

- TRIBUTE -

Anthony Hedges: 1931 – 2019

For a composer who garnered such esteemed acclaim, whose music was performed and broadcast by the likes of Sir Neville Mariner and Alexander Gibson amongst others, had collaborated with Philip Larkin, and whose recorded output spans approximately twenty discs, it is one of those curious ironies that his Second Symphony—forty minutes in length and composed nearly a quarter of a century ago—still awaits a posthumous premiere.

Anthony Hedges is remembered today chiefly for his significant contributions to British Light Music. But in fact, Hedges' legacy is as diverse as it is abundant. His output comprises at least 170 numbered opuses, each distinguished by a sincere and distinct artistry.

Born in Bicester, Anthony John Hedges was the son of author, Sid. G. Hedges; he is descended from a long line of Methodist preachers and amateur musicians. He was educated at Bicester Grammar School, after which he studied at Oxford, where Thomas Armstrong was one of his tutors.

Some early compositions date from his two years' national service in the Band of the Royal Signals Regiment in Yorkshire, the county he would eventually call home. Newly married, he and his wife Joy moved to Glasgow in 1957, where he worked as a lecturer at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music.

In 1962, he took up a lectureship at Hull University, and ten years later, began his term as Chairman of the Composers' Guild of Great Britain. Despite the national and international attention his music had received to that point, his compositions were first heard in London the following year. In 1995, Hedges retired from the University as Reader in Composition, and—two years later—was awarded a DMus *honoris causa* by that same institution.

In 1990, the composer remarked: 'My interest has not been with the latest fads and fashions, but in trying to re-use traditional material in non-traditional ways'; this reflects a nonconformist traditionalism, characteristic of Hedges. The result is an

authentic body of work that displays expert craftsmanship and consideration for both performer and listener.

Excepting four forays into serialism in the late '60s, beginning with *Four Pieces for Piano* (opus 20) and ending with the *String Quartet* (opus 41), Hedges generally operated within a tonal framework. Most accessible are the 'lighter' works: ever-popular and still regularly broadcast, including various overtures, *West Oxford Walks* (opus 143), *Four Breton Sketches* (opus 79), *Kingston Sketches* (opus 36), and *Scenes from the Humber* (opus 80) – delightful character pieces which charmingly and sometimes boisterously evoke the places of their inspiration. The latter two were recorded by Humberside Sinfonia, conducted by the composer.¹

Among Hedges' works which incorporate elements of both 'light' and 'serious' idioms include his *Prayers from the Ark* (opus 68)—harmonically challenging yet witty in its portrayal of the animals' prayers—and the *Ten Bagatelles for piano* (opus 156). These showcase a confluence of jazz inflections, Latin dance, as well as echoes of composers such as Debussy, Rawsthorne and Britten.

Into the more decidedly 'serious' category fall pieces such as *October '62* (opus 9) which reflects the angst of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the colourful *Variations on a Theme of Rameau* (opus 24), and the *First Symphony* (opus 57) – premiered in 1978 by Bryden Thomson conducting the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra: particularly striking are the jarring brass interjections in the first movement; the second contains some distinguished writing for percussion. Other significant commissions include the cantatas, *Bridge for the Living* (opus 62)—which sets the only text Philip Larkin wrote specifically for music—and *The Lamp of Liberty* (opus 155) – marking the bicentenary of William Wilberforce's hand in the Abolition Act of 1807.

Central to Hedges' ethos—from his early days a church organist, accompanist, chamber musician, arranger, and veritable all-rounder—is a sense for the importance of community and education. His output bears some orchestral works scored with amateur or youth forces in mind, and much of his solo and chamber music has appeared on exam and festival syllabi. *Four Miniature Dances* (opus 28) is a playful work, each dance bearing a titular dedication to one of his children. It contains material since reworked as educational pieces.

Elegy for Tony (opus 168) was written in memoriam Anthony Goldstone, whose recording of Hedges' Piano Sonata No. 1 (opus 53) is available on CD. His final opus, *Song for Molly*, sets a poem by his great-granddaughter.

Anthony Hedges passed away in June 2019, aged 88. An archive was established in 1990 by Colin Bayliss for Hull Central Library, which remains available for study. Rights for Hedges' music have been passed to his daughter Fiona, herself a professional musician, who is in the process of lovingly and painstakingly collating and re-cataloguing her father's artistic legacy.

By his own request, his 1955 setting of Sir Walter Raleigh's poem, *Even Such Is Time* for SATB and Organ, was performed at the composer's memorial at St. Mary's Church, Beverley. It concludes thus:

*But from this earth, this grave, this dust,
My God shall raise me up, I trust.*

Adam Davies
Independent

Adam Davies is a pianist based in Manchester. After studying with Irina Glushenkova, he gained a BMus(Hons), MMus, and PGDip from the RNCM, where his tutors were John Gough and Dr Murray McLachlan. Adam now divides his time between performing throughout the UK, teaching piano both privately and for Yorkshire Young Musicians, and examining for ABRSM. Having grown up in Beverley, he was first introduced to Anthony Hedges' music through performances of Scenes from the Humber during his time as a violinist in the East Riding Youth Orchestra.

Endnote:

¹ A performing body which Hedges founded in the 1970s.