couzens

Recorded in the SNO Centre, Glasgow in August and September 1981

Sleeve design: Thumb Design Partnership

Self portrait of Stravinsky reproduced by kind permission of Vera Stravinsky

Chandos

2-disc set

CHAN 8345/6

STRAVINSKY: 3 SYMPHONIES & ODE

Chandos

GIBSON · SCOTTISH NATIONAL

CHAN 8345/6

# IGOR STRAVINSKY

1882-1971

SIR ALEXANDER GIBSON

conducts

THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

Leader, Edwin Paling

**RECORD 1**

SYMPHONY IN E FLAT (1905-7) Op.1

ODE (1943)

Elegiacal Chant in three parts



**RECORD 2**

SYMPHONY IN C (1938-40)

SYMPHONY IN THREE MOVEMENTS (1942-45)

Piano Soloist: Raymond O'Connell

DDD

© 1982 Chandos Records Ltd. © 1982 Chandos Records Ltd.  
Printed in West Germany/Imprimé en Allemagne · Made in West Germany  
CHANDOS RECORDS LTD, LONDON, ENGLAND