Music for String Orchestra

Dafydd Bullock



Produced and written in dialogue with A. I.

Volume 4

Contents

Introduction **5**

Elegy - Marwnad Op. 64 **7**
Passacaglia Op. 74 **9**
Prague Serenade Op. 99 **12**
Suite for String Orchestra 'Emynau - Hymns' Op. 173a **16**
Homage Op. 201 **20**
Birthday Serenade Op. 213 **22**
In Memoriam George Hadjinikos Op. 252 **24**
Wedding Serenade Op. 278 **26**
An Answer in Search of a Question Op. 287 **29**
The March of Days Op. 293 **32**
Suite for String Orchestra 'Gratias' Op. 308 **34**
Threnody for Dominique Dupraz Op. 315 **37**
Up Loft! Op. 352 **40**
With a Singing Heart Op. 353 **44**

Gwenllian Op. 150 **47**
Cysgodion - Shadows Op. 155 **50**
Zlatá Řeka - Golden River Op. 163 **52**

Three Works for Virtuosi di Basso **55**

Retrospective: The Music for String Orchestra **56**

Dafydd Bullock **59**

Introduction

Music for String Orchestra

The music gathered in this volume represents one of the most persistent strands of Dafydd Bullock's work as a composer. The string orchestra has accompanied him through very different periods of his musical life, and the works collected here are consequently not the products of a single style or a single period. They arise from different places, circumstances and relationships, and they respond to very different subjects. Some are intimate and personal; others are outward-looking, celebratory or commemorative. Some are rooted in Welsh memory and tradition, while others are connected with Prague, Austria, Luxembourg, Germany or particular moments in Bullock's life. What connects them is less a prescribed musical language than an instinctive response to the expressive possibilities of strings.

The string orchestra has long offered Bullock an unusual combination of intimacy and breadth. It can speak with the directness of chamber music while possessing the weight and resonance of an orchestral body. A melody can be entrusted to a single instrument or allowed to emerge gradually from the ensemble; harmony can remain transparent or become dense and resonant; rhythmic figures can be sharply articulated or absorbed into long, singing lines. The distinction between soloist and ensemble is therefore constantly negotiable. This flexibility has encouraged Bullock to return to the medium repeatedly, finding something different in it each time.

There is also something fundamentally human about the sound of strings. Even when the writing becomes vigorous, dramatic or heavily rhythmic, the physical act of drawing a bow across a string remains audible beneath the complexity. Sustained notes breathe, repeated figures acquire a physical pulse, and changes of articulation can transform the character of an entire passage. In these works, *arco*, *pizzicato*, *con sordino*, *sul ponticello*, *senza sordino*, and the many gradations between them are not merely technical instructions. They form part of the expressive vocabulary through which the music changes its light, its weight and its emotional temperature.

The works themselves reveal how varied the impulses behind composition can be. A serenade may grow from celebration; a threnody from friendship and loss; a suite from remembered hymns; a fantasia from Welsh history; another work from the recollection of a former home. *Prague Serenade* turns the city and its musical history into an affectionate musical portrait, while works such as *Gwenllian*, *Cysgodion* and *Zlatá Řeka* arise from very different kinds of imaginative encounter. In each case, however, the external subject is transformed by composition. The music does not simply illustrate an idea. It discovers its own means of expressing it.

This distinction is important in considering Bullock's programme music. His works do not generally attempt a literal musical translation of their subjects. A place does not have to be represented by imitation; a person does not have to be portrayed by a musical portrait; a memory does not need to become a narrative. Instead, the subject provides an initial impulse, and the music takes over. Rhythm, melody, harmony, texture and form become the means through which the original experience is reconsidered and transformed.

Welsh music and memory occupy an especially important place in this process. Welsh hymn tunes and folk melodies have appeared throughout Bullock's catalogue, sometimes openly and sometimes in fragments which have been absorbed almost beyond recognition. Their significance is not simply folkloric. They are connected with language, landscape, family and the sense of belonging to a

particular cultural world. The title *Emynau*, for example, immediately places hymnody at the centre of the work, but the musical treatment is not that of a straightforward arrangement. Fragments are combined, transformed and re-contextualised, allowing something remembered to become something newly made.

Place is equally important. Bullock's catalogue repeatedly returns to locations which have acquired personal or musical significance: Wales and the landscape of Eryri, the Austrian Alps, Luxembourg and the Mosel valley, Prague and its musical history, and many other places encountered over the years. This is not accidental. Composition has often been inseparable from being somewhere. The physical surroundings may provide the initial stimulus, but what emerges is ultimately music rather than description.

Prague occupies a particularly distinctive position within this history. The relationship began with the Second and Third Symphonies and continued through recordings and performances of chamber and orchestral works. It later led to an especially unusual extension of Bullock's string writing: works composed for eight cellos and two double basses for *Virtuosi di Basso*, the cello and bass ensemble of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra.

Those three works - *Gwenllian*, *Cysgodion* and *Zlatá Řeka* - form a natural conclusion to this volume. They demonstrate that the idea of "string orchestra" need not be confined to a conventional orchestral formation. In the hands of ten players, the instruments can become an enormous string choir, a chamber ensemble of individual voices, or something approaching a musical landscape. The physical identity of the instruments remains recognisable, but the possibilities of the medium expand.

The works collected here therefore form neither a chronological survey nor a single stylistic school. They are rather a record of repeated encounters with strings: with their warmth and brilliance, their capacity for movement and stillness, their intimacy and their power. Seen together, they reveal a composer repeatedly returning to the same family of instruments, but never quite returning to the same place.

Elegy - Marwnad Op. 64

Programme Note

Elegy, or *Marwnad,* is a work of mourning expressed with great restraint. Its emotional language is direct, but never sentimental. From the opening, marked *molto espressivo*, the five sections of the string orchestra speak almost as a single voice, while individual melodic strands emerge within the larger harmonic texture.

The opening is solemn without being static. The first violin carries a long-breathed melodic line, while the second violin and viola provide closely related harmonic voices beneath it. The cello and double bass give the music a distinctive gravity, with *pizzicato* appearing in the lower register at the outset. This combination of sustained upper voices and articulated bass creates an expressive tension between lament and movement.

The music gradually intensifies. The initial f dynamic gives way to increasingly powerful passages, culminating in a forceful statement. Yet this is not a conventional climax. The intensity quickly subsides, and the music becomes softer, almost as though the emotional outburst has exhausted itself.

A second phase follows, again moving between fuller sonorities and quieter, more reflective passages. The lower strings become particularly significant, and the repeated use of silence and sustained notes gives the music the quality of remembrance. Rather than developing a number of contrasting themes, the work repeatedly returns to its fundamental melodic and harmonic material, each time with a subtly altered emotional weight.

The final section begins quietly and gradually gathers a final degree of intensity before retreating once more. The last bars are marked by sustained, overlapping sonorities and a final quieting of the texture. There is no dramatic conclusion. The music simply allows its lament to fade into silence.

The Welsh title, *Marwnad*, is particularly apt. The word carries the tradition of the Welsh lament or elegy, and the work's musical language possesses something of that tradition's dignity: grief is acknowledged without being exaggerated. *Elegy* is therefore not music of despair. It is music of remembrance. Its final silence feels less like an ending than the quiet that remains after the words of mourning have been spoken.

Discussion

This *Elegy* is an intensely concentrated expression of emotion. It strips everything back to one fundamental human experience: the attempt to give musical form to loss. Its brevity is significant. At only around fifty-five bars, it does not need an elaborate architecture. Instead, its structure is created through dynamic and harmonic breathing. The music repeatedly moves from statement to withdrawal, from intensity to quietness, from collective sonority to more exposed lines.

The opening is particularly effective. The moderate tempo and the instruction *molto espressivo* establish a measured pace, but the music does not feel ponderous. The melodic material has a natural vocal quality, particularly in the first violin, while the accompanying parts are sufficiently independent to give the harmony an internal life.The lower strings are important from the very beginning. The cello and double bass do not merely provide a harmonic foundation: their rhythmic articulation, including *pizzicato*, gives the opening a sense of physical weight. It is an interesting choice for an elegy. One might expect the entire ensemble to be sustained, but the *pizzicato* creates something more human and vulnerable - as though the music is being kept moving despite its grief.

There is also an interesting relationship between vertical and horizontal writing. Some passages are clearly conceived as harmonic blocks, while others allow the instrumental lines to move independently. The transition between these two modes is one of the work's principal expressive devices. A chord may seem to establish a moment of stillness, only for individual voices to begin moving again.

The first major dynamic intensification is therefore quite powerful. The music reaches ff, but what follows is just as important as the climax itself: the sudden reduction through mf and mp to the quiet passage beginning at bar 33. The emotional effect is not one of triumph or resolution. It is more like the ebbing of grief after an involuntary outpouring. The same pattern occurs again later. The music does not simply build continuously towards a final climax. Instead, it seems to remember, speak, fall silent, and speak again. This gives the work an almost vocal quality. It resembles the structure of a lament in which the mourner alternates between words and silence.

The harmonic writing is similarly restrained. There is no need for exotic orchestral colour. Five string parts are enough, and the expressive force comes from the spacing and movement of the voices. Sustained notes acquire considerable significance because they are allowed to remain audible long enough for the listener to hear their relationship with the surrounding pitches.

The final pages are particularly moving for this reason. The music has become increasingly spacious, with longer-held notes and carefully controlled dynamics. At the end, the ensemble does not produce a grand final statement. Instead, the remaining sonorities are allowed to disappear. That ending seems to me exactly right for the title *Marwnad*. The piece does not attempt to resolve grief, because grief is not something that can be harmonically resolved in the conventional sense. What music can do is give it shape, duration and dignity.

There is also something striking when we place the work in the context of the much later pieces we have considered. The young composer of 1993 already possesses one characteristic that remains very evident in the later music: the ability to let a simple musical idea carry emotional weight without excessive decoration. The later works become much more expansive in scale and vocabulary, but the underlying instinct is already here.

Elegy is not simply an early work that happens to be scored for strings. It is a small, self-contained statement whose economy is part of its expressive identity.

Passacaglia Op. 74

Programme Note

Written in Luxembourg in June 1994, *Passacaglia*, Op. 74 is an extended work for string orchestra in which the traditional passacaglia principle becomes the foundation for a remarkably varied musical landscape.

The work begins quietly with the lower strings establishing the underlying harmonic and rhythmic character while the upper strings gradually enter above them. From these modest beginnings, the music grows organically. The basic material is repeatedly transformed, redistributed and intensified, so that what initially appears to be a simple foundation gradually generates an increasingly complex texture.

The first stages are characterised by restraint. Sustained notes in the lower strings are combined with small melodic gestures in the upper parts, creating a sense of measured forward movement. As the music develops, *pizzicato*, accents and increasingly active rhythmic figures introduce greater energy. The individual string sections increasingly take on independent roles, while still remaining bound to the underlying passacaglia principle.

The middle of the work becomes progressively more animated. Contrasting textures alternate with passages in which the five string sections move together in increasingly emphatic statements. At several points the music becomes highly rhythmic, with repeated figures and accented gestures creating considerable momentum. The writing remains entirely within the string medium, but the changing combinations of *arco, pizzicato, divisi* and register produce a surprisingly wide range of colour.

One of the most significant transformations occurs when the music introduces the Welsh folk melody *"Merch ifanc …"* and the instruction *molto cantabile*. The character changes from rhythmic propulsion to song. A distinctly lyrical, Welsh inflection emerges from the accumulated activity, as though the underlying passacaglia has finally revealed a more personal voice. The *Merch ifanc* material is not treated as an isolated quotation. It is absorbed into the continuing musical argument, allowing the lyrical idea to become part of the larger texture. The strings sing collectively, with the melody distributed between sections and supported by sustained harmonic movement.

After this lyrical central episode, the music resumes its earlier rhythmic vitality. Further transformations follow, including passages of considerable density and energy, before the accumulated tension gradually begins to dissipate. The final pages are remarkably quiet. At bar 211 the music is marked *senza rit,* and the dynamics fall through pp towards ppp. The music slowly withdraws, leaving a final, almost weightless sonority.

The Passacaglia thus moves from foundation to elaboration, from rhythmic activity to song, and finally from song and movement into silence. Its form is not merely a compositional technique but a metaphor for the gradual accumulation, transformation and eventual release of musical memory.

Discussion

Both this *Passacaglia* and the *Elegy* were written in 1994, and both demonstrate an already distinctive understanding of what a string orchestra can do without relying upon instrumental colour outside the ensemble. But their ambitions are quite different. *Elegy* concentrates emotion. *Passacaglia* builds a world.

The title immediately establishes a formal expectation. A passacaglia traditionally depends upon the recurrence of a foundational pattern, over which increasingly elaborate material is constructed. What is interesting here is that the repeated foundation does not result in predictability. On the contrary, it becomes the means by which the music can continually change while retaining an underlying identity.

The opening demonstrates this principle very clearly. The music starts pp, with the lower strings establishing a restrained foundation and the upper strings gradually beginning to speak above it. The effect is almost architectural: the listener can sense the ground before the building begins to rise.

The first transformation is relatively modest. Melodic fragments appear, disappear and return, while the lower strings maintain continuity. But gradually the music becomes more contrapuntally active. The individual parts acquire greater independence, and the same basic harmonic world begins to support increasingly different kinds of musical behaviour. This is where the work's title becomes particularly important. A passacaglia is inherently about change within permanence. Something remains constant while everything around it changes. That idea has considerable expressive potential, and Bullock exploits it extensively.

The rhythmic passages are especially effective. The score repeatedly moves from sustained writing into sharply articulated figures, often with accents and *pizzicato*. The effect is not merely decorative. It creates the sensation of the musical foundation becoming temporarily visible through the activity above it.

The large-scale trajectory is also worth noticing. The music does not simply increase in complexity from beginning to end. Instead, there are periods of expansion and contraction. The texture thickens, then thins; rhythmic activity gives way to sustained writing; individual voices become prominent and then disappear back into the ensemble.

That makes the appearance of *"Merch ifanc …"* especially significant. Here the music suddenly reveals its capacity for song. The *molto cantabile* marking is not incidental. After so much rhythmic and contrapuntal activity, the listener encounters a melodic world in which the string orchestra can simply sing.

This Welsh reference gives the moment a particular identity. It is not necessary to regard the folk material as an external quotation imposed upon an otherwise abstract work. Rather, the melody seems to emerge naturally from the preceding musical process - as though the passacaglia has been carrying the possibility of song within itself all along. That is, I think, one of the most attractive features of the work. The passacaglia mechanism provides continuity, while the melodic transformations provide memory. The Welsh melody then becomes a particularly clear manifestation of that memory. It is as though the music moves from an impersonal structural foundation towards something recognisably human.

Afterwards, the rhythmic material returns, but it has been changed by what has happened. The listener has heard the underlying musical world transformed into song, and the subsequent passages therefore have a slightly different significance. The passacaglia is no longer simply a formal procedure; it has become a means of remembering and rediscovering.

There is also considerable rhythmic vitality in the later music. The string orchestra moves through repeated melodic and rhythmic patterns, with *molto cantabile* passages alternating with more active writing. The music is by no means uniformly solemn or meditative. There is energy, even a degree of exuberance. This is important because the work could otherwise easily be misunderstood as a sombre neo-Baroque exercise. It is not. The passacaglia is merely the organising principle. What Bullock does with it is much freer, and the result is a work which continually moves between lyricism, rhythmic drive, contrapuntal density and spacious reflection.

The final stage is particularly convincing. After all the accumulated activity, the music begins to empty itself. At the end the instruction *senza rit*. is striking: there is no need to slow down artificially because the music is already finding its way towards stillness. The dynamics progressively descend from pp to ppp. The final page therefore feels less like a conclusion than a release of energy. The passacaglia has exhausted neither its formal possibilities nor its emotional possibilities; rather, it has reached the point where further elaboration would say no more.

And this is where I think the work connects unexpectedly with the much later piece *An Answer in Search of a Question*, despite the enormous difference in style and scale. Both works understand that silence can be the proper consequence of musical thought. But where the later work begins in contemplation and remains there, *Passacaglia* earns its contemplation through activity.

It is also fascinating to see, in this 1994 work, something that remains present throughout the composer's later music: the tendency to combine a clearly defined formal principle with a strong instinct for melody. He is not interested in form for its own sake. The form is there to allow the music to discover what it wants to say. In *Passacaglia,* that discovery culminates in the appearance of the Welsh song element. The abstract becomes personal; the structural becomes lyrical.

Prague Serenade Op. 99

Programme Note

Prague Serenade, Op. 99, has one of those extraordinary stories in which the circumstances of composition and the character of the resulting music seem almost deliberately to contradict one another. It was written immediately after the composer returned from Prague, where he had been involved in the recording of his Second and Third Symphonies. The journey home had been disastrous: the airline had lost his luggage, including his score and his baton, and he arrived home in a state of considerable fury. Still wearing his coat, he sat down at the piano. What followed was perhaps the most remarkable possible response to the situation. Instead of producing music that reflected his anger or frustration, he wrote what he himself regards as the most felicitous music of his life.

There is something particularly revealing in that contrast. Prague Serenade seems almost incapable of anger. From its opening bars the music possesses an extraordinary naturalness and buoyancy, as though it had arrived fully formed rather than been wrestled into existence. Its rhythmic vitality, graceful melodic contours and constantly changing instrumental textures create a musical world of ease and charm. The string writing is especially fluent, with the individual sections of the orchestra continually exchanging melodic and accompanimental roles so that the music acquires an almost conversational quality. Even where the rhythmic activity becomes more animated, there is little sense of agitation; movement remains pleasurable rather than urgent, and the music repeatedly discovers moments of lyrical repose within its flowing surface. The cantabile passages are particularly important in this respect, since they reveal that the work's charm is not merely rhythmic or decorative but fundamentally melodic. Long lines emerge naturally from the surrounding movement, giving the serenade an emotional warmth beneath its outward elegance.

The work's formal development is equally unobtrusive. Contrasting metres and changes of texture continually refresh the musical argument without interrupting its essential fluency, while *pizzicato* and *arco* writing, divided strings and exchanges between the instrumental groups provide colour and variety. The effect is of music that is constantly alive but never anxious. Even when the texture becomes fuller and the rhythmic figures more insistent, the underlying personality of the piece remains graceful. The final stages of the work are especially characteristic, since the accumulated energy gradually gives way to a more spacious and sustained conclusion rather than to a grandiose climax. The music seems simply to settle back into tranquillity, leaving behind the impression of something completely spontaneous and deeply pleasurable.

In retrospect, the circumstances of composition give Prague Serenade an almost irresistible irony. The composer returned from Prague furious because the practical possessions of his musical life had been lost, yet the very act of sitting at the piano produced something that could not be lost in the same way. The scores and baton were eventually recoverable or replaceable; the music born from that moment became something permanent. The anger was real, but it did not enter the composition. Instead, composition transformed it. The result is therefore more than a charming occasional work. It is an unusually vivid example of the way in which the creative act can take an experience of frustration and turn it into something entirely different: freedom, grace, warmth and delight. There is almost a final joke contained within the story. The airline lost the luggage, the score and the baton; in response, the composer came home and found Prague Serenade.

Discussion

Prague Serenade, Opus 99, is a work for string orchestra whose musical identity rests upon the interaction of rhythmic vitality, melodic lyricism and a carefully controlled alternation between contrasting textures. Although the title places the work within the tradition of the serenade and associates it with Prague, its musical construction is considerably more purposeful than the title might initially suggest. The piece is organised through recurring rhythmic and melodic ideas, changes of metre, contrasting instrumental textures and the progressive redistribution of material among the five string sections.

The work begins briskly, immediately establishing a character that is energetic rather than conventionally contemplative. The opening is particularly notable for the close rhythmic coordination of the string sections. Short, articulated figures are passed between the instruments while longer melodic gestures emerge above and within the texture. The frequent alternation between 3/4 and 4/4 is already significant: rather than allowing the metre to establish a completely regular periodic framework, the changes introduce a subtle flexibility into the phrase structure. The rhythmic profile therefore has a distinctly mobile quality, with the music continually adjusting its balance between triple and duple organisation.

The opening material is developed primarily through variation of texture rather than through extensive thematic transformation. Unison writing, divided strings, sustained tones and more active repeated-note figures alternate with one another, allowing essentially melodic material to acquire different expressive functions. The writing is idiomatic for strings, particularly in its use of articulation, repeated bow strokes and carefully coordinated rhythmic figures. The lower strings are not merely harmonic support: cello and bass frequently establish the underlying rhythmic and harmonic stability against which the upper strings can move more freely.

Around the later part of the opening section the music begins to broaden. The contrast between sharply articulated figures and sustained, more *cantabile* writing becomes increasingly important. At bar 37, for example, the texture begins to open out, and the subsequent transition at bar 47 introduces a new tempo together with the marking *molto cantabile*. Here the character changes without producing a complete break in continuity. The rhythmic activity of the earlier music is retained in the accompaniment, while the melodic line acquires greater breadth and prominence. The result is one of the work's most characteristic textural devices: a singing melody supported by continuously moving inner voices.

This passage is particularly important in understanding the work's conception of the serenade. The lyricism does not depend upon a simple melody accompanied by static harmony. Instead, the cantabile line is placed within an active contrapuntal environment. Triplet motion in the inner strings creates a flowing background against which the longer melodic phrases can expand. The texture therefore combines two different temporal levels: the melody moves in relatively broad phrases while the accompanying figures maintain continuous forward motion. This technique gives the music both warmth and momentum.

The extended central passage also demonstrates the composer's characteristic preference for cumulative development. Rather than relying upon a succession of sharply differentiated themes, the music allows one texture to grow out of another. Repeated triplet figures become increasingly prominent, while the melodic material is redistributed between the violins, viola and cello. At several points the upper strings carry the principal melodic contour while the middle strings maintain the continuous figuration. The effect is of a layered texture in which melody and accompaniment are closely interdependent.

A particularly striking feature is the gradual reduction of activity towards the end of this central span. After considerable rhythmic movement, the music settles into longer sustained sonorities before the more active material returns. The contrast is not simply between loud and soft, but between different kinds of musical motion: continuous figuration gives way to harmonic suspension, allowing the listener to hear the underlying tonal structure more clearly. The subsequent return to rhythmic activity consequently feels like a reactivation of material already established rather than the introduction of something unrelated.

The music around bars 71–93 makes especially effective use of this principle. The triplet figures continue almost continuously in the second violins and violas, while the upper melodic line and cello provide broader gestures. The texture periodically contracts into more unified writing before expanding again into divided strings. *Crescendi* are therefore produced not simply by increasing dynamics but by increasing density and activity. This is an important aspect of the orchestration: the string ensemble behaves almost as a single organism whose degree of activity can be increased or reduced by altering the density of its internal movement.

By bar 95 the texture begins to dissolve into sustained notes, creating a substantial point of repose. The following passage at bar 104 returns to Tempo 1 and recalls the rhythmic character of the opening. The recurrence is not an exact mechanical repetition, however. Material has been redistributed and the harmonic and textural context has changed, so that the return functions as a structural recollection rather than merely a reprise.

This return also clarifies the larger architecture of the work. *Prague Serenade* may be heard as a broad arch in which energetic material and cantabile material repeatedly alternate and influence one another. The work's coherence comes less from a rigid classical formal scheme than from the recurrence of identifiable rhythmic and melodic behaviours. The opening rhythmic language, the flowing triplet texture and the broad singing phrases become the principal elements from which the larger form is constructed.

The final section again recalls the opening material. The alternation between 4/4 and 3/4 returns, as does the characteristic combination of short articulated figures and longer melodic gestures. The musical argument is now more compressed, however. The principal ideas are sufficiently established that they no longer require extensive development. Instead, the music moves towards its conclusion through increasingly concise statements and a gradual stabilisation of the texture.

The closing pages are particularly revealing. At bar 138 the music retains its melodic character but becomes increasingly spacious. The final bars employ sustained sonorities and a *Solo arco* line in the lower strings before the ensemble settles into its final sonority. Given the considerable rhythmic activity of the preceding music, there is a resolution through a process of relaxation and consolidation.

The Czech dimension of the work is therefore best understood not as a superficial stylistic quotation but as part of its musical atmosphere and conception. The serenade tradition, the emphasis on melodic naturalness and the balance between rhythmic vitality and lyrical expression all contribute to its character. The references to Dvořák and Janáček provide useful points of orientation, but the score itself does not depend upon direct imitation. Its musical language remains individual, particularly in its handling of changing metre, repeated-note figures, continuous triplet motion and the flexible distribution of melodic material across the ensemble.

What makes *Prague Serenade* successful is ultimately the equilibrium between these elements. Its rhythmic writing is sufficiently active to prevent the lyricism from becoming static, while the sustained melodic passages prevent the rhythmic material from becoming merely decorative. The string writing continually alternates between homogeneity and division, between foreground and

background, and between movement and repose. The result is a work whose apparent simplicity conceals a carefully constructed network of recurring materials and textural relationships.

Seen in this light, *Prague Serenade* is less a musical postcard of Prague than a sustained study in musical flow. Its serenade character emerges from the balance of lyricism and movement, while its Czech associations provide an aesthetic context rather than a restrictive stylistic model. The personal circumstances surrounding its composition may explain something of the work's unusual energy, but they are not necessary to understand it. The score itself reveals a coherent musical design in which rhythmic vitality, melodic breadth and finely differentiated string textures are continually brought into equilibrium.

Suite for String Orchestra ‘Emynau - Hymns’ Op. 173a

Programme Note

Emynau - Hymns is a work rooted in the Welsh tradition of hymn singing, but conceived not as a sequence of straightforward arrangements. Rather, the hymn material becomes the source of a continuous musical meditation, in which melody, rhythm, texture and colour are transformed within the medium of the string orchestra.

The first movement, *Rheidol* and *In Memoriam*, begins with a restrained and reflective atmosphere before developing into a much more animated central passage. The music subsequently returns to the contemplative character of the opening, creating an arc from remembrance, through activity and intensity, back towards stillness. The contrast between the quiet opening and the vigorous central music is fundamental to the movement's expressive character.

The second movement, *Gwahoddiad*, is more immediate and rhythmically active. Its melodic material is surrounded by flowing triplet figures and increasingly varied instrumental textures, allowing the hymn character to emerge through movement and rhythmic energy rather than through simple presentation of a tune. The music passes through contrasting sections, including passages marked *cantabile*, before gathering considerable momentum.

The final movement, *In Memoriam*, is the most driven and rhythmically concentrated of the three. Its changing compound metres and persistent ostinato-like figures create a sense of urgency, while the later *Molto meno mosso* provides a marked change of perspective. The work ends not with a brilliant conclusion but with sustained sounds, allowing the final remembrance to remain suspended in the air.

Taken as a whole, *Emynau – Hymns* is therefore less a collection of hymn arrangements than a reflection upon what the hymn tradition represents: memory, community, faith and the persistence of inherited melody. The string orchestra becomes both the voice of that tradition and the means by which it can be reimagined.

Discussion

Emynau - Hymns occupies an interesting position in Dafydd Bullock's output because its musical identity is inseparable from the Welsh hymn tradition, yet its treatment of that tradition is fundamentally symphonic in conception. The hymns are not merely quoted melodies placed successively into an orchestral setting. They act instead as generators of musical behaviour: melodic shapes give rise to counterpoint, rhythmic cells become accompanimental figures, and familiar material is repeatedly reframed through changes of register, texture, metre and intensity.

This distinction is important. The work does not attempt to reproduce the experience of congregational hymn singing. It takes something recognisably associated with that experience and subjects it to the processes of a concert work for strings. The result is at once culturally specific and musically independent.

The opening movement, *Rheidol* and *In Memoriam*, establishes the work's fundamental expressive polarity. The beginning is slow and the five string parts enter with a restrained combination of sustained and articulated material. There is already a sense that the music is remembering rather than simply stating. The melodic line is allowed space, while the lower strings provide a foundation against which the upper voices can unfold.

What follows is considerably more complex than a simple hymn harmonisation. The texture continually changes, with melodic fragments passed between instrumental groups and with *pizzicato* and *arco* used to distinguish different kinds of musical presence. The score shows a particularly strong concern with the relationship between foreground melody and accompanimental figuration. Rather than keeping the hymn tune permanently exposed, Bullock allows it to become absorbed into the surrounding orchestral fabric.

At bar 40 the character changes dramatically. The tempo speeds up and the music acquires a distinctly motoric energy. Repeated semiquaver patterns and sharply articulated figures replace the spaciousness of the opening. The effect is not merely one of contrast for its own sake. The central section seems to turn the act of remembrance into something more urgent and physically animated. The remembered material is no longer static: it is being reconsidered, pursued and transformed.

Particularly effective is the eventual return to the slower tempo at bar 89. The music has passed through a substantial period of activity and now withdraws again into a more spacious texture. This gives the movement a broad ternary trajectory, but one in which the return is psychologically different from the beginning. The listener has heard the material transformed, and the subsequent quietness therefore carries the weight of what has preceded it. The movement's memorial character lies as much in this structural process as in its title.

Gwahoddiad, the second movement, moves into a different world. The music immediately displays greater rhythmic animation, with triplet motion becoming an important component of the texture. Here the hymn-derived character is not presented primarily through solemnity. Instead, it is energised.

The string writing becomes increasingly contrapuntal and layered. Melodic phrases are set against repeating figures, while different sections of the orchestra take on complementary rhythmic roles. The music consequently has a sense of collective movement that is particularly appropriate to the idea embodied in *Gwahoddiad*. The hymn material is not simply an object of contemplation; it becomes something in which the whole ensemble participates.

Bullock also makes considerable use of changes of articulation. *Pizzicato* passages interrupt arco textures, while triplet figures alternate with more sustained melodic writing. The result is a movement in which continuity is maintained not by repeating one texture but by continually redistributing the musical material among the strings.

The central *cantabile* section is especially significant. Here the music relaxes sufficiently for the melodic element to regain prominence, creating a lyrical counterweight to the rhythmic activity surrounding it. This is one of the places where the work's treatment of hymn material becomes most clearly apparent: the melody is allowed to sing, but it does so within a sophisticated orchestral environment rather than as a conventional four-part hymn setting.

The third movement, *In Memoriam*, returns to the memorial dimension of the first movement but does so in radically different musical terms. The opening tempo is very fast, with changing compound metres. The resulting rhythmic profile is restless and propulsive.

The lower strings are particularly important in establishing this momentum. Repeated figures provide a persistent rhythmic ground over which the upper strings introduce melodic and contrapuntal activity. The technique gives the movement something of the character of a perpetual motion, but without reducing the music to mere display. The energy is purposeful: it drives the remembrance forward.

As the movement progresses, Bullock organises the material through a succession of contrasting structural stages. The sectional markings B, C, D, E and F make the large-scale architecture unusually visible in the score. The repeated rhythmic figures are continually recombined, while melodic material is brought forward and then submerged again within the texture.

This produces an interesting relationship between repetition and transformation. The music depends heavily upon recurring patterns, but their significance changes according to register, harmony, articulation and the material placed above them. Repetition consequently becomes a means of memory: something returns because it has not disappeared, but it never returns quite unchanged.

The climax of the movement is followed by the most striking transformation of tempo in the whole suite. At bar 357 the music becomes *Molto meno mosso*. The frenetic energy of the preceding music is suddenly replaced by a broader, more spacious perspective. The final pages retain some of the melodic and rhythmic vocabulary of the movement, but the texture becomes increasingly weighty and sustained. The closing bars finally settle into long notes rather than a conventional emphatic cadence.

That ending seems particularly apt. The suite does not conclude by resolving memory into something finished. Instead, the music slows, broadens and finally remains suspended. The final sound is therefore less a conclusion than an act of recollection that has reached silence.

Across the three movements, *Emynau – Hymns* demonstrates a characteristic Bullockian interest in allowing inherited musical material to generate new structures rather than treating it as something sacrosanct or immutable. The hymn tradition provides the work with its cultural and emotional foundation, but the compositional processes are entirely active: material is fragmented, repeated, redistributed, accelerated, slowed and transformed.

The three movements also form a convincing expressive progression. *Rheidol* and *In Memoriam* establishes remembrance through contrast between stillness and movement; *Gwahoddiad* turns towards communal energy and lyrical participation; and the final *In Memoriam* combines remembrance with an increasingly urgent rhythmic drive before withdrawing into its spacious closing passage.

What makes the suite particularly successful is that its Welsh identity does not depend upon explanatory commentary. It is embedded in the musical material itself. The listener does not need to know every source melody in order to perceive that these are melodies carrying history and collective memory. Bullock's achievement is to take that inherited material out of its original context without stripping it of its identity, allowing it to become the substance of a personal orchestral meditation.

Homage Op. 201

Programme Note

Homage, Opus 201 and dedicated to Anton, was composed at Canach on 14 November 2011, it is neither a festive overture nor a ceremonial tribute. Instead, it is a work of quiet affection and deep respect, offering its dedication through lyricism rather than display.

The score opens with the instruction with great expression and a broad tempo. From the very first bars the music sings with remarkable directness. The first violin introduces a spacious melodic line while the remaining strings support it with gently moving inner voices and a quietly pulsing pizzicato bass. The atmosphere is intimate, almost conversational, as though the music were speaking directly to its dedicatee.

Rather than relying upon dramatic contrasts, the work unfolds through gradual expansion. Melodic phrases are shared between the sections of the orchestra, harmonic colours deepen almost imperceptibly, and moments of greater intensity arise naturally from what has gone before. The writing allows every part of the string orchestra to contribute to the musical conversation, so that the tribute becomes collective rather than individual.

The middle of the work broadens into passages of greater warmth and strength before gently subsiding into quieter, more reflective music. The final pages return to the serenity of the opening, allowing the principal melodic material to settle into sustained sonorities that fade without theatricality.

Homage is therefore exactly what its title suggests: a musical offering. It celebrates neither achievement nor occasion in an outward sense, but expresses gratitude, admiration and friendship through the expressive voice of the string orchestra.

Discussion

Homage is one of the most understated works in this collection, and its restraint is precisely what gives it its emotional authority. Dedicated simply *für Anton*, it avoids the temptation to celebrate through brilliance or virtuosity. Instead, it chooses the language of lyrical generosity.

The opening immediately establishes the work's personality. The instruction with great expression is significant because it describes not merely performance style but the entire emotional approach of the composition. The melody unfolds with the ease of a song, supported by warm inner harmonies and a discreet pizzicato foundation in the double bass. Nothing is hurried. Every phrase is allowed to breathe.

The most striking feature of the work is its melodic confidence. The music rarely feels argumentative or developmental in the conventional symphonic sense. Instead, ideas grow through repetition, extension and gentle transformation. The melody is passed from one section of the orchestra to another, creating the impression that every instrument participates in the same act of tribute. The first violin may begin a phrase, but the viola or cello quietly completes its thought, while the remaining strings colour the harmony around it.

This collective approach is central to the character of the piece. A homage is not a portrait painted from a distance; it is an acknowledgement of a relationship. The music therefore avoids placing a single instrumental voice permanently at the centre. Instead, the orchestra behaves like a community of voices speaking together.

As the work progresses, its emotional landscape gradually widens. Around the middle section, the dynamics expand from the intimate opening into warmer, fuller sonorities. The music becomes more spacious without becoming grandiose. The melodic lines climb higher, harmonic tension briefly increases, and the orchestra acquires greater weight. Yet these moments of strength never feel triumphal. They feel like affection spoken with greater conviction.

Equally important is the way the music repeatedly returns to quieter ground. After each expansion, the texture relaxes, and the lyrical material reappears with renewed simplicity. This breathing quality gives the composition its architecture. Rather than building towards one overwhelming climax, Homage moves through successive waves of expression, each one deepening rather than replacing the last.

There is a maturity in this design. By 2011 Bullock’s musical language had become increasingly interested in continuity rather than contrast for its own sake. Homage demonstrates that confidence beautifully. The work trusts melody. It trusts harmonic warmth. It trusts silence between phrases. There is no need to persuade the listener through spectacle. The final pages are especially eloquent. The orchestra gradually relinquishes its earlier fullness and returns to sustained, luminous sonorities. The ending feels less like a conclusion than a blessing quietly spoken. The music does not seek applause; it simply comes to rest.

In the wider context of Bullock’s string orchestra music, *Homage* forms an important counterpart to works such as *Threnody for Dominique Dupraz* and *In Memoriam George Hadjinikos*. Those compositions remember friends after death. Homage celebrates friendship while life is still being lived. It is a rare kind of tribute: one offered in gratitude rather than in mourning. Perhaps that is why the work leaves such a lasting impression. Its emotional world is one of generosity without sentimentality. The music says something deeply human with remarkable economy. It honours another person not through grandeur, but through warmth, dignity and song.

Birthday Serenade Op. 213

Programme Note

Birthday Serenade was written for Dafydd Bullock's sixtieth birthday on 29 April 2013. It is a work of celebration, but its celebration is expressed through movement, energy and the sheer pleasure of instrumental writing rather than through ceremonial grandeur.

The music begins at a lively pace, with the first and second violins immediately engaged in an animated melodic dialogue. The opening is predominantly in triple metre, and its melodic gestures have the characteristic grace of a serenade, but the rapid tempo gives them an unusually vigorous character. The lower strings soon join the conversation, with *pizzicato* providing a rhythmic foundation beneath the more lyrical upper parts.

At section A the music gathers momentum. Rapid repeated-note and scale-like figures pass through the string sections, creating a sense of collective excitement. The writing becomes increasingly animated without losing its melodic character. The contrast between sustained lyrical phrases and rapid figurations becomes one of the work's principal sources of energy.

Section B brings a change of emphasis. The upper strings temporarily recede while viola, cello and double bass assume a more prominent role, before the musical material rises again through the ensemble. The writing is particularly effective in the way it allows the same rhythmic impulse to appear at different levels of the texture.

At C the music becomes more expansive. Long-breathed phrases alternate with energetic triplet writing, and the various string sections increasingly function as parts of a single, animated organism. The central portion of the work has a distinctly orchestral character: although there are only five string sections, the changing distribution of material creates the impression of considerably greater variety.

Section D brings the most overtly virtuosic passage. Rapid triplet figurations are distributed throughout the ensemble, generating a powerful cumulative momentum. The music reaches fortissimo, after which the intensity gradually subsides into long sustained notes.

The final section, E, restores the lyrical side of the serenade. The music relaxes and allows the melodic material to breathe again before moving towards its conclusion. At the very end the strings alternate between *arco* and *pizzicato*, and the dynamic falls from mf towards mp. The final section therefore has none of the bombast of a conventional birthday fanfare. Instead, the work closes with warmth and good humour. The score is dated Luxembourg, 29 April 2013 - the birthday itself.

The result is a birthday work which celebrates not a particular age so much as the continuing vitality of music-making. Its fundamental message is wonderfully simple: life goes on, and there is still music to be made. Before finishing this music, the composer ran a half-marathon.

Discussion

Birthday Serenade occupies an interesting position in relation to the other string-orchestra works. *An Answer in Search of a Question* is inward-looking and contemplative; T*he March of Days* considers the passage of time. Here, however, time is being celebrated rather than contemplated.

The opening immediately establishes that difference. The music is anything but retrospective. The first violins launch into a flowing melodic idea, echoed and complemented by the second violins, while the lower strings gradually supply rhythmic and harmonic support. The use of 3/4 and the graceful contours of the melodic material justify the title Serenade, but the tempo transforms the conventional serenade into something much more energetic.

There is also a delightful physicality to the writing. The lower strings' pizzicato figures are not merely accompaniment; they give the music a spring in its step. At several points the cello and double bass acquire independent rhythmic importance, and the music consequently avoids the rather obvious hierarchy of “melody above accompaniment”. Even in a celebratory work, Bullock seems to want the entire string body to participate.

Section A is the first major expansion of this idea. Here, rapid semiquaver figures begin to circulate through the ensemble. The effect is almost one of musical laughter: the material is recognisably derived from the opening world, but it has suddenly become more animated. The writing is idiomatic for strings because the figures can be passed between sections and shaped by bowing rather than sounding like exercises imposed upon the instruments. The music then develops by alternation rather than conventional thematic argument. Section B reduces the forces at particular moments and gives the middle and lower strings greater prominence. The listener's attention is thereby continually redirected. A figure which might have belonged to the violins can suddenly become part of the cello's or viola's musical vocabulary.

Section C is particularly attractive in this respect. The upper strings carry long, graceful melodic lines while triplet activity develops underneath and around them. There is an almost Schubertian quality to the coexistence of songfulness and restless movement - not necessarily in direct stylistic imitation, but in the ability to let a lyrical surface contain considerable underlying activity.

The climax in D is the most obvious demonstration of the work's virtuoso side. The triplets become almost continuous, filling the texture from top to bottom. The music reaches ff, and the string orchestra becomes a single energetic mass. Yet what is striking is what happens afterwards: the energy does not simply drive towards an even bigger climax. Instead, the texture gradually settles into sustained notes. That makes the return of the lyrical material in E particularly effective. After so much activity, the music suddenly seems to breathe more slowly. The serenade re-emerges from underneath the virtuoso display, reminding us that the rapid music was never the whole point. It was the exuberance surrounding the underlying melodic personality of the piece.

The decision to finish with *pizzicato* is charming. The final pages move between *arco* and *pizzicato*, with the dynamics retreating from mf to mp. It is almost as though the celebration is winding down naturally rather than being brought to a ceremonial halt. There is consequently something rather appealing about the work's emotional honesty. A sixtieth birthday can easily invite solemn reflection on the passage of time. Bullock chose instead to write something fast, lyrical, playful and technically alive. The piece does not deny the passage of years; it responds to it by celebrating continued movement. On the same day the composer ran a half-marathon - a physical and musical declaration that sixty is not an ending but another beginning

In Memoriam George Hadjinikos Op. 253

Programme Note

In Memoriam George Hadjinikos is a tribute to the composer's teacher, George Hadjinikos, whose influence extended far beyond the inspirational teaching of music. The work is framed by a quotation from Albert Einstein: "*Do not grow old, no matter how long you live. Never cease to stand like curious children before the Great Mystery into which we were born.*" The words provide an unusually apt key to a composition concerned with memory, intellectual curiosity and the continuing life of music.

The work begins quietly, with the strings entering separately and gradually establishing a spacious, questioning texture. The first violin and cello make brief expressive appearances against sustained notes in the other strings, creating an atmosphere which is contemplative rather than conventionally mournful. The piano is present in the score from the beginning, but remains silent during these opening stages. As the music develops, the string orchestra becomes increasingly animated. The first major section, A, introduces sharper rhythmic gestures and greater dynamic intensity. Short, accented figures begin to disturb the sustained sonorities of the opening, and the music acquires a sense of intellectual and emotional agitation.

Section B provides a contrasting relaxation. The texture becomes more spacious again, with long melodic lines in the upper strings and more active figures in the viola and cello. This alternation between concentrated rhythmic activity and reflective stillness becomes fundamental to the work's structure. Sections C and D continue this process of recollection and transformation. Earlier rhythmic figures return, but in altered contexts, while the music moves repeatedly between f, mf and quieter passages. The sense is not of a linear funeral procession but of memory itself: fragments appear, disappear and return in different forms.

The later sections become increasingly animated. The rhythmic figures acquire a more urgent character, particularly in the middle and lower strings, while the upper strings answer with sharply articulated gestures. The music briefly approaches something almost scherzo-like in its energy before withdrawing again.

Then comes the extraordinary final transformation. At section F, the atmosphere changes radically. The string orchestra becomes quiet and sustained, while the piano finally emerges into the foreground. The opening of the piano's role is deliberately restrained, but it soon becomes increasingly recognisable as an evocation of Beethoven's Emperor Concerto. This is not simply a quotation inserted for musical effect. It is a personal musical remembrance of Hadjinikos himself. He once played Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto* with the Hallé Orchestra at only six hours' notice, an extraordinary feat of musicianship and memory. The appearance of the piano at the very end of the work therefore becomes a portrait of the teacher through the repertoire with which he was associated.

The final pages are especially moving because the string orchestra largely withdraws, leaving the piano to recall Beethoven against a sustained harmonic background. The music eventually settles into quietness. Thus the memorial is ultimately not only about death. It is about the continuation of a teacher's presence through music. Hadjinikos survives in the memory of his pupil, in the repertoire he performed, and in the musical curiosity and discipline he transmitted.

The work was completed in Luxembourg on 30 November 2015.

Discussion

In Memoriam George Hadjinikos is one of the most personally significant works in the string-orchestra collection. The quotation from Einstein immediately suggests that this is not intended as a conventional *In Memoriam*. There is mourning, naturally, but the emphasis is placed upon curiosity rather than mortality. That is particularly appropriate for a teacher. A great teacher does not simply transmit information; he leaves the student with a continuing appetite to discover.

The opening captures this beautifully. The strings enter individually, with sustained tones interrupted by small expressive gestures. There is something almost conversational about it: voices are searching for one another. The music does not announce its grief. It begins by remembering.

The structure that follows is also significant. The sections A through F are clearly differentiated, but they are not separate episodes in the conventional sense. Each seems to revisit some aspect of the preceding material. Rhythmic cells return with altered accents; melodic fragments migrate between instrumental sections; sustained sonorities interrupt more agitated passages. This makes the work's emotional trajectory rather like the process of remembering a person. One does not recall someone chronologically. A gesture brings back a voice; a rhythm recalls an occasion; a particular sound suddenly evokes something apparently forgotten.

The increasingly agitated music around sections D and E is particularly interesting. The sharply accented repeated figures are almost antithetical to the spacious opening. Yet they do not seem alien to it. They could be understood as another aspect of the personality being remembered: energy, intellect, decisiveness and perhaps the formidable concentration required of a pianist.

And then, at F, everything becomes clear. The piano has been waiting. For much of the work it exists almost as a silent presence, sharing the score with the strings without participating in the musical argument. Then, near the end, it suddenly speaks. This is an exceptionally effective structural idea because the listener has not been prepared for a piano concerto-like intervention. Its arrival therefore feels almost like a memory breaking through. The memory is Beethoven.

Knowing the story of Hadjinikos performing the Emperor with the Hallé Orchestra at six hours' notice transforms those final pages. What might otherwise appear to be an intriguing Beethoven quotation becomes something much more intimate: the teacher is suddenly present through the sound of the instrument and the music he once performed.

There is even a delightful irony in the Einstein quotation. *"Never cease to stand like curious children…"* is followed, at the end, by a recollection of a pianist who apparently had to demonstrate precisely the opposite of complacency: extraordinary readiness, knowledge and courage when confronted with an unexpected demand. The Emperor becomes not merely Beethoven, but a symbol of the musical inheritance that Hadjinikos embodied.

The piano writing at the end is therefore almost a musical apparition. It does not dominate the work from the beginning because Hadjinikos himself is not being represented by a portrait theme. Instead, his presence emerges only when the musical journey has reached its final stage. The strings do not disappear completely. They remain beneath the piano as a sustained collective presence. The teacher and pupil are therefore not represented as two isolated entities. The piano memory exists within the string orchestra, within the composer's own present musical voice.

Wedding Serenade Op. 278

Programme Note

Wedding Serenade, Opus 278, was written for Jenny and Nick. Composed at Hinterthal on 5 - 6 August 2018, it is a compact work for string orchestra whose musical character is immediately suggested by its title: intimate rather than monumental, celebratory without becoming ceremonious, and animated by a sense of youthful movement.

The music begins f, and is very lively. The two violins establish the opening material almost immediately, with short, buoyant phrases whose rhythmic character is defined by the alternation of longer notes and quick semiquaver gestures. The lower strings initially remain largely silent, giving the opening a lightness and transparency appropriate to a serenade. Gradually, however, the viola, cello and double bass enter, and the musical texture becomes increasingly full.

There is a delightful sense of conversation throughout the opening section. Melodic fragments are passed between the upper strings and then echoed or developed in the lower instruments. The writing is energetic but never heavy, and the frequent rests contribute as much to its character as the notes themselves. At bar 17, section A introduces a particularly attractive change of texture, with solo passages emerging from the ensemble while the accompanying strings maintain a gently propulsive rhythmic framework.

The music continues to alternate between melodic statements and more animated exchanges. *Pizzicato, arco* and *unison* writing add variety to the colour of the ensemble, while the recurring rhythmic figures give the piece a strong sense of coherence. The wedding celebration is thus conveyed not through grand orchestral rhetoric but through movement, interplay and musical good humour.

At section B, beginning at bar 46, the music changes direction. The preceding activity gives way to a more spacious texture, with sustained notes and a reduction in dynamic level before the rhythmic energy begins to gather again. This central passage provides a moment of reflection within the otherwise buoyant character of the Serenade. It prevents the work from becoming simply a continuous display of brilliance and gives the music a more affectionate dimension.

The final section restores the lively character of the opening. Melodic figures once again circulate among the strings, while the texture builds through increasingly active exchanges. Yet the conclusion is not a triumphant orchestral climax. Instead, the music gradually relaxes, and the final bars settle into sustained notes, with the lower strings providing the last movement beneath the quietly held upper sonorities.

The resulting shape is simple but satisfying: an energetic opening, a contrasting central reflection and a return to the original celebratory character, followed by a gentle withdrawal. The work's brevity and intimacy are entirely appropriate to its purpose. The music is warm, lively and personal, offering celebration without ceremony and affection without sentimentality.

Discussion

Unlike the grand public forms of ceremonial music, a serenade traditionally implies music offered to particular people. *Wedding Serenade*, Opus 278, retains precisely that quality. It celebrates a wedding, but it does so through the language of personal musical address rather than through grandiloquent declaration.

The work's opening immediately establishes this distinction. The tempo is a lively and the metre is 3/4, while the first musical gestures belong to the two violins. Their short, rhythmically buoyant phrases have something almost conversational about them. They do not sound as though they are announcing an occasion to a large audience; they sound as though they are speaking to one another.

That is reinforced by the initial scoring. The lower three sections are largely silent at first, leaving the violins exposed. The music therefore begins with a certain lightness before gradually expanding into the complete string orchestra. This process of accumulation becomes one of the work's basic structural ideas. Rather than presenting a fully formed orchestral texture from the outset, the composition allows the musical community to grow.

When the lower strings enter, they do not simply provide harmonic ballast. They acquire their own melodic and rhythmic identities, and the music begins to move between registers. The upper strings carry quick, singing figures, while the lower instruments introduce contrasting gestures and rhythmic foundations. The result is a texture that feels active without becoming crowded.

At A, bar 17, this conversational quality becomes especially clear. Solo writing emerges from the ensemble, and the surrounding instruments provide a more restrained accompaniment. The solo passages are not treated as virtuosic display for its own sake. Their function is more akin to stepping forward briefly from a group conversation before returning to the collective texture.

This seems to me particularly appropriate for a wedding serenade. The music has a social character. Individual voices appear, but they exist within a larger ensemble; one line answers another, disappears and is replaced, and the musical argument depends upon interaction rather than confrontation. It is possible to hear in this a general metaphor for partnership without turning the work into a literal programme: two voices may initiate the musical discourse, but the larger world of sound continually surrounds them.

The rhythmic language is equally important. Much of the melodic material is built from short gestures, rests and quick semiquaver movements. This produces a sense of buoyancy, but also of speech. The rests prevent the music from becoming mechanically continuous. Phrases breathe, answer one another and leave spaces for something else to be heard.

There is also a considerable amount of harmonic colour within what is essentially a very economical ensemble. Chromatic inflections appear within the melodic writing, and the tonal centre is continually enlivened by passing notes and altered pitches. The music therefore has more sophistication beneath its apparently effortless surface than its brevity might initially suggest.

The middle of the piece provides the essential contrast. At B, beginning at bar 46, the animated musical discourse suddenly becomes more spacious. Sustained notes and quieter dynamics create a moment in which the listener can step outside the exuberance of the opening. This central section is important precisely because it is not simply another tune. It introduces a different conception of time. Where the opening is characterised by quick gestures and constant exchange, the music here

allows individual sonorities to remain. The wedding celebration acquires a moment of stillness, as though the music pauses to acknowledge the significance of the occasion before continuing.

The return to activity is consequently more meaningful. The lively rhythmic language resumes, but the listener has now experienced its opposite. The work has acquired a small but convincing emotional arch: celebration gives way to reflection and then returns to celebration.

The final pages are particularly well judged. The music does not attempt to manufacture a huge climax merely because the occasion is a wedding. Instead, its energy gradually subsides. The final sustained sonorities allow the work to come to rest naturally, with the lower strings contributing the final movement beneath the upper voices.

That ending gives the work an unusual tenderness. After the lively exchanges of the preceding music, there is no need for another flourish. The Serenade simply settles into quietness. The effect is rather like a conversation reaching its natural conclusion: the important thing has been said, and there is no need to insist upon it.

The date of composition, 5–6 August 2018, places the work within Bullock's Hinterthal period. The setting is perhaps worth noting because the music itself possesses something of the lightness associated with outdoor serenading, although the score does not prescribe any such programme. What matters musically is the combination of rhythmic vitality, transparent scoring and lyrical exchange.

There is also an appealing economy to the work. In only four pages, the composition manages to establish a recognisable musical personality, develop its material, introduce contrasting textures and dynamics, create a central point of repose and bring the whole structure to a satisfying conclusion. Its compactness is not a limitation; it is part of its character.

Above all, *Wedding Serenade* succeeds because it understands that a wedding piece need not be solemn in order to be sincere. Its affection is expressed through musical liveliness. The music smiles rather than declaims. Its rapid exchanges, solo appearances, pizzicato passages, changes of register and moments of repose create an atmosphere of companionship and shared enjoyment.

The result is therefore not a ceremonial monument but something more personal: a small musical celebration, offered directly. The serenade's essential gesture is one of musical good wishes - lively at first, reflective for a moment, then once again full of movement before settling into a final, contented calm.

An Answer in Search of a Question Op. 287

Programme Note

There are questions for which an answer can be found only after the question itself has been properly understood. *An Answer in Search of a Question* explores that curious territory between certainty and uncertainty, between something sensed but not yet articulated and the possibility that an answer may exist before we have discovered precisely what it is that we are asking.

The work is deliberately slow and spacious. Scored for harp and strings, it begins almost in stillness. The strings, muted from the outset, sustain long, gently changing sonorities, while the harp makes occasional interventions that seem less like accompaniment than distant points of illumination. The music therefore asks the listener to listen not only to what happens, but to what happens between events.

There is no conventional melody in the opening sense. Instead, the musical thought gradually emerges from the texture itself. Individual string voices move almost imperceptibly, producing subtle alterations of colour and harmony. A note may remain unchanged while another voice moves around it; a chord may appear stable but reveal a different character when one pitch is displaced. The effect is one of contemplation rather than argument.

The sections marked A, B and C deepen this process. The material is not discarded and replaced, but reconsidered. At A, the strings gather into increasingly resonant sonorities; at B, the texture again becomes more diffuse; and at C, the harmonic language seems to turn inward once more. The harp remains sparingly employed, so that when it does speak its presence has particular significance.

The later sections continue the same journey. D, E and F bring further transformations of the sustained string texture, with the harmony becoming increasingly rich through the accumulation and redistribution of the individual voices. The music does not seem to be travelling towards a conventional climax. Rather, it is approaching a state of recognition.

By the time the music reaches G, the process has become almost entirely one of suspension. The final pages do not offer a dramatic resolution. Instead, the musical activity gradually withdraws until the strings are left in a state of extraordinary quietness. The score ends with the work's original atmosphere of stillness essentially restored. The manuscript is dated 1 May 2019.

The title is therefore beautifully paradoxical. This is not an answer which solves a question. It is an answer which is itself searching for the question to which it belongs. The music inhabits that moment of uncertainty in which we sense that something has been discovered, even though we cannot yet put it into words.

Discussion

An Answer in Search of a Question is one of those works whose essential character becomes clearer when one stops looking for a conventional narrative. Its drama is harmonic and perceptual rather than thematic. The entire work is an extended meditation on the smallest possible changes.

That is already apparent on the first page. The strings enter *sempre* mp, *sempre con sordino,* creating a veiled sonority from which the music seems to emerge rather than begin. The mute is crucial to the atmosphere. It removes some of the overt brilliance of the string sound and places the listener inside a softer, more ambiguous harmonic world. The harp, meanwhile, is not deployed as a decorative colouristic instrument. Its appearances are sufficiently infrequent that each one becomes an event.

The writing is remarkably patient. The long-held notes and repeated sonorities mean that the listener becomes aware of changes that, in faster music, might pass unnoticed. A single pitch moving by a semitone can transform the emotional colour of an entire sonority. The music consequently encourages a different kind of listening: rather than asking what comes next?, one begins to ask what has changed?

That distinction is central to the work.

There is also a fascinating relationship between individual identity and collective sound. Although there are six instrumental lines - the five string sections plus harp - the string parts frequently combine into composite harmonic structures. Yet the lines remain sufficiently independent that the ear can sense their separate trajectories. The score repeatedly creates the impression of a single sonority which is nevertheless alive internally.

This becomes particularly evident in the long passages around sections A to C. At section A, the strings gradually establish a substantial harmonic field; subsequent passages alter that field through minute changes of pitch and register rather than through abrupt modulation. The music is consequently less about going somewhere than about looking more deeply into where it already is.

The same principle governs the later sections. D, E and F do not behave like conventional developmental sections. Instead, each seems to pose another version of the same problem. The harmonic material is revisited from different perspectives, and the listener gradually becomes conscious that the repetitions are not repetitions at all. Something has shifted each time.

The harp has an especially intriguing philosophical function. Because it is so restrained, it can almost be heard as an external consciousness: a separate voice entering the sustained world of the strings, asking something of it, or perhaps commenting upon it. Its occasional notes and chords have the quality of questions precisely because they are not integrated into a conventional melodic discourse.

This brings us back to the title. There is much ambiguity in *An Answer in Search of a Question*. Normally the question comes first and the answer follows. Here that order is reversed. The music seems to suggest that we sometimes possess an intuition, an emotional truth or a musical answer before we know what problem it resolves. The composition becomes the process of discovering the question retrospectively.

That may also explain why the work refuses an emphatic conclusion. A conventional answer would require some sense of finality. Instead, the music gradually withdraws, leaving the listener with the

sensation that the search has reached a point of temporary understanding rather than absolute resolution. The closing pages return to the extraordinary spaciousness with which the work began.

In that sense, the piece is almost anti-rhetorical. It does not persuade us. It does not insist. It waits.

This is one of its considerable strengths. There is a maturity in allowing a work of 376 bars to remain so quiet, patient and questioning. The absence of conventional drama becomes the drama. The listener is invited into a space where very small harmonic changes acquire enormous expressive significance.

If *The March of Days* is concerned with the unavoidable movement of time, *An Answer in Search of a Question* is concerned with something almost opposite: the suspension of time while consciousness searches for meaning. One marches; the other waits. Yet both works share an important underlying characteristic: they make musical process itself the subject of the composition.

That makes *An Answer in Search of a Question* a particularly compelling work. It demonstrates how little is actually required to create a large expressive world: muted strings, a harp used sparingly, time allowed to expand, and the courage to let a musical idea remain unresolved long enough for the listener to begin asking the question.

The March of Days Op. 293

Programme Note

The March of Days is a meditation on the inexorable movement of time. Its title suggests a march, but there is little of the conventional military or ceremonial march about the music. Instead, the sense of marching is created by recurrence: musical ideas return, are reshaped, move between the instruments and acquire different expressive meanings as the work progresses.

The opening establishes the character immediately. The first violin presents a measured, singing idea while the other strings move independently beneath it, creating a texture in which several lines seem to exist simultaneously rather than being subordinated to a simple accompaniment. The cello's sustained tones and the *pizzicato* writing of the double bass give the music a quiet sense of forward motion. Already there is a striking contrast between movement and stillness: individual voices proceed while longer-held harmonies seem to suspend time.

This tension becomes one of the work's central characteristics. The music repeatedly moves from flowing, contrapuntal writing into passages of sustained chords, only to resume its journey. These pauses do not feel like interruptions so much as moments of reflection. They suggest the way memory interrupts the present: something familiar returns, but never quite in the same form.

The sectional structure reinforces this impression. The principal divisions, marked A to F, do not create sharply contrasting movements but rather stages in a continuous process. At section B, the music becomes more inward and harmonically static before the more animated writing of section C. Section D brings a renewed melodic prominence to the upper strings, while E produces one of the work's strongest climactic moments. Yet the climax is followed not by a triumphant conclusion but by another withdrawal.

The ending is particularly eloquent. After the fuller sonorities of the middle and later sections, the music gradually fragments. Individual instruments emerge from the silence almost as isolated recollections. The final cello phrase is allowed to diminish to pp, leaving the work suspended rather than emphatically concluded.

In this respect, *The March of Days* becomes something more universal than its title might initially suggest. The march is not the march of people towards a destination, but the march of time itself. Days pass, experiences recur, memories return, and yet nothing can quite be repeated. The music's combination of recurrence and change expresses that paradox with considerable economy.

Discussion

There is something very characteristic of Bullock's music in *The March of Days:* the work takes a straightforward idea and finds a way of making it psychologically more complex. The title might lead us to expect rhythmically emphatic music - instead, the "march" is largely contained in the process of musical continuation. The music keeps going because time keeps going.

The opening is important in this respect. The first violin does not announce a grand theme so much as begin a conversation. Its phrases are answered or complemented by the second violin, while viola and lower strings establish their own trajectories. The result is distinctly polyphonic without becoming academically contrapuntal. The lines retain their independence, and the music seems to breathe naturally from one instrumental voice to another.

There is also a fascinating alternation between activity and suspension. The more mobile melodic writing repeatedly gives way to sustained sonorities. These chordal moments function almost like temporal markers: the music stops to look backwards before continuing forwards. The repeated use of *arco* and *pizzicato* is particularly effective here. *Pizzicato* can suggest the discreet ticking of a clock, but the composer does not exploit the image literally; instead it becomes part of the broader rhythmic vocabulary of the piece.

As the work develops, previously established material is not simply repeated. It is re-contextualised. At section C, for example, the violas assume a much more conspicuous rhythmic role while the upper strings temporarily withdraw. Later, the material is redistributed again, with melodic fragments passing between the violins and cello. This constant redistribution is one reason why the work feels organic despite its clearly articulated sectional construction.

The climax at section E is especially telling. The music arrives at a full forte sonority after a long accumulation of activity, and the sustained chords have the quality of an arrival. But this arrival proves temporary. The following section strips the texture back, and by the final pages the music has once again become fragmentary and intimate.

The conclusion therefore has an almost philosophical quality. At bar 123 the ensemble briefly gathers into a strong chordal statement, marked f, but this immediately recedes to p. The final section leaves the cello with the last melodic thought, while the upper strings have fallen silent. The closing diminuendo to pp is wonderfully understated.

The work is also notable for its economy of means. Five string parts are sufficient to create a surprisingly broad range of colour: sustained chords, *pizzicato* pulse, lyrical melody, imitative fragments and changes of register all become structural elements rather than merely orchestral effects. There is no need for virtuoso display. The expressive world comes from the interaction of the five voices.

Perhaps the most revealing feature is that *The March of Days* does not attempt to defeat time. It accepts it. Musical ideas recur because experience recurs, but every recurrence is changed by what has happened in between. The final withdrawal therefore feels neither tragic nor celebratory. It is simply the recognition that another stage of the journey has been completed.

Suite for String Orchestra ‘Gratias’ Op. 308

Programme Note

Gratias, subtitled *Dankgesang - Thanksgiving,* is a suite for string orchestra composed in Senheim on 9 and 10 November 2020 and dedicated to Ugur Sahin, Özlem Türeci and President Joe Biden. At the centre of the work lies the chorale *Nun danket all Gott,* whose presence provides both a musical foundation and an emotional point of reference. The dedication gives particular resonance to the idea of thanksgiving: the work was conceived at a moment when gratitude, hope and the possibility of a return to ordinary human life had acquired an intensity that could scarcely have been imagined before.

Yet *Gratias* is not a ceremonial work of thanksgiving. The chorale is never simply stated and accompanied. Instead, its musical substance is woven into the texture of the string orchestra, appearing through movement, transformation and recollection. The familiar hymn becomes something living within the composition rather than something placed upon it.

The **first movement** begins with striking energy. Rapid semiquaver figures circulate through the strings, producing a sense of movement and collective purpose. Within this activity the material of *Nun danket alle Gott* is encountered, sometimes more clearly and sometimes more deeply absorbed into the surrounding texture. The effect is almost that of discovering a familiar voice within the turbulence of events. The music moves between animated passages and increasingly sustained sonorities, allowing the underlying chorale to emerge with growing strength. Thanksgiving here is an active process: something being sought, recognised and affirmed.

The **second movement** turns inward. The tempo is slower and the strings are muted, creating a veiled and intimate sonority. The chorale is consequently heard in a very different psychological space. What in the first movement was surrounded by restless activity now becomes an object of contemplation. The music seems to suspend itself between memory and hope. In the context of the dedication, this inwardness is especially poignant: thanksgiving is not merely a public declaration but a deeply human response to the possibility of renewal.

The **final movement** restores the unmuted strings and with them the energy of the opening. Rapid figures return, but their significance has changed. The chorale is no longer simply something encountered within the musical texture; it has become an integral part of that texture. Activity and reflection, movement and stillness, are now reconciled. The music gathers towards a broad and sustained conclusion in which the thanksgiving implicit in *Nun danket alle Gott* becomes an affirmation rather than merely a remembrance.

The three movements therefore trace a simple but powerful trajectory: thanksgiving discovered in movement, turned inward through contemplation, and finally released once more into the world. The dedication to Sahin, Türeci and Biden gives this journey a very human focus. Whatever the circumstances in which the work is heard, *Gratias* remains a gesture of gratitude towards those associated, in very different ways, with the possibility of hope and renewal.

The ancient chorale and the contemporary dedication thus meet in the same musical space. *Nun danket alle Gott* represents a long inheritance of thanksgiving; the dedication places that inheritance within a particular moment of modern history. Between the two lies the composer's own musical voice, transforming remembrance into something immediate and personal.

Discussion

There are works in which a title describes an atmosphere, and there are works in which the title provides the key to the entire composition. *Gratias* belongs to the latter category. Its *Dankgesang - Thanksgiving* is not simply an indication of mood but the principle around which the work is constructed. The dedication to Ugur Sahin, Özlem Türeci and President Joe Biden makes that principle especially concrete. Thanksgiving here has human recipients, and the music acquires its meaning from the relationship between an inherited musical language of gratitude and a particular historical moment in which gratitude, hope and renewal had become intensely personal matters.

The choice of *Nun danket alle Gott* as the principal musical reference is fundamental. Rather than presenting the chorale as a self-contained quotation, the composition allows it to permeate the fabric of the string orchestra. Its identity is sometimes recognisable and sometimes submerged within rapidly moving instrumental material. This gives the work an important distinction from a traditional chorale setting. The hymn is not being illustrated; it is being remembered.

That distinction shapes the **first movement.** The opening is energetic and restless, with rapid semiquaver figures distributed among the strings. There is an immediate sense of collective activity, as though the orchestra is already in motion before the listener has had time to establish a single point of reference. Against this movement, the chorale material acquires a particular expressive significance. *Nun danket alle Gott* is not initially offered as an unequivocal statement. It has to be found.

That idea seems especially appropriate to the work's dedication. The people named in the dedication are not incorporated into the score through musical portraits or explicit descriptive gestures. Instead, the dedication is reflected in the fundamental emotional movement of the composition. The music begins from activity and uncertainty, discovers within that activity a remembered language of thanksgiving, withdraws into reflection and finally emerges with renewed affirmation. The dedication therefore becomes part of the work's emotional architecture rather than an external inscription.

As the first movement progresses, the rapid activity is increasingly interrupted or complemented by longer sustained sonorities. These moments are structurally important because they allow the underlying chorale character to become more apparent. The music seems gradually to discover its own centre of gravity. What initially appears to be a world of independent instrumental motion reveals a deeper coherence.

The **second movement** is the great inward turning-point of the suite. The muted strings immediately alter the colour and emotional temperature of the music, while the slower tempo creates a sense of spaciousness. The chorale now seems to have moved from the external world into memory. Its thanksgiving is quieter, less declarative and more contemplative.

Here the title *Dankgesang* becomes particularly apt. A song of thanks need not always be sung loudly. Indeed, the muted strings suggest something closer to private gratitude: the recognition of something precious after a period in which its absence has been keenly felt. The movement's restrained sonority prevents the sentiment from becoming merely rhetorical. Its emotional power lies precisely in its reserve.

The dedication acquires another dimension here. By naming Sahin, Türeci and Biden, the score identifies particular human beings within the otherwise universal concept of thanksgiving. The second movement allows that human dimension to be felt without turning it into programme music

in the narrow sense. There are no portraits and no narrative episodes. Instead there is the musical equivalent of a pause for reflection: an opportunity to consider what the possibility of renewal means after uncertainty.

The return to the unmuted strings in the **third movement** consequently carries considerable expressive weight. The energy of the opening returns, but it is no longer quite the same energy. The listener has passed through the inwardness of the second movement, and the chorale has acquired a different significance. The rapid figures can now be understood not as an alternative to the hymn but as part of its continuing transformation.

This is where the three movements achieve their greatest coherence. The first movement presents thanksgiving as something discovered within activity; the second treats it as something remembered and contemplated; the third brings it back into active musical life. The work does not simply move from fast to slow and back to fast. It describes an emotional cycle.

The final pages are particularly significant in this respect. The music gradually relinquishes some of its earlier restless activity and moves towards sustained sonorities. The conclusion therefore does not depend upon a grandiose gesture. Its affirmation arises from the entire journey that has preceded it. The chorale has survived its transformations and emerges at the end as the work's deepest source of stability.

There is something deeply satisfying about the way the dedication and the chorale consequently illuminate one another. *Nun danket alle Gott* brings with it the accumulated resonance of a centuries-old tradition of thanksgiving. The dedication brings that tradition into the present and gives it individual human names. Between those two poles stands *Gratias* itself: neither a historical arrangement nor a topical statement, but a personal musical act of gratitude.

The use of a string orchestra is also important. There is no large orchestral apparatus, no brass fanfare and no ceremonial percussion. The forces are essentially intimate and collective at the same time. Five string sections create a single body capable of extraordinary delicacy as well as vigorous movement. That makes the work's thanksgiving less public ceremony than shared utterance. The orchestra speaks with one voice, but that voice is created from many individual strands.

Ultimately, *Gratias* is a work about the recovery of something that may have seemed temporarily beyond reach: movement after paralysis, sound after silence, and affirmation after uncertainty. The chorale provides the memory of thanksgiving; the dedication provides its human focus; and the three movements provide its emotional journey.

The title says simply *Gratias*. The music takes that simple word and asks what it actually means to give thanks. Its answer is neither triumphalist nor sentimental. Gratitude is something discovered, contemplated and finally allowed to speak again. In that sense, *Gratias* is both a dedication and a personal statement: an acknowledgement of those to whom thanks is owed, and an expression of the profound human impulse to say, quite simply, thank you.

Threnody for Dominique Dupraz Op. 315

Programme Note

Threnody for Dominique Dupraz, Opus 315, is a memorial work written in memory of the French composer Dominique Dupraz, a friend and colleague of the composer. The dedication is deliberately simple and personal: *"In memory of my friend and colleague, French Composer Dominique Dupraz."* There is no attempt to place the deceased at a distance as a historical figure. The work begins instead from the immediacy of personal loss and from the act of remembering someone with whom a musical and professional relationship had been shared.

The opening establishes an atmosphere of profound stillness. At a slow tempo the lower strings introduce a succession of sustained sonorities while the violins initially remain silent. The music seems to emerge almost from silence, its long notes creating an atmosphere in which every change of pitch assumes significance. Rather than presenting an immediately recognisable lamenting melody, the music proceeds through isolated tones, intervals and slowly changing harmonic relationships. The effect is less that of a public expression of grief than of a private act of recollection.

As the work develops, the upper strings gradually enter the musical discourse and the texture becomes more animated. At section A, the music begins to acquire greater movement, while section B brings a still more active exchange between the instrumental voices. This change is important: the piece does not remain imprisoned within mourning. Memories of a person are inevitably memories of life, and the music allows something of that movement and vitality to enter the elegiac landscape.

The central sections continue this process of development. Musical fragments pass between the strings, sometimes appearing as lyrical statements and sometimes as more rhythmically defined gestures. At C the material gathers further momentum, before the work eventually turns towards the expansive *legatissimo* writing of section D. Here the music seems to discover a more sustained form of remembrance. The grief has not disappeared, but it has acquired a different quality: less an immediate wound than a memory capable of being contemplated with affection.

The closing pages gradually diminish in intensity. The dynamic falls from mf and mp towards pp, and the musical material becomes increasingly spare. The cello and double bass remain to articulate the final phrases before the work comes to rest in a quiet, sustained sonority. The ending therefore feels less like a dramatic conclusion than a gradual withdrawal from the world of sound.

Written at Chiddingly, Sussex, on 13 July 2021, the *Threnody* is ultimately a work of remembrance rather than despair. Its slow opening, its subsequent movement and its final return to silence trace the emotional course of mourning itself: shock and stillness, the return of memory, the recollection of a living personality, and finally the quiet acceptance of absence.

Above all, however, the work remains an expression of friendship. Dominique Dupraz is remembered here not simply as a French composer, but as a fellow musician whose life intersected with the composer's own. The music consequently serves as both elegy and tribute: a farewell to a colleague, but also a musical remembrance of a friend.

Discussion

A threnody is, by definition, a song of mourning, but mourning has many forms. It may be anguished and immediate; it may be ceremonial; it may be contemplative; or it may become, with the passage of time, inseparable from affectionate memory. *Threnody for Dominique Dupraz* belongs principally to the last of these worlds. Its grief is genuine, but it is never theatrical. The work seems less concerned with displaying sorrow than with inhabiting the strange quietness that follows the loss of someone who has been part of one's own musical life.

This is made clear by the wording of the dedication: Dominique Dupraz is described as a friend and colleague, as well as a French composer. Those words are crucial. The work does not commemorate an acquaintance or a distant artistic influence. It commemorates a relationship. The musical response is therefore necessarily personal.

The opening is one of the strongest expressions of this. The music begins with a remarkably exposed texture. The double bass establishes the first movement of sound, while the upper strings initially wait. The resulting sonority is dark, spacious and grave. There is an almost physical sense of absence in the opening: voices that might be expected to be present are silent, and those that do speak do so in long, isolated tones.

This is an especially effective way of beginning a memorial work because the music does not immediately tell us how to feel. There is no conventional lamenting melody, no sudden climax and no overtly dramatic gesture. Instead, the listener is placed inside a space of waiting. The long notes and slowly changing pitches make time itself seem suspended.

The gradual entrance of the other strings is therefore expressive. The music begins to acquire a greater sense of collective presence, but it does so slowly, as though memory itself were reconstructing the presence of the person who has gone. At section A the texture becomes more active, and by section B the music has acquired considerably greater movement. This is one of the most interesting aspects of the composition: the threnody is not confined to the vocabulary of lamentation.

Indeed, the increasing animation of the middle sections can be understood as the intrusion of life into mourning. To remember a friend is not simply to remember the fact of death. It is to remember the person as alive: gestures, conversations, musical ideas, professional encounters and all the small details that make an individual presence real. The music's increasing activity can consequently be heard as a movement from the fact of loss towards the memory of the life that preceded it.

The work's formal development reinforces this interpretation. The musical material is not presented as a sequence of unrelated episodes. Rather, there is a gradual accumulation of voices and activity, followed by periods of suspension and renewed movement. Section C continues this process, while the later *legatissimo* passage at D provides a particularly important change of character. The music here becomes more lyrical and sustained, and the memorial character of the work comes into sharper focus.

This is where grief begins to become remembrance. The distinction is subtle but fundamental. Grief looks towards what has been lost; remembrance looks towards what remains. In a musical memorial, what remains is the music itself: the possibility of giving shape to an absent presence. The sustained lines of the later section seem to do precisely this. They do not attempt to restore Dupraz, but they allow his memory to occupy a musical space.

The harmonic language contributes strongly to this atmosphere. The score repeatedly favours sustained pitches and slowly changing combinations rather than conventional harmonic progression. The result is a sense of continuity without conventional forward momentum. Individual tones seem to acquire importance because they are allowed to remain. Silence and resonance become almost as important as melodic development.

This is particularly appropriate for a work whose subject is memory. Memory rarely proceeds in a straight line. It pauses, returns, concentrates on a detail, loses it again and then suddenly recalls something else. The musical structure of the *Threnody* has a comparable quality. Its long-held sonorities create spaces in which musical memory can operate, while its more animated passages suggest the sudden return of remembered experience.

The final section is consequently not merely a diminuendo. As the music moves through mf and mp towards pp, the texture becomes increasingly transparent. The upper strings gradually fall silent, leaving the lower instruments to carry the final remnants of the musical argument. The last sounds seem almost to remain suspended between presence and disappearance.

This gives the conclusion an unusually intimate character. There is no triumphant resolution and no artificially consoling major chord. Instead, the music accepts silence as the natural destination of the threnody. The final sonority is not a declaration that grief has been overcome; it is an acknowledgement that the person being remembered is no longer physically present.

Yet the silence is not empty. It is filled by everything the music has already said.

The music deliberately avoids documentary detail. There is no attempt to narrate Dupraz's biography. Instead, the work does something arguably more intimate: it recreates the emotional experience of remembering a friend who was also a fellow composer.

That dual identity matters. Friendship and professional companionship are not separate worlds here. For composers, colleagues may become part of one's own musical history. Conversations about music, shared experiences, mutual recognition and the simple fact of working within the same artistic world create a relationship that cannot be reduced to biography. A memorial to such a person inevitably becomes a reflection on one's own musical life as well.

In that sense, *Threnody for Dominique Dupraz* is also a work about the persistence of musical fellowship beyond physical presence. Dupraz's voice may have fallen silent, but the relationship is continued through the act of composition. The composer writes because the friend is remembered; the friend is remembered because the music gives that memory a form.

The work's modest forces are entirely appropriate to this purpose. The five-part string texture allows the music to move between individual voices and collective sonority without the distancing effect of a large orchestra. The strings can sound almost like a single body, yet individual instruments repeatedly emerge from that body. This creates an expressive ambiguity between personal and communal mourning.

Ultimately, the *Threnody* does not attempt to make death beautiful. It does something more honest. It gives grief time to become memory. Its opening silence and grave sonorities acknowledge absence; its central activity recalls life; its lyrical later passages transform that recollection into affection; and its quiet ending accepts the return to silence. For that reason, the work's most important word may not actually be “Threnody”, but “friend.” The composition is a memorial because Dominique Dupraz was a composer, but it is a deeply personal memorial because he was also a friend and colleague. The music does not merely mourn a fellow musician. It keeps company, for a little while longer, with someone who is no longer there.

Up Loft! Op. 352

Programme Note

Up Loft!, Opus 352, is a work for string orchestra dedicated to Kate, Dave, Evelyn and Norah. Its musical character is established from the outset through a combination of weighty rhythmic articulation and gradually increasing movement. The opening, marked *pesante, non legato*, begins in the lower strings and progressively expands through the ensemble, creating a sense of accumulating energy before the music reaches its first clearly defined section.

The work is constructed from a succession of contrasting sections in which energetic, rhythmically articulated passages alternate with more lyrical and sustained writing. Changes of articulation are central to the design: forceful *non-legato* figures give way to *legato* phrases, *con sordino* writing and passages in which *pizzicato* and *arco* are juxtaposed. The music therefore derives much of its character from changes in sonority as well as from melodic and harmonic development.

A particularly important feature is the movement between dense, active textures and passages of considerable stillness. The middle of the work increasingly favours sustained lines and overlapping sonorities, allowing the five sections of the string orchestra to function as independent melodic voices rather than simply as a homogeneous block. The later music becomes progressively quieter and more spacious, culminating in a subdued final section in which the individual instruments are widely separated within the texture.

The title *Up Loft!* gives the work an energetic and informal identity, but the music itself moves between vigour and reflection. Its expressive range is achieved principally through the contrast of rhythmic impetus, articulation, instrumental colour and sustained lyricism. Written in Senheim on 12 August 2024, the work combines a direct and strongly rhythmic opening with an increasingly contemplative conclusion.

Discussion

Up Loft!, Opus 352, is constructed around a fundamental opposition between rhythmic propulsion and sustained lyricism. Written for the standard five-part string orchestra of first and second violins, viola, cello and double bass, the work exploits the ability of this ensemble to change character rapidly through articulation, register, density and bowing technique. Its six principal sections, designated A to F, provide a clear formal framework, but the musical continuity depends less upon sharply separated themes than upon the transformation of recurring rhythmic and textural ideas.

The opening is unusually deliberate in its preparation of the musical material. The double bass establishes a persistent rhythmic foundation before the cello, viola and upper strings progressively enter. The marking *pesante, non legato* is significant: the opening does not seek the flowing quality normally associated with string writing, but instead emphasises weight, attack and rhythmic definition. The gradual accumulation of the five instrumental groups creates a form of textural crescendo in which the sense of increasing intensity comes as much from the addition of voices as from the dynamic level itself.

The first section, A, develops this material through increasingly active figures. The writing is strongly coordinated between the sections, but the instruments do not remain permanently locked into a single homophonic texture. Figures are transferred from one register to another, and the cello and double bass are given a particularly active role in maintaining the rhythmic profile. This gives the music a sense of physical movement. Even where the harmonic material remains relatively stable, the redistribution of the rhythmic figures keeps the texture in motion.

At bar 18 the formal marking A coincides with a particularly noticeable change in the disposition of the material. The upper strings and lower strings exchange prominence, and the previously continuous rhythmic activity is broken into shorter gestures. The result is a more conversational texture, with one instrumental group answering another. The use of accents and rests becomes an important part of the musical vocabulary, producing a strongly articulated rhythmic language in which silence itself becomes a structural element.

The following passage intensifies this process. From bar 22 the music becomes increasingly fragmented and registrally dispersed, with the principal gestures appearing successively in cello, double bass, viola and upper strings. The instruments seem to propel the musical material from one part of the ensemble to another rather than simply presenting a melody with accompaniment. This is one of the work's principal characteristics: orchestral colour is generated through the movement of material between instrumental registers.

The close of this opening complex provides an effective point of contrast. Sustained notes and rests interrupt the accumulated rhythmic energy, creating a moment in which the harmonic sonority can be heard independently of the rhythmic machinery. The transition is consequently not merely a cessation of activity but a change in the way the listener experiences the ensemble.

Section B introduces one of the most important changes of colour in the work. The upper strings and viola are marked *con sordino* and *legato*, producing a softened sonority quite different from the forceful opening. The music becomes more spacious, and sustained melodic lines replace the strongly articulated gestures of the first section. The muted sound also alters the relationship between the instrumental groups: instead of a sharply differentiated rhythmic ensemble, the strings begin to merge into a more homogeneous harmonic field.

The subsequent section, C, reverses this process. The muted sonority is progressively abandoned, and *non-legato* writing reappears. At the same time, the lower strings become increasingly active, while *pizzicato* and *arco* are brought into proximity. The contrast is therefore one of both articulation and physical resonance. The passage demonstrates how effectively the work uses the inherent resources of the string orchestra: a change of bowing technique can transform the character of an otherwise related musical idea. Short accented figures are exchanged between the upper and lower strings, often with rests separating the gestures. This creates an antiphonal effect without requiring a conventional dialogue between soloists and ensemble. The ensemble becomes internally differentiated, with different groups functioning almost as independent instrumental voices.

Section D again moves towards a more lyrical conception. The *legato* markings in the upper strings and viola contrast with the more articulated material immediately preceding them. Yet the earlier rhythmic identity has not disappeared. Fragments of the preceding material remain present beneath or between the longer phrases, so that the lyrical section feels like a transformation of the established language rather than an unrelated episode. The strings sustain overlapping tones, creating a comparatively static harmonic texture, while the double bass participates more discreetly. At E, the dynamic level falls to *mp* and the texture becomes still more transparent. The sustained writing here is important structurally because it provides the necessary counterweight to the physical energy of the opening and middle sections.

From this point onwards, the work increasingly explores resonance and duration. Long notes overlap between the instrumental groups, and the boundaries between melody and accompaniment become less distinct. The effect is not one of complete stasis, however, since individual lines enter and disappear at different points. The texture therefore remains in a state of slow internal movement.

The music from bar 87 takes this process further. Individual sustained lines are separated across the five sections, leaving considerable space between successive entries. The orchestral texture has now been reduced almost to its structural essentials. Rather than driving towards a conventional climax, the work allows its accumulated energy to dissipate gradually. Section F marks the final stage of this process. The dynamic indications progressively descend from mf and mp towards p, while the music again emphasises long-held notes and carefully controlled changes of resonance. The conclusion is therefore prepared over a substantial span rather than arriving abruptly.

The final pages are especially restrained. The individual sections sustain long notes which overlap and gradually disappear. The cello and viola become particularly important in the final sonority, while the double bass provides the lowest foundation. The music arrives at its final quiet state, and the work ends without rhetorical exaggeration.

The large-scale trajectory of *Up Loft!* can consequently be understood as a movement from weight and articulation towards resonance and stillness. The opening depends upon attack, rhythmic insistence and the accumulation of instrumental voices; the later sections increasingly depend upon legato, sustained tones, muted colour and the separation of individual lines. The contrast is not simply between fast and slow or loud and soft. It concerns two fundamentally different ways of organising orchestral sound: one based upon rhythmic energy and one based upon duration.

This gives the work a stronger formal unity than its sectional markings alone might suggest. Sections A - F are not isolated episodes but stages in a continuing process. Material is repeatedly reinterpreted through different articulations and instrumental combinations, and the listener's perception of the string orchestra changes as the work progresses. What begins as a strongly physical ensemble gradually becomes a resonant, almost weightless collection of individual lines.

In this respect, *Up Loft!* is a particularly clear example of the importance of orchestral texture within Bullock's string writing. The musical argument is carried not solely by melody or harmonic progression, but by the changing relationship between the five instrumental groups. The work moves from collective rhythmic force to increasingly independent voices and finally to a carefully balanced, quiet sonority. Its expressive effect therefore arises from the transformation of the ensemble itself, making the final stillness the natural consequence of everything that has preceded it.

With a Singing Heart Op. 353

Programme Note

With a Singing Heart, Opus 353, was written in August 2024 following a return to Fachwen, very near to Sŵn y Llyn, the place that had once been the composer's home. He stayed for several nights with a neighbour, and the experience of being once again so close to the landscape and surroundings of his earlier life was deeply evocative. The score bears the inscription *"Sŵn y Llyn and Senheim, August 2024"*, marking the two places between which the work was conceived.

There is something poignant about returning to a place that was once home and discovering that it is at once so near and yet so far. The physical landscape may remain recognisable, while the life that once inhabited it belongs to another time. *With a Singing Heart* grows from that curious mixture of presence and distance: the joy of return, the persistence of memory and the knowledge that one can revisit a place without ever quite being able to return to the life one once lived there.

The music begins quietly and organically. The lower strings establish broad, rising gestures, and the upper strings gradually enter, so that the sound seems to grow upwards through the ensemble. There is immediately a sense of awakening, of something remembered beginning to speak. The ascending figures that recur throughout the opening give the music an instinctive feeling of reaching upwards, as though memory were drawing the past into the present.

At A, the music gathers greater energy, with the various string sections contributing increasingly animated ascending figures. The work then repeatedly alternates between movement and repose. At B the texture becomes more restrained, before the music gathers renewed energy; later, C brings a denser and more strongly articulated passage, while D turns towards expressive, sustained writing. This alternation is at the heart of the work. The music does not attempt to reconstruct the past as though it were still present. Instead, memories appear and disappear, some vivid and energetic, others more distant and contemplative. The active passages can suggest the immediacy of remembered life, while the long, sustained phrases seem to acknowledge the distance that time has created.

The lyrical character becomes especially pronounced in the E section, where the first violin carries long, singing phrases above the gently moving inner voices. Here the title becomes almost literal. The music seems to sing from within itself, and the singing quality has the character of memory rather than nostalgia. It is affectionate without attempting to idealise what has been lost. The work subsequently gathers renewed energy at F and G, before H opens another extended period of spacious, sustained writing. The final sections increasingly favour lyrical continuity, with the upper strings carrying the principal melodic voice while the remaining instruments gradually recede.

The ending is deliberately quiet. The dynamic has fallen and the final phrases are spare and gently sustained. The music does not conclude with a statement of finality. It simply becomes quieter, as memories themselves may become quieter without disappearing. *With a Singing Heart* is therefore a work of return, but not of restoration. To revisit Sŵn y Llyn was to encounter a place that was still physically close, yet separated from the present by the distance of many years. The music inhabits that distance. It remembers without attempting to reclaim; it celebrates without denying change. The heart that sings in the title is consequently both the heart of the present and the heart of the past. It is the voice that recognises the old landscape, feels the continuing attachment to it, and understands that one can belong to a place even after one's life has carried one far away.

