

SYMPHONIES FOR WIND ORCHESTRA

By Francis Pieters, Kortrijk (Belgium) 2013

It has been quite common, since the Beethoven era, to consider the symphony as the pre-eminent showpiece of the orchestral classical music. The term, derived from the Greek words 'syn' and 'phone'(sounding together), was already used since the Middle Ages, though the orchestral symphony only got a more or less standard shape in the second half of the 18th century. Since the 17th century however, numerous orchestral pieces, such as orchestral interludes in vocal compositions or opera overtures have been called symphony or "*sinfonia*". Today, the term refers normally to a large-scale orchestral composition, usually in four movements. The four-movement symphony reached its first pinnacles with **Mozart** and **Haydn**. **Ludwig van Beethoven** gave another dimension to the symphony and later **Bruckner** and **Mahler** and numerous other great composers also wrote splendid symphonies throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The list is endless and still grows constantly nowadays.

Such a popular and most appreciated type of orchestral composition did not remain restricted to the classical "*symphony orchestra*" composed of strings and winds. When the somewhat larger wind band, the direct precursor of the modern wind or concert band, was established within the National Guard in France in the last decade of the 18th century, its repertoire soon also included compositions designated as "*symphonie*". Although the Paris National Guard Band, under the leadership of Bernard Sarette and the musical direction of Gossec, was initially founded to add luster to the popular festivals of the French Revolution, this band did not limit itself to accompany the massed choirs. Indeed **François-Joseph GOSSEC** (1734-1829), the band's conductor and official composer of the French Revolution, had already composed a lot of symphonies both for limited instrumental ensembles and for larger orchestra. No wonder he also wrote a symphony for wind orchestra called **Symphonie Militaire en Fa** (1793-94), starting in F and ending in C, which is assumed to be the first symphony ever written for wind orchestra. This three part symphony, performed at the 'National Festivals' included the following parts: 2 *piccolo flutes* – 2 *oboes* – 2 *clarinets in C* – 2 *trumpets in F* – 2 *horns in F* – 2 *bassoons* – *serpent or string bass* – *timpani* – *bass drum*. The term "*militaire*" precisely referred to the fact that it was written for wind orchestra. One year later he wrote **Symphonie en Ut** in one movement for larger wind orchestra with following parts: 6 *piccolo flutes* – 6 *first clarinets* – 6 *second clarinets* – 3rd and 4th *clarinet parts for the oboes* – 2 *first horns* – 2 *second horns* – 6 *bassoons* – 4 *serpents* – 6 *string basses* – *buccin or tuba curva* – 3 *trombones*. These were the parts written by the copyist of the Opera for a performance on August 10, 1794. Other members of this band, also professor at the Paris Conservatoire, actually proceeding for the greater part from the National Guard Band in 1793, followed Gossec's example. **Louis JADIN** (1768-1853) composed his **Symphonie Militaire** (1794) and **Charles Simon CATEL** (1773-1830) also wrote a **Symphonie** and a **Symphonie Militaire**. Numerous National Guard bands were set up all over the French territory, whereas the military bands had adopted a similar instrumentation which was also imitated by the countless amateur wind bands in France and abroad.

The Belgian clarinetist **Amand VANDERHAGEN** (1753-1822), also member of the National Guard Band, composed under Napoleon a **Grande Symphonie Militaire** and a second **Grande Symphonie Militaire: La Naissance du Roi de Rome** (1811) both for wind orchestra.

In this same period **Antonin REICHA** (1770-1836), known for his numerous wind quintets, wrote a real symphony for wind orchestra: **Musique Funèbre pour célébrer la Mémoire des Grands Hommes qui se sont illustrés au Service de la Nation Française** (Funeral Music to celebrate the memory of those Great Men who distinguished themselves in favor of the French Nation). The fourth movement is a funeral march. The German composer **Joseph KÜFFNER** (1776-1856)

wrote **Musique Militaire ou Sinfonie** in E flat opus 163 in four movements in 1825 and, probably during the same decade, the Danish composer **Christian Frederik BARTH** (1787-1861) composed a **Grande Sinfonie** for wind instruments.

The First really important symphony for (very large) wind orchestra was without any doubt the **Grande Symphonie Funèbre et Triomphale** written by **Hector BERLIOZ** in 1840 for the burial of the mortal remains of the victims of the 1830 Revolution on the Bastille Square in Paris. The autograph full score is written for: *4 Db piccolo flutes - 5 Eb flutes – 5 Eb clarinets – 14 first Bb clarinets – 12 second Bb clarinets – 5 oboes – 4 first & second French horns in F – 4 first & second French horns in Ab - 4 first & second French horns in C - 4 first & second trumpets in F - 4 first & second trumpets in C - 4 first & second cornets in Ab – 4 first alto or tenor trombones – 3 second tenor trombones – 3 third tenor trombones – 1 large bass trombone (not obligatory) – 3 C ophicleides – 3 Bb ophicleides – 2 Bb bass clarinets – 8 first & second bassoons – 1 contrabassoon (non obligatory) – 15 cellos (non obligatory) – 10 string basses (non obligatory) – 4 first drums (without snares or muffled) - 4 second drums (without snares or muffled) – 3 pairs of cymbals – 1 bass drum – timpani in B and Ab – 1 tam-tam.* In the second movement, some brass instruments change of tonality and most of the percussion as well as the (non obligatory) stringed instruments are left out. In the third movement the complete percussion is increased with a “*Pavillon Chinois*” (‘Jingling Johnny’ or ‘Turkish Crescent’). The first movement is a funeral march, whereas the second movement is a musical funeral oration with an important trombone solo. Apparently the then few symphonies written for wind orchestra often had a funeral character, either partly or completely as was the case with Richard WAGNER’s **Trauersinfonie** composed for the translation of Carl Maria von Weber’s mortal remains to Dresden in December 1844. Anyway most of these band symphonies were written on purpose for an outdoor celebration. Except for the **Grande Symphonie pour Instruments à Vent** (1845) which the Belgian composer **Karel Lodewijk HANSSSENS** wrote for the Brussels ‘Grande Harmonie’, a **Symphonie Militaire** (1845) by the French composer **Edouard BATISTE** and the **Petite Symphonie** (1879) by his fellow-countryman Charles GOUNOD, both for smaller wind ensembles, one had to wait until the 20th century for the next real symphonies for wind orchestra.

If we do not take into consideration the symphonies written for wind ensembles, such as Stravinsky’s **Symphonies d’Instruments à Vent** (1920), Milhaud’s **Symphonie No. 5** (1922) and Krenek’s **Symphony Nr. 4 for winds and percussion** (1925), the first real modern symphony for wind orchestra was the **Symphonie pour musique d’harmonie** written by the French composer **Paul FAUCHET** and premiered by the Garde Républicaine Band, conducted by Guillaume Balay, in Paris in 1926. The very same year, in Great Britain, **Percy Fletcher** wrote the first symphony for brass band, called **An Epic Symphony** premiered at the National Championships in the London Chrystal Palace. Numerous symphonies for brass band (and on the European continent also for fanfare band) were to follow, but those are beyond the scope of this introduction.

During the decade following the end of World War I, there was a radical change in the conception of the wind orchestra which did no longer confine itself to a mere utilitarian or popular function but became an instrument of ‘serious’ music thanks to some enterprising conductors. The era of successful professional touring wind orchestras, such as the “*Sousa Band*”, was over, partly due to the technical evolutions engendering the radio, the cinema and the record industry. After the “Great War”, the wind orchestra was slowly but irreversibly provided with a new repertoire focused on musical aesthetics. The lead of this evolution was taken in three big metropolises. In New York, Edwin Franko Goldman invited great composers (including Percy Grainger, Carl Busch, Ottorino Respighi and Albert Roussel) to write for his professional “*Goldman Band*” from 1918 onwards. In London, it was Colonel Somerville of the Military School of Music at “*Kneller Hall*” who persuaded several great composers, such as Gustav Holst, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gordon Jacob

and Haydn Wood, to compose music for military band. In Paris, Guillaume Balay, conductor of the famous Garde Républicaine Band, made haste to premiere the too rare original wind band pieces written by important contemporary composers, such as Florent Schmitt's "*Dionysiaques*" (1925) and Fauchet's "**Symphonie**" (1926). Strangely enough, this pioneer band symphony remained unknown in France until quite recently, but was made known in the U.S. by James R. Gillette's adaptation in 1933. Gillette was inspired by Fauchet's composition and wrote himself three symphonies for band (1928-1933).

A real milestone was the **Symphony No. 19** opus 46 written in 1939 by the prominent Russian composer **Nikolai MIASKOVSKI** (1881-1950). This symphony for military band in four movements was only partly premiered at a Moscow radio station, but became famous when it was performed by the Goldman Band in New-York on July 7, 1948.

Other symphonies for wