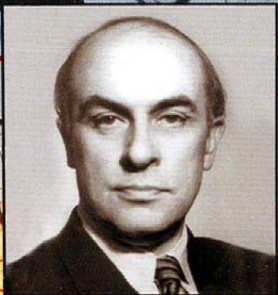


THE BRITISH SYMPHONIC COLLECTION

CLASSICO

VOL. 13



ALAN BUSH
SYMPHONIES 1 & 2

ROYAL NORTHERN COLLEGE OF MUSIC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
DOUGLAS BOSTOCK

**ALAN BUSH
(1900-1995)**

Alan Bush came from a middle class London family, attended Highgate Grammar School and studied music at the Royal Academy of Music, where he was one of the last composition pupils of Frederick Corder, who earlier had taught Bantock, Bax and Eric Coates. Tobias Matthay was Bush's piano professor, though he later expressed serious reservations about Matthay's celebrated method. Bush subsequently studied composition with John Ireland and the piano with Benno Moiseiwitsch (whose assistant Miss Mabel Lander taught him the Leschetizky method, systematically) and, in Berlin, with Schnabel.

In 1928 he went to Germany to study music and philosophy. He joined the International Labour Party in 1925 and conducted the Finchley Labour Choir, later succeeding Rutland Boughton as the Musical Adviser to the London Labour Choral Union in

1929. In 1934 he found himself gradually getting 'redder as the years roll by' and he joined the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1935. During the 1930s he was well-known for his feeling that music needed to be in the service of the people. In 1936 he was a founder member of the Worker's Music Association and was tireless both in writing choral pieces for them and conducting.

He also organised and wrote the music for *The Pageant of Labour* in 1934. This included the ballet *Men and Machines* and Bush followed it with the political ballets *His War or Yours* (1935) and *Mining* (1935). This very 30s activity continued with *Towards Tomorrow – a pageant of co-operation* in July 1938 and the Festival of *Music for the People* in April 1939, where as well as himself he managed to assemble a team of some of the leading British composers of the day including Britten, Arnold Cooke, Elisabeth Lutyens and Vaughan

Williams. Bush also wrote music for the 'Communist Manifesto Centenary Pageant' in 1948, but it no longer had wide support and ultimately it was a genre that had had its day. Bush turned his attention to opera and with his *Wat Tyler* – a historical pageant if ever there was one, more Mussorgsky than Vaughan Williams – was one of the prize winners in the ill-fated Festival of Britain opera competition in 1951, where none of the winners achieved stage performance. Bush's operas were first seen in East Germany and the USSR.

Yet there is a paradox at the heart of Bush's music in the 1930s for while composing ostensibly populist music, notably short choral pieces, his music reaches its climax with the Piano Concerto first heard in a BBC performance on 4 March 1938. This is a powerful work on the largest scale whose idiom is a gritty motivic one, but in the last movement introduces baritone and chorus who address the audience 'Friends we would speak a

little of this performance . . . Music is the mind-changer, the life-giver'. The approach set in motion in this concerto reached its apotheosis in the Symphony in C which was his next completed extended work. It too exemplified the two sides of Bush's music – a severe intellectualism contrasting with his desire to reach a popular audience.

During the ensuing cold war, Bush as a high profile communist sympathiser tended to be judged on his politics rather than his music, and even now his art has not yet been properly assessed by the wider public. In fact, considered as composer per se, he has to be accounted one of the major figures of the British music of his time. Looking at a listing of Bush's oeuvre one is constantly amazed at its variety, for Bush wrote from the final year of the First World War and his art straddles most of the twentieth century, including his four operas.

Bush allocated opus numbers up

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Alan Bush in the mid-1930s.

to 122, and even that does not include such substantial scores as his four operas or three childrens' operas, theatre music or a plethora of short choral pieces, to which he did not assign numbers. Otherwise he wrote in most conventional forms, chamber music, piano and organ music, song cycles (though few individual songs), choral music with and without orchestra and extensive orchestral music including concertos for piano, violin, a suite for cello and orchestra and other concertante music for violin, organ and piano and orchestra.

In 1941 Bush became a cause célèbre when the BBC banned broadcasts of music by signatories to the People's Convention which included Bush. In the face of widespread press comment, Vaughan Williams withdrew his new work, *England*, from broadcasting in sympathy. The BBC rescinded the ban, though Bush's music was still only occasionally heard, but one of his high profile appearances was when the Symphony

in C, his First Symphony, received its first performance during the 1942 series of Henry Wood Promenade Concerts at London's Royal Albert Hall, though it was not broadcast. Yet Bush went on to enjoy an unprecedented seven 'Proms' commissions over his career.