Discussion

Some compositions arise from an idea, some from an event, and some from a place. *With a Singing Heart* belongs unmistakably to the third category. Its musical origins are bound to the return to Fachwen and to *Sŵn y Llyn,* once the composer's home, and to the experience of staying in Fachwen again for several nights with a neighbour. The score's inscription, *"Sŵn y Llyn and Senheim, August 2024",* consequently has more than documentary significance. It records the physical geography of the composition and, more importantly, the distance between two points in a life.

There is a particular poignancy in returning to an old home. The place may be remarkably near in geographical terms, yet the life to which it belonged can be extraordinarily far away. One sees the landscape with the eyes of the present while simultaneously remembering it through the eyes of the person one once was. It is this double perspective that gives *With a Singing Heart* much of its emotional character.

The title itself seems almost to acknowledge that contradiction. A singing heart implies joy, vitality and openness, but it does not necessarily imply uncomplicated happiness. One can sing because one is happy; one can also sing because memory has opened something within oneself. In this work, the singing quality seems to arise from the coexistence of present experience and remembered experience.

The opening is revealing in this regard. The music begins with broad, ascending gestures distributed through the strings. The music does not arrive fully formed. It grows. The lower strings begin the process and the upper strings progressively join it, creating the impression of something emerging into consciousness. This is an unusually apt musical image for return and remembrance. Memory is rarely a complete picture that suddenly presents itself. A detail appears first; another follows; gradually the larger image becomes recognisable. The opening of *With a Singing Heart* has something of that quality. Its musical landscape is constructed through successive entries and rising gestures.

The recurring upward movement is equally significant. At A, the ascending figures return with greater energy and breadth. The music seems continually to reach upwards, and this creates an expressive ambiguity. Is it reaching towards the past, towards the present, or beyond both? The score does not answer the question, and it does not need to. Its emotional strength lies precisely in the coexistence of those possibilities. The formal structure then becomes a succession of changes in perspective. B reduces the intensity; C restores rhythmic concentration; D opens into expressive sustained writing. The music continually moves between recollection and immediacy.

The central lyrical passages are particularly important. At E, the first violin carries a long, singing line above the other strings. The effect is not that of a soloist separating itself from the ensemble but of a single voice emerging naturally from the collective sound. The melody seems to possess its own memory.

This is perhaps where the personal significance of the work is most strongly felt. The return to an old home does not produce a simple reconstruction of the past. Instead, the past survives as a collection of voices within the present. Some are vivid; some are distant; some emerge unexpectedly. The orchestra becomes an ideal medium for such an experience because its individual voices can be heard both separately and as part of a single continuing sound.

The energetic passages that follow should therefore not be understood as interruptions of the lyricism. F, G and the surrounding sections demonstrate how the singing impulse can coexist with rhythmic activity and harmonic weight. The music does not choose between vitality and reflection. It needs both. That is one reason the work avoids becoming nostalgic. Nostalgia often attempts to preserve the past in an idealised form. *With a Singing Heart* does something more mature. It recognises the past while accepting that it has become past. The music can celebrate the memory of *Swn y Llyn* without pretending that the intervening years have not happened.

The later H section deepens this perspective. After the energetic episodes, the music becomes increasingly spacious. The long sustained notes allow the listener to hear not only what is sounding but also what has disappeared. Silence becomes part of the musical vocabulary. From I onwards, the upper strings increasingly carry the expressive burden of the composition. The music becomes almost vocal in its sustained melodic writing, while J gives the ensemble renewed substance without sacrificing its lyrical character.

The final withdrawal is therefore deeply significant. The dynamics fall to p and mp, and the music gradually becomes sparse. The final sound is not a farewell to the past so much as an acknowledgement of its continuing presence at a distance. Perhaps that is the real meaning of *With a Singing Heart*. The heart can remain attached to a place without remaining physically there. A landscape can continue to belong to one's inner life long after one's outward life has moved elsewhere. To return is to discover both the nearness of the place and the distance of the years.

The work's inscription joining *Swn y Llyn* and Senheim therefore becomes almost symbolic. These are not simply two locations where the composer happened to be. They represent two points in a life, brought together through music. The composition becomes the meeting place between them. That makes the title especially apt. The heart that sings is not naïvely celebrating a return to what once was. It is singing because the connection has survived the distance. The old home is still there, the memory is still there, and the composer is now able to encounter both from the perspective of a very different life.

There is something rather moving in that. So near, and yet so far is not simply a description of geographical distance. It is the emotional condition from which the work grows. *With a Singing Heart* turns that distance into music - not into mourning, not into nostalgia, but into gratitude for the fact that what has been lived can continue to sing within the present.

Gwenllian Op. 150

Programme Note

Gwenllian is a fantasia written for the cello and bass sections of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, *Virtuosi di Basso*. It is based on a Welsh folk song, *Merch ifanc,* conceived for the unusual and richly sonorous combination of eight cellos and two double basses. The title refers to Princess Gwenllian, the daughter of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the last Welsh Prince of Wales. After the death of her father she was taken from Wales on the orders of Edward I and confined for the remainder of her life in a convent in England, separated from her country, language and culture.

The music does not attempt to tell this story literally. Instead, the folk melody becomes the central musical presence from which the fantasia continually develops. It is presented in different registers and textures, sometimes plainly and lyrically, sometimes surrounded by increasingly active figuration. The ten instruments are treated as a single large string choir, but also as distinct layers, allowing melodic fragments to pass between voices and contrasting sonorities to emerge from the same underlying material. *Pizzicato, arco,* sustained harmony and rapid rhythmic writing all play important roles. The work repeatedly moves between activity and repose, before returning towards the simplicity of the opening idea and finally coming to rest in a quiet, sustained conclusion.

Discussion

Gwenllian is conceived as a fantasia on a Welsh folk song, and the significance of that song, *Merch Ifanc*, is fundamental to the work. The historical figure of Gwenllian, the last Welsh Princess of Wales, provides the human subject, while *Merch Ifanc* provides a musical image through which the tragedy of her unrealised life can be understood. The folk song tells, in compressed form, of a young girl who is a girl in the morning, married by noon and a widow by nightfall. Time passes with extraordinary speed; possibilities disappear almost before they have been realised. In *Gwenllian*, that idea becomes more than a literary association. The folk melody is placed within a work whose changing textures, tempi and intensities continually suggest movement, interruption and the passage of time. The central section introduces *Merch Ifanc* explicitly, making the folk song the emotional and conceptual centre of the fantasia.

The musical treatment begins, however, without the folk melody being immediately presented as a lyrical subject. The opening is strikingly direct. All ten instruments - eight cellos and two double basses - enter together, establishing a substantial, integrated sonority from the outset. Rather than an atmospheric introduction or a gradual accumulation of individual voices, the opening presents the ensemble as a single musical body. The full string sonority gives the beginning a sense of weight and purpose, appropriate to a work concerned with a life and a history already burdened by circumstances beyond the individual's control.

The music moves into a faster tempo and the character becomes increasingly animated. The fantasia proceeds through a succession of contrasting textures and rhythmic states rather than following a conventional song-form design. Upper and lower instruments acquire increasingly differentiated functions; sustained notes are placed against repeated and rapidly moving figures, and *arco* and *pizzicato* writing are juxtaposed to create changes of physical character as well as colour. The ten instruments can sound like a single large string body, but they can also divide into smaller groups whose independent activity gives the music a considerably more chamber-like character.

This process of increasing activity is important to the expressive conception of the work. The music repeatedly accelerates, gathers intensity and then relaxes, with *più mosso* passages followed by returns to *Tempo primo, meno mosso*. The succession of sections - from A onwards through the later formal divisions - therefore produces a sense of continual movement rather than simple linear development. Rhythmic figures become increasingly prominent, *pizzicato* is used as an important articulative device, and the ensemble repeatedly shifts between sharply defined activity and more sustained writing. The result is a musical world in which time is felt physically: through pulse, repetition, acceleration and the accumulation of events.

Against this background, the appearance of *Merch Ifanc* acquires particular force. The folk song is not introduced merely to establish a Welsh identity, nor is it decorative local colour. Its narrative of a young woman whose life seems to pass almost instantaneously provides the essential human meaning of the fantasia. The melody brings with it an idea of potential that has not been fulfilled. In the context of Gwenllian, this becomes especially poignant: a life that might have developed in many directions is instead curtailed by political events and captivity. The folk song therefore acts almost as a musical counter-image to the surrounding activity. Its simplicity and recognisability allow the listener to hear, within the larger argument of the work, something specifically human.

The contrast between the folk melody and the more active writing is consequently crucial. *Merch Ifanc* carries the sense of song, memory and human identity, while the surrounding music creates a more turbulent temporal and dramatic environment. The folk material does not stand outside the fantasia; rather, the surrounding musical processes give it its particular emotional significance.

When it emerges, the listener hears not simply a melody from Welsh tradition but a musical representation of what has been lost.

The later course of the work continues to alternate between energetic and more measured states. The numerous sectional divisions allow Bullock to change tempo, articulation, register and density without abandoning the fundamental unity of the work. The music repeatedly returns to faster, strongly articulated passages, while other sections reduce the intensity and allow sustained sonorities to emerge. This gives the fantasia an episodic quality, but the episodes are held together by the persistent sense of temporal movement established from the beginning.

The ensemble itself is also central to the expressive character of the piece. Eight cellos and two double basses offer an unusually broad range of colour within what is, essentially, a single family of instruments. The lower register can give the music considerable gravity, while the upper cellos can assume a more vocal or lyrical character. The absence of other instrumental families means that changes of colour must be achieved almost entirely through register, articulation, bowing, dynamics and the distribution of musical material between the players. *Pizzicato* and *arco* become especially important in this respect, as do the contrasts between densely integrated passages and more differentiated lines.

The closing stages of the work bring the accumulated activity towards a gradual withdrawal. After the final energetic sections, the music returns to the slower *Tempo primo* and eventually subsides through increasingly quiet dynamics. The conclusion, marked pp, does not offer a triumphant resolution. Instead, the sound gradually diminishes, leaving the listener with a sense of something passing beyond reach. This is particularly apt in a work whose central musical image is a song about the rapid passing of a woman's life.

Gwenllian therefore occupies an interesting position between historical subject, folk tradition and abstract musical fantasy. Its programme is never simply illustrated by the music; rather, the historical idea and the folk song become structural elements within the musical argument. *Merch Ifanc* provides the work with its most direct expression of lost time and unrealised potential, while the surrounding fantasia creates the restless temporal world through which that idea is experienced. The result is not simply a memorial to Gwenllian, but a meditation on the fragility of human possibility: on how quickly a life can be changed, how much can be lost, and how music can preserve something of what history has taken away.

Cysgodion - Shadows Op. 155

Programme Note

Cysgodion — "Shadows", or more suggestively "Shades" — was written for *Virtuosi di Basso*, the cello and bass ensemble of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra in Prague. The title evokes the spirits of the dead moving through the darkness of All Hallows, and the music reflects this idea not through literal depiction but through an atmosphere of appearance, disappearance and restless movement.

The work begins quietly, with *pizzicato* fragments and sustained notes emerging almost imperceptibly from the lower strings. Gradually the texture becomes more animated and contrapuntally active. Individual instruments emerge from the ensemble, including a solo cello passage marked *molto espressivo*, while later sections explore increasingly varied combinations of *pizzicato, arco*, *sul ponticello* and muted playing. A vigorous central passage is followed by more mysterious sonorities and, eventually, a return to the opening tempo and material. The final pages settle into a subdued, spacious texture. The "shades" of the title seem never quite to disappear; rather, they recede into the resonance of the music.

Discussion

Cysgodion is perhaps the most overtly atmospheric of the three works written for the Czech ensemble. Its conception is closely bound to the special colour of eight cellos and two double basses, but the writing avoids treating the group simply as a homogeneous string choir. From the opening, Bullock divides the ensemble into contrasting layers: *pizzicato* figures and sustained notes coexist, while individual cello voices appear and disappear within the larger sonority. The predominance of very soft dynamics create a sense of music that is already present before it has fully announced itself.

The formal design is strongly sectional, with thirteen principal divisions marked A to M. Yet the sections are connected through recurring rhythmic and harmonic gestures, so that the work feels less like a succession of independent episodes than like a changing landscape. Section A introduces a solo cello marked *molto espressivo*. This is an important moment because it establishes a human, singing quality within music that has previously been predominantly fragmentary. The lyrical line subsequently becomes one of the elements through which the otherwise elusive character of the work is given continuity.

Later the music moves into a much faster tempo. Here the rhythmic profile becomes considerably sharper, with repeated notes, accented gestures and pizzicato contributing to a more animated and almost agitated surface. The contrast is particularly effective because it grows out of the restrained opening rather than appearing as an unrelated interruption. The music repeatedly shifts between these two poles: sustained resonance and sharply articulated movement, lyricism and rhythmic agitation, presence and disappearance.

One of the most striking passages comes later, when the strings are instructed to play *sul ponticello*. The change of bow position transforms the colour of the ensemble, producing a thinner and more spectral sonority. This is followed by a passage involving *con sordino* playing, and subsequently by *senza sordino* writing. These changes of colour are structural rather than decorative. They give the work a constantly shifting acoustic identity, as though the same musical figures were being heard at different distances or through different layers of memory.

The passage beginning at bar 146 provides a further transformation. The upper cello parts are marked *cantabile*, allowing a more sustained melodic character to emerge above the accompanying figures. The music subsequently builds towards the emphatic *fortissimo subito* at bar 187. The suddenness of this arrival is characteristic of the work: moments of quiet concentration can be broken by abrupt appearances of greater force, much as a shadow may suddenly become sharply defined before once again dissolving.

The closing section consequently has the character of a return rather than a new beginning. The musical vocabulary of the opening is recognisable, but it has acquired the memory of everything that has intervened. The final pages gradually reduce the activity and allow the resonance of the ensemble to predominate. The work ends not with a decisive cadence but with a quiet, suspended sonority. The final date in the score is “Fachwen - Luxembourg, 3-7 November 2004.”

Zlatá Řeka - Golden River Op. 163

Programme Note

Zlatá Řeka - "Golden River" - was written for Virtuosi di Basso, the cello and bass ensemble of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, and takes its inspiration from the view of the Vltava from the Smetana Monument in Prague. From this vantage point the river passes over the weir below, its movement and turbulence giving the water an extraordinary sense of animation. The presence of the river also inevitably evokes Bedřich Smetana and his musical evocation of the Vltava.

The music responds to the scene through movement itself. It begins *con sordino* with almost continuous triplet motion distributed among the cellos, creating a flowing, restless surface. Against this current Bullock introduces broader melodic shapes and sustained tones. The two elements are repeatedly separated, recombined and transformed, producing a large-scale alternation between fluid rhythmic movement and more spacious, singing passages.

As the work progresses the texture becomes increasingly varied and expansive, with *pizzicato* and *arco* playing, changes of register and increasingly powerful tutti writing all contributing to the sense of a river gathering energy. The final pages reverse this process: the music gradually recedes until only fragments of the flowing motion remain, disappearing *a niente*.

Discussion

Of the three works for this unusual ensemble, *Zlatá Řeka* makes the most sustained use of continuous rhythmic motion as a structural principle. The opening is immediately distinctive. All eight cellos play *con sordino*, while the musical surface is dominated by flowing triplets. The individual lines move at different pitches and in different registers, but their common rhythmic impulse produces the impression of a single continuous current. The double basses initially remain silent, allowing the upper and middle registers of the cello ensemble to establish the river-like motion before the full depth of the ensemble is gradually introduced.

The work unfolds through seventeen marked sections, A to Q, but these divisions function as stages in a continuing process rather than as discrete movements. There is a progressive alteration in the balance between rapid figuration and sustained melodic writing. The triplet figure is particularly important because it is not merely accompanimental. It creates the basic temporal environment within which the other material can move. Long notes, melodic fragments and sustained harmonic fields appear above, below or within this motion, so that the listener can experience both the turbulence of the water and the broader perspective of the landscape surrounding it.

The instrumental writing takes advantage of the fact that ten lower strings can produce an extraordinary spectrum of density. At times almost every cello participates in the flowing figuration, producing a remarkably continuous texture; at other moments the rapid movement is confined to only a few instruments while the others sustain longer notes. The result is not simply a contrast between melody and accompaniment. Rather, the functions continually exchange. A line that has seemed accompanimental can suddenly become prominent, while a previously exposed melodic gesture is absorbed into the larger rhythmic fabric.

Changes of articulation are central to this process. The opening muted sonority eventually gives way to *senza sordino* writing, while *pizzicato* passages provide moments in which the continuity of the bowed sound is interrupted by sharper attacks. Later sections make increasing use of dense tutti writing and strongly articulated rhythmic patterns. The music consequently acquires greater physical weight as it progresses. The river which began as a distant, almost shimmering presence becomes progressively more immediate.

The large climax is reached in the later part of the work. At bar 313 the music becomes increasingly forceful, and by bar 317 the score calls for *molto crescendo* across the ensemble. The effect is one of accumulated energy: the previously continuous current has expanded into a much larger sonorous mass. Yet the work does not end at this point. Instead, the accumulated energy is gradually released. At bar 323 the texture falls back dramatically, after which the subsequent sections alternate renewed activity with increasingly spacious passages.

The final sequence is particularly beautifully judged. At bar 332 the music returns to flowing triplet figures, but these no longer possess quite the same inevitability as at the opening. They have become part of a larger recollection of the work's earlier material. The rhythmic motion continues through the upper cellos while longer notes appear beneath it, and the final pages progressively thin the texture. By bar 366 the dynamics have fallen to pp, with the final sounds marked *a niente*. The last remaining gestures in the double basses are bowed and extremely soft, leaving the music to disappear rather than conclude with a formal punctuation.

In this respect the ending completes the central idea of *Zlatá Řeka*. The river is never represented through a single descriptive effect; instead, its identity is embodied in the continuing interaction between movement and stillness. The triplets provide the flowing current, while the longer melodic

and harmonic lines suggest the changing perspective of the observer. The musical image is therefore both physical and contemplative: water in constant motion, seen from a fixed point, with the musical energy eventually receding into silence.

Three Works for Virtuosi di Basso

The three works *Gwenllian*, *Cysgodion* and *Zlatá Řeka* occupy a distinctive place within Bullock's music, not least because they were written for an ensemble unlike any other for which he has composed: the group of eight solo celli and two solo bassi of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra as *Virtuosi di Basso*. They arose from a particularly fruitful relationship with the Prague musicians, who commissioned the works and performed them internationally. *Gwenllian* was premiered and recorded at the Rudolfinum in Prague, and subsequently appeared on the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra Chamber Series Volume 7.

Although the three works were composed over several years and have quite different subjects, they are connected by more than their unusual instrumentation. Each begins with an idea that is essentially simple and then discovers, within the remarkable sonority of the ensemble, a much larger expressive world. In *Gwenllian*, the starting point is Welsh: the historical figure of the last Welsh Princess of Wales and, at the heart of the work, the folk song *Merch Ifanc*. The melody becomes a vehicle for contemplating the waste of a life and the loss of possibilities. The extensive fantasia allows it to appear in many different guises, moving between lyricism, rhythmic activity, *pizzicato* and richly layered *arco* textures before finally subsiding into stillness. The musical process mirrors the subject without attempting to illustrate it literally.

Cysgodion turns from historical memory to something more elusive. Its "shadows" or "shades", associated with All Hallows, inhabit a darker musical world in which sound itself seems continually to appear and disappear. The writing exploits the extraordinary colouristic possibilities of the ensemble: *pizzicato* and *arco*, muted and unmuted strings, *sul ponticello*, isolated melodic voices and dense tutti passages succeed one another. Yet the work remains recognisably a fantasia, its episodes growing from recurring gestures rather than from a rigid formal scheme. The result is music in which the distinction between presence and absence is constantly shifting.

With *Zlatá Řeka*, the Prague connection becomes explicit. The inspiration is the view of the Vltava from the Smetana Monument, where the river passes over the weir and the water is set into continuous movement. Here the fundamental musical image is correspondingly kinetic: flowing triplets provide an almost uninterrupted current, while broader lyrical material evokes Smetana and the wider musical identity of Prague. The two elements gradually become increasingly integrated, and the music builds towards a powerful culmination before reversing its course and finally disappearing *a niente*.

Seen together, the three works therefore form an unintended but remarkably coherent journey. *Gwenllian* looks backwards towards Wales, memory and a life denied its possibilities; *Cysgodion* inhabits the uncertain territory between memory and presence; *Zlatá Řeka* turns towards Prague and the continuing movement of the Vltava. The subjects move from a human life cut short, through the mysterious persistence of the dead, to the perpetual renewal of nature. At the same time, the music itself moves from melody, through atmosphere and colour, towards rhythmic flow. What unites the three works most strongly, however, is the discovery of how much expressive variety can be drawn from ten instruments occupying essentially the same lower-string register. The cello and bass ensemble becomes, in turn, a choir, a chamber orchestra, a landscape and a resonant space for memory. That particular sound world is inseparable from the musicians for whom these works were written, and their performances in Prague and elsewhere gave the three pieces a life beyond the circumstances of their composition.

Retrospective: The Music for String Orchestra

Seen in retrospect, the works in this volume are revealing not simply because of the differences between them, but because of the persistence of certain impulses across very different periods of Dafydd Bullock's musical life. The circumstances of composition have changed enormously. The music has been written in Wales, Luxembourg, Germany, Austria and elsewhere; it has responded to friendship, family, remembrance, celebration, landscape, history and circumstance. Yet the decision to write for strings seems to return with a consistency which is difficult to explain simply in terms of instrumentation.

Perhaps the answer lies in the nature of the medium itself. Strings allow a composer to move almost imperceptibly between the personal and the public. A single sustained note can feel intimate, even vulnerable; the same note, multiplied across an ensemble, can acquire extraordinary breadth. A simple melody can remain recognisably human while being transformed by harmony and texture. Rhythmic writing can be muscular and energetic, yet the sound remains capable of singing. This combination of physical immediacy and orchestral possibility has clearly been central to Bullock's continuing attraction to the medium.

The works in the collection arise from different circumstances, but they repeatedly reveal an instinct which has remained remarkably constant: music is often generated by an encounter. Sometimes the encounter is with a person; sometimes with a place, a memory, a piece of history or a melody already known. The composition begins when that encounter becomes sufficiently insistent that it demands another form of expression.

This helps to explain the importance of dedication in Bullock's music. A dedication is not merely an inscription placed beneath a title. It can be the point from which a piece begins to exist. Works written for friends, family members, colleagues or particular occasions acquire an additional dimension because the person or circumstance remains present behind the music. Yet once the work is completed, it must stand independently. The dedication may explain its origin, but it cannot determine what the listener hears.

The same is true of place. Wales has remained an important presence throughout Bullock's music, not because he has attempted to maintain a permanently "Welsh" style, but because Wales is part of the musical and imaginative landscape from which he began. Hymns, folk melodies, mountains, language and memories inevitably belong to that landscape. At other times another place takes over. The Austrian Alps, Prague, Luxembourg, the Mosel valley and many other locations have entered the music not as postcards but as experiences which have been absorbed into the compositional imagination.

The string-orchestra works make this process particularly visible. *Prague Serenade*, for example, is inseparable from Prague, yet the music does not depend upon the listener knowing the circumstances of its composition. Its musical character is sufficient. References to Dvořák and Janáček become part of a larger musical language rather than quotations simply attached to a programme. The city becomes transformed into rhythm, melody, gesture and colour.

Other works turn inward. A threnody remembers a friend; a serenade celebrates a marriage; a work such as *With a Singing Heart* looks towards a place which is at once familiar and distant. In such music, memory is not simply a subject. It becomes a structural force. The music may return, hesitate, repeat, transform or finally allow something to disappear. What has been remembered is therefore not merely described but re-experienced through musical time.

The Welsh works reveal another aspect of this process. Hymn tunes and folk melodies carry a collective memory which is different from personal recollection. They have existed before the composer encounters them and will continue to exist afterwards. To use them is therefore to enter into a conversation with something inherited. In *Emynau*, for instance, fragments of Welsh hymnody are not treated as museum pieces. They are taken apart, recombined and made to live within a new musical context. The old and the new coexist.

This relationship between inheritance and transformation is fundamental to Bullock's music. He has never needed to choose between tradition and individuality. A melody can be old and yet become new through its surroundings. A familiar harmonic progression can acquire another meaning through rhythm or instrumentation. A folk song can become the starting point for a substantial musical argument. The important question is not whether the material is new in itself, but what the composer does with it.

The final three works in this volume make this principle especially clear. *Gwenllian*, *Cysgodion* and *Zlatá Řeka* were written for *Virtuosi di Basso, t*he cello and bass ensemble of the Czech Philharmonic, and they extend the idea of string-orchestra writing into an almost chamber-orchestral world. All three works were premiered at the Rudolfinum in Prague and then performed internationally. *Gwenllian* was recorded at the Rudolfinum, and the recording subsequently appeared in the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra Chamber Series.

The three pieces are also strikingly different in subject. *Gwenllian* looks towards Welsh history and the wasted life of a young princess; *Cysgodion* turns towards shadows and the unsettling world suggested by All Hallows; *Zlatá Řeka* responds to the Vltava and to the musical presence of Smetana. Yet when placed beside one another they reveal how the same ensemble can become three quite different expressive worlds. In *Gwenllian* the instruments can suggest human voices and lost possibility; in *Cysgodion* they become spectral and elusive; in *Zlatá Řeka* they acquire the continuous movement of water.

That seems to offer a useful metaphor for the whole collection. The instruments remain the same, but the world they inhabit changes. Looking back over the works, it is also apparent that Bullock has rarely composed by following a predetermined stylistic programme. The music has accumulated rather than been designed as a single edifice. One work leads to another, sometimes because of a commission, sometimes because of a place, sometimes because of an event or relationship, and sometimes simply because an idea refuses to go away. The catalogue has consequently become a kind of record of continuing engagement with the world.

This may explain why the music contains so many returns. Melodies return, places return, ideas return, and sometimes music written many years earlier finds itself unexpectedly reappearing in a later work. A return is never quite a repetition. Time has intervened, and the composer has changed. What was once heard from one perspective may be heard differently later.

This is particularly evident in Bullock's later chamber music, where earlier thematic material can be recalled decades afterwards. The effect is not necessarily nostalgic. It can be more like meeting an old friend after many years: recognition comes first, followed by the realisation that both people have changed.

The string-orchestra works therefore seem, in retrospect, less like a discrete collection than like a series of conversations. There is a conversation with Welsh musical inheritance, with European musical tradition, with places that have mattered, with people who have mattered, and above all with the possibilities of the string sound itself.

The string orchestra collection, so far, consequently provides not a complete portrait but a particular perspective: one through which a recurring strand of Bullock's musical thought can be followed across different periods and circumstances. What emerges is not a single "string orchestra style". Rather, it is a continuing fascination with what strings can say: sometimes urgently, sometimes lyrically, sometimes privately and sometimes on an almost orchestral scale. The works have different origins, different subjects and different musical personalities, but they belong to the same ongoing process. This process is not finished. The final work in this volume is therefore not really an ending. It is simply the point at which the collection stops. The music continues elsewhere, as it has always done, with another place, another memory, another encounter, another musical idea waiting to become a work. The catalogue is not a completed journey, but the accumulated evidence of continuing movement.

Dafydd Bullock

Dafydd Bullock was born in 1953 in Llanberis, Gwynedd, Cymru (Wales). A composer, conductor, arranger and teacher, he graduated in Music (University of Manchester and the Royal Northern College of Music, 1971 - 1976) where he studied with George Hadjinikos, and took a Master's Degree in International Relations (University of Sussex, 1981 - 1983). In 1993 and 1994 he won first prizes at the National Eisteddfod of Wales, and in 1995 he was honoured in Wales by admission to the highest Order of the Gorsedd of Bards. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 2005.

His compositions include 42 Symphonies, 19 Symphonic Poems, 2 Operas, 2 Requiems, 2 Mass settings, a Missa Brevis, an Oratorio, 44 String Quartets, 9 Trios and other chamber music and many songs and pieces for piano. He has written scores for 2 films.

Works have been published in the British Isles by Cwmni Gwynn, Curiad and Bardic Edition, in Belgium by Alain Van Kerckhoven Editeur, in the USA and in Luxembourg by Luxembourg Music Publishers, Music Enterprise and Double You. He has made 42 CDs to date, with SAIN (Wales), AVK (Belgium) and LakeSound. His music has been performed and broadcast in many countries, including Japan, China, Brazil and Colombia as well as widely within Europe.

Dafydd Bullock has a particular relationship with Prague: his Second Symphony was given its world premiere by Musici de Praga during the 1996 Prague Spring Festival and the Third Symphony, again in Prague, on St. Valentine's Day, 1997. The third and fourth String Quartets were also recorded in Prague (Becher Quartet) as were the complete works for Cello and Piano (Jindrich Ptacek) and five Trios. Virtuosi di Basso, the twelve solo celli of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra have recorded and performed music especially written for them. In 2008 and 2009 he premiered his Requiem for Jan Palach in Luxembourg and in Prague.

Website:
http://www.bullockmusic.info

Recordings::
http://soundcloud.com/dafydd-bullock

Downloads: https://dafyddbullock.bandcamp.com/

Scores:
http://stores.lulu.com/dolbadarn

Volume 4

Produced and written in dialogue with A. I.
First Edition, Senheim Germany, September 19th, 2026

Copyright D. Bullock 2026. All Rights Reserved.