Bush was a celebrated composition teacher at London's Royal Academy of Music, appointed in 1925, and where he was to teach for half a century, influencing more than two generations of composers. One of his earliest pupils was the composer Herbert Murrill who commented that he taught a 'rigorous economy of means, and inculcates skill in the manipulation of musical material by a close study of Palestrinian counterpoint on the strictest pattern.' All his pupils underlined how he did not attempt to influence them either politically or stylistically, but sought to develop a technical skill which would allow them to find themselves. Bush tried to build technique in his

students, and Edward Gregson is warm in his reminiscence of his teacher, remembering him demanding his pupil justify specific notes and intervals in his latest piece.

Bush wrote four symphonies – the combative First composed during the first year of the Second World War, followed by the extrovert programmatic *Nottingham Symphony* in 1949, then the Third, the *Byron Symphony* with choral finale, celebrating Byron's stand against tyranny in Greece and setting the poet's words, completed in 1960, and finally the *Lascaux Symphony*, music inspired by the celebrated cave paintings in France, completed in 1983. It is strange we have never considered Bush a symphonist, but when one works through the symphonies as a group one realises that one is dealing with one of the notable British symphonist of his period, and it was a time when many British composers wrote symphonies. This is a body of works, written over a span

of 45 years, which deserve a much higher profile than they have so far received. We hope you find this first instalment persuasive.

Symphony No 1 in C, Op 21 (1940)

Prologue: *Grave*, leading to
I *Allegro molto*
II *Lento molto – Largo*
III *Allegro moderato e deciso*

Bush had started writing this symphony in June 1939, before the outbreak of war, and most of its composition was in the climate of the early months of the phoney war, followed by Dunkirk and the beginning of the Blitz, Bush completing the score in August, 1940. The first performance took place in a Promenade Concert at the Royal Albert Hall on July 24th, 1942, with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by the composer. Bush

wrote a programme note for that performance which is reproduced below, but it was not used at the time, presumably because of Bush's overt political stance in it. For the Proms Edwin Evans contented himself with saying 'It has a "programme" rooted in the composer's political or, more accurately, sociological views, its keynote being aspiration in the Prologue and respectively greed, frustration, and liberation in the three movements.'

The symphony consists of a slow brooding introduction leading into an aggressive Allegro at the centre of which is a spectral scherzando. The slow movement moves from melancholy to defiance, while the finale has a more celebratory character.

The first movement of the symphony uses a 12-tone series, though Bush emphasised that it is treated 'so that tonality is prevalent throughout the work'. The 12-tone series is un-Schoenbergian in that it uses the note D twice and does not use G

natural. The row when first heard is: D Eb C Db A Bb D E F# G# and A. It is almost never used as a theme as such, but generates motifs and themes in both the Prologue-first movement and slow movement, though in the latter the main theme is a modal melody and the bleakness associated with the dodecaphonic elements may well be evocative of the horrors of war as Bush had already experienced them. Bush later remarked that the non-musical context of the music was closer to the issues raised in the Piano Concerto than in the grimness of the time it was written: 'My idea was to depict the three classes into which the society of Britain was divided at the time when the symphony was composed – 1939.' 'I have other titles for the movements but, as they are connected with specific places and individuals, I have never divulged them. I fear they would be libellous.' Its first performance was in a programme in which the first half was

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Alan Bush in army uniform at the time of the First Symphony.

given over to Beethoven; in those days you had value for money in the concert hall, the first half consisting of the *Egmont* Overture, Violin Concerto and Fifth Symphony. After the interval came the Alan Bush symphony, surely brilliant programming for with Bush it shakes a clenched fist at heaven, followed by the light-hearted overture to Ethel Smyth's comic opera *The Boatswain's Mate*. In the event only the first two items on the programme were broadcast.

Although the BBC declined to use Bush's full programme note in 1942, it survives and we need to quote it here. The composer wrote:

In this Symphony, the composer's intention is to evoke the feelings of the men and women of Britain during the nineteen-thirties. There is no programme of events depicted; the three main movements are more in the nature of mood pictures, each an expression of the prevailing mental and emotional

atmosphere of the social movement of the time. The visionary Prologue conjures up those feelings of desire for betterment, which have helped Man to persist in his search for greater happiness, peace and well-being.

Prologue: *A faint opening of gently straining upwards-moving sounds, gradually gaining momentum leads to a half serene, half uneasy period of repose followed by a further development of the first motif. Then comes a lyrical melodic passage for the 1st violins, bass and tenor parts have the first motif in close canon, and in the alto part is heard in even note-values a twelve-tone series. After an intervening cadenza-like passage on the clarinet a balancing passage leads to a climax. With the hint of repose, the movement fades out with the upward rising motif.*

Movement I: *The principal subject is of a clawing, overbearing, and tigrish character, pointed and angular. The rhythm and tempo is steady, with a perpetual movement in quavers, but*

with many cross accents. The key suggested is C minor. A bridge passage leads to the second subject, a hectic and sardonic jazz motif, which is followed by a return of the principal subject. A middle section (*un poco meno mosso*) expresses the bloodless but sanctimonious religion of the capitalists of all countries. This is succeeded by the Dance of Death to which their policy has brought the peoples of the world. A return of the choral melody is followed by the recapitulation and succeeded by the coda.

Despite the fact that a definite tonality is suggested throughout, the whole movement is built up on the twelve-tone series already sounded in the Prologue.

Movement 2: A slow and somewhat mysterious introduction leads to the main theme, a broad melody in simple triple time and in a modal scale of A minor. The base is built upon the twelve-tone series, which formed the whole material of the previous movement. The mood is one of heavy and

weary sadness, interspersed with flashes of impotent, frustrated annoyance, and questionings of a fantastic character, leading finally to an impassioned outburst. This climax wanes and is succeeded by a recapitulation of the modal melody, in a very broken form and a coda, which starts like the introduction and finishes with a final raging gesticulation. Apart from the modal theme the music is again constructed from the twelve-tone series, while at the same time always suggesting some tonality or other.

Movement 3: The twelve-tone series is entirely abandoned, and the music takes on a direct, vigorous, challenging, varied, cheerful and yet aggressive character. The fighter for the liberation of humanity, never ceasing, never giving up hope, always varying his method with the changing situation yet never losing the end in view, the control by humanity of the forces of nature for the benefit of all, is here portrayed. I cannot hope to have given an adequate picture of the most notable

type that humanity has yet produced, the Dimitroffs, the Pasionarias of the present period. The more personal and individual idiosyncrasies are only fleetingly referred to in the visionary second subject; the main body of the movement is taken up with the presentation of a personality, ceaselessly, tirelessly fighting for the cause of humanity.

The form of this movement is derived from sonata form, but with many of its classical features altered in emphasis. An introduction leads to the principal subject and then a bridge leads to the second subject in the subdominant, when a leading back passage brings us to the coda. There is no development and no recapitulation. Or rather the exposition is the development and the coda the recapitulation. A last effort on the composer's part to express the never failing dynamic of such a type as this is the ending of the movement (and therefore of the symphony) on the fourth beat of a four four bar, the intention being to suggest

a further and continuous progress forward into the future. The tonality of this movement is throughout most definite and is dominated by the key of C Major.

The finale was later extracted and revised as the 'Character Portrait' *Defender of Peace*, as a tribute to Marshal Tito, and first performed under Bush's baton in Vienna in May 1952.

**Symphony No 2 The Nottingham,
Op 33 (1949)**

5. I. Sherwood Forest

(*Moderato – Allegro vivace*)

6. II. Clifton Grove (*Largo*)

7. III. Castle Rock (*Allegro molto*)

8. IV. Goose Fair (*Allegro moderato*)

The *Nottingham Symphony* was commissioned by the Nottingham Co-operative Society to mark the celebrations for the 500th anniversary of the founding of the City of Nottingham, and was first performed at the Albert Hall, Nottingham, by the London Philharmonic Orchestra on 27 June 1949, repeated the following evening, conducted by Nottingham's local Director of Music, David Ellenberg. It was two years before a London studio performance followed, and three and a half years before it appeared in a public concert in London. Thomas Russell, the Managing Director of the LPO, and himself a Communist, later told how, with civic funding, four rehearsals

could be scheduled and two performances given, one of which was broadcast.

After the notorious Zhdanov doctrine promulgated in Moscow in January 1948 at the Conference of Russian Composers, Bush was inclined to undertake serious self-analysis. He attended the Second International Congress of Composers in Prague the following May and became the UK representative on the 'Inception Committee'. As far as his music was concerned he said: 'It gave me a further clarification on points that were worrying me . . . My response to nationalism lacked dedication and precision. I was convinced, as a result of the discussions at the 1948 conference, that I ought to make a more determined effort to bring out a national character in my music.' The Nottingham Symphony was Bush's first extended orchestral work written after this time.

The Nottingham Co-operative Society published an elaborate brochure

about the work for its first performance, with a programme note including musical examples which was programmatic in tone. Thus we have a first movement, 'Sherwood Forest'. This more or less conventional sonata form movement opens with a slow introduction intended to evoke 'the sunny, open spaces of Sherwood' redolent with horn-calls. We reach the *allegro vivace* with a first subject at first on soaring violins. This consists of three elements the third of which on wood-wind is a 'melodic and rhythmic figure. . . suggestive of galloping horsemen'. The second subject is a contrasted clarinet tune. Later we hear the Sheriff's cavalcade and after the rhythm of the cavalcade has been 'broken down by the attacks of the previous musical material' the 'idyllic picture of the forest dwellers life is recalled afresh. The movement ends lightly in the gayest good humour.'

The slow movement in what Bush described as 'abridged sonata

form' is subtitled 'Clifton Grove', and evokes the River Trent in the introduction. Bush describes it thus: 'a sustained richly harmonised passage on the whole body of strings, quietly sonorous, slow moving with gentle surges and small ripples on the horns and wood-wind, suggest the broad peaceful flow of the River Trent at Clifton Grove.' After the Introduction, the first subject is unusual for being a duet for solo cello and clarinet.

The scherzo, 'Castle Rock', is a *moto perpetuo* encompassing an agitated passacaglia with a fugato replacing the usual trio, a *tour de force* of restless energy. The running quavers, characterised by the unexpected insertion of bars of 3/4 into a 5/4 pulse, are sustained throughout, when the second subject is reached, becoming the accompaniment to the 'wild dance' of the new theme, which presages the 'violent climax'. In a profile of Bush published after the first performance, one commentator reminds us that 'Castle Rock was the

seat of the Duke of Newcastle, who voted against the Reform Act of 1832. So furious were the people of Nottingham that they burned down his castle amid scenes of unprecedented violence'. In the finale, which Bush called 'Goose Fair', he presents a full-blown sonata allegro, featuring a festal march theme that is contrasted with one of Bush's most extended lyrical passages which the strings elaborate for 47 bars. This is only the first element of the second subject which soon encompasses a further wide-spanning lyrical movement at first on woodwind and soon becoming an elegant dance and then a dignified passage where the theme is on strings and woodwind against stately chords from the brass. Here the origins of the running quavers in the theme are all too clearly derived from the preceding scherzo. The development brings massive climaxes leading to a reminiscence of the slow movement marked by a solo violin, and the music ends in a mood of triumphant optimism complete with

pealing bells.

At the time of its composition the composer submitted the *Nottingham Symphony* to the BBC, whose reading panel were then three of Bush's leading British symphonic contemporaries: Rubbra, Alwyn and Berkeley. All were enthusiastic, Rubbra finding it 'an excellent work', and Berkeley adding, 'it is written with the greatest skill and accomplishment.' However, even here, in one of Bush's most potentially popular works, William Alwyn, having noted 'a work written with great technical skill & authority', felt the need to add: 'personally I should prefer it less from the brain & more from the heart.' Yet issues of socialist realism, then the doctrine in Soviet music, would have been considered adversely in the west in the early 1950s, and one wonders if the programmatic title and its commission by the Co-op for a civic occasion tarred it with the wrong brush. A performance in Moscow in 1963 conducted by the composer did

circulate for some years on very poorly recorded Russian LPs, but this tended to underline its specialised appeal. In fact it is surely one of the most approachable British symphonies of its day, and in the Fifth edition of *Grove's Dictionary* it was compared in all seriousness to Shostakovich's *Leningrad Symphony* – to the disadvantage of Shostakovich! And could the *Nottingham* be a musical artist's creative reply to what he felt to be just criticism?

Lewis Foreman © 2004

Quotations from Alan Bush's programme notes © the Alan Bush Estate

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The RNCM Symphony Orchestra is one of several major ensembles at the Royal Northern College of Music through which students gain the orchestral training, which is a fundamental part of their education within the Schools of Strings and Wind and Percussion. All the ensembles perform frequently in public concerts, both in the College and in outside venues. When not actually preparing for a public concert, orchestra members attend regular repertoire sessions for which specialist conductors are often engaged, to rehearse specific repertoire. The Symphony Orchestra works regularly with members of the College's own tutorial staff as well as guest conductors. In addition to Douglas Bostock, the latter have

included the late Sir Charles Groves, Sir Edward Downes, James Loughran, Paul Daniel, Yan Pascal Tortelier, Elgar Howarth. George Hurst, Martyn Brabbins, Kent Nagano, Vassily Sinaisky and HK Gruber.

The orchestras also work every year in support of the College's critically acclaimed opera productions. These have recently included Verdi's *Falstaff*, Handel's *Tamerlano*, Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades* and Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. The Symphony Orchestra undertakes overseas tours and in recent years has been the orchestra in residence at the annual *Cantiere Internazionale d'arte di Montepulciano*, the Italian festival founded by Hans Werner Henze. The orchestras's first commercial recording was the well-received Volume 10 in this series, including music by York Bowen, Frederic Austin and Edgar Bainton issued in 2002 (CLASSCD 404).

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*The Royal Northern College of Music Symphony Orchestra with Douglas Bostock
in the Brown Shipley Hall at the RNCM, Manchester, on 7 February 2004,
during their recording of Alan Bush's First Symphony.*

FIRST VIOLINS

Weimin Zheng (*leader*)
 Xander Van Vliet
 Franziska Mattishent
 Rosie Nicholson
 Carmen Craven Grew
 Marije Ploemacher
 Rebecca Matthews
 Cheryl Gaudio
 Suzannah Quirke
 Aoife Dowdall
 Claire Rutland
 Kathleen Ord
 Arne Bautz
 Emanuela Buta
 Michael Gurevich

SECOND VIOLINS

Rebecca Harris
 James Pattinson
 Hazel Ross
 Helen Tonge
 Oliver Heath
 Joseph Dickens
 Eleanor Ryan
 Joe Ichinose
 Bethany Dickinson
 Zara Benyounes
 Patricia Garcia Marian
 Jennifer Stokes
 David Fairbank

VIOLAS

Ella Brinch
 Benedict Taylor
 Sarah-Jane Campbell-Smith
 Charlotte Dykes
 Allan Grant
 Timothy Sykes
 David Grime
 Birgit Seifart
 Shelley Jamieson
 Raymond Lester

CELLOS

Claire Gallat
 Elinor Gow
 Eustaqui Puente Bautista
 Danielle Jones
 Adrian Calef
 Melanie Jones
 Carys Donahue-Davis
 Sinead Fletcher
 He Jiang
 Pei-Jee Ng

BASSES

Juraj Kukan
 Gorgi Cinciewski
 Yi Song
 James Adolpho
 Daniel Swana
 Zoe Elsom
 Sebastien Forest

FLUTES

Claudia Lashmore
 Rachel Green
 Mirjam Plas (+picc)

OBOES

Alexia Pelling
 Bryony Pearson

CLARINETS

Paul Vowles
 Ruth Partington
 Sarah Masters

BASSOONS

Anja Caffelle
 Richard Beards
 Gwion Lockley

HORNS

Andrew Maher
 Aidan Bradley
 Daniel Coghill
 Brian Walters
 Laura Tanner

TRUMPETS

Timothy Barber
 Richard Pounder
 Kitt Garner

CORNETS

Jonathan Corry
 William Balkwill
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 Rebecca Lundberg
 Christopher Neary

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Stephen Burke
 Ying Han
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Nadine André

ORCHESTRA

MANAGER

James Williams

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This recording has been sponsored by the Alan Bush Trust, and Classico and all concerned wish to thank them for their support, without which the recording could not have been made. The following have given generous support to the issue of this CD: Maurice Allmen; Dr. John Amis; Dag T. Andersson; Chris Ashton; Ray Ayris; Penelope Badham; Emer Bailey; Dennis Barker; Dr. G.B.Barlow; Andrew Barrow; Basil & Jeanne Becker; Dr. Nicolas Bell; Anthony Bennett; John Berry; Andrew Bibby; Dr. S.A. Biggart; Birmingham Clarion Singers; Professor David Blake; Kenneth Bowen; Dr. Timothy Bowers; Aubrey Bowman; Andrew Boyd; Eileen Bradshaw; Leonard Brown; David Burkett; Piers Burton-Page; Julie Bush; Dr. Michael Butler; Chris Calver; Dr. David Carhart; A.J. Carnall; Stuart Carroll; Peter Chidzey; Frank Cliff; J.L.Coates; Fay Cole; Paul Conway; Gwen Cook; Wendy Corum; Professor Stewart Craggs; Andy Croft; Robert Crowley; Martin Dalby; Kenneth Davenport; Sir Edward Downes; J.C.Drake; Michael Eagleton; Dr. David Eastwood; Sylvia Eaves; Les Emmens; Maurice Epstein; Anne Fairston; Rodney Foord; Vera Ford; S.J.B.Francis; Adam Gac; Jonathan Gardiner; Alan Gifford; Rob Gill; Leonard Goldman; Dr. John Goodby; Professor Marilyn Govich; H.K. Greenhalgh; Peter Gregory; Professor Edward Gregson; Professor B.A.Hepple; Shirley Hepple; Professor C.R.Hill; Helen Hillman; Catherine & Michael Hinson; Richard Hinson; Ivan Y.Hirsh; Kevin Hogarth; Angela Hopkinson; Joan Horrocks; Elizabeth Hudson; John & Jean Humphreys; Emmanuel & Kay Hurwitz; Peter Jacobs; Dr. David & Moira Jenkinson; Dr. Simon Jenner; Graham Johnson; Dr. Roy Johnston; David G. Jones; Michael Jones; John Jordan; John P.H. Joubert; Morris Kahn; Deryck & Mrs L. Kelly; Phillip G. Kennedy; Thomas Krebs; Martin Leadbetter; Elizabeth & Nandra Letsly; Topsy Levan; Frank Loeffler; Dr. Alan Lowe; Clare & Peter Lubrano; Richard Mann; Dr.W.& Mrs G.I. Mansfield; David J. Martin; Frank P. Martin; Vivian M. Martin; Dr. Colin Matthews; Robert Max; Gordon McClennan;

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For information about Alan Bush, his life and works, books, CDs, scores, etc. as well as the Trust and its activities, please contact the Honorary Secretary, Dr. Rachel O'Higgins, 7 Harding Way, Histon, Cambridge, CB4 9JH Telephone: 01223 232659

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Website: www.alanbushtrust.org.uk

Douglas Bostock (b. 1955) is Principal Guest Conductor of the Czech Chamber Philharmonic, and Permanent Guest Conductor of the Munich Symphony Orchestra. From 1991 – 1998 he was Music Director of the Carlsbad Symphony Orchestra in the Czech Republic. Douglas Bostock is currently Principal Conductor of the Aargau Symphony Orchestra in Switzerland and the renowned Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra. After his tenure as Music Director in Konstanz and regular appearances with the Southwest German Philharmonic he embarked on an international conducting career which takes him to guest engagements with leading orchestras in Europe, America and Japan, including BBC Symphony, BBC Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, Royal Scottish National Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Aarhus Symphony, Odense Symphony, Prague Symphony, Czech Radio Symphony, Brno Philharmonic, Slovak Philharmonic, Tokyo City Philharmonic, Kanagawa Philharmonic, Gunma Symphony, Mexico State Symphony, Kansas City Symphony, Colorado Festival Orchestra, the major orchestras in Halle, Jena and Erfurt. Douglas Bostock's large repertoire covers a broad spectrum of genres and styles. Over sixty CD recordings of a wide and varied range of music, radio and television productions, as well as frequent appearances at international music festivals, document his versatile musical personality.



ALAN BUSH 1900-1995

SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN C OP. 21 (1940)

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

1	Prologue <i>Grave</i>	5:57
2	I <i>Allegro molto</i>	10:25
3	II <i>Lento molto – Largo*</i>	9:53
4	III <i>Allegro moderato e deciso</i>	6:39

SYMPHONY NO. 2

THE NOTTINGHAM OP. 33 (1949)

5	I Sherwood Forest <i>Moderato – Allegro vivace</i>	9:19
6	II Clifton Grove <i>Largo</i>	11:13
7	II Castle Rock <i>Allegro molto**</i>	5:30
8	IV Goose Fair <i>Allegro moderato</i>	12:18

TOTAL TIME 71:28

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Royal Northern College of Music Symphony Orchestra

Weimin Zheng – violin * Ella Brinch – viola *

Clare Gallant – cello* / ** Paul Vowles – clarinet **

Conductor: Douglas Bostock

Recorded in the Royal Northern College of Music,
Manchester 7 & 8 February 2004

Producer: Martin Cotton

Sound engineer: Tony Wass

Consultant, session and cover photographs: Lewis Foreman



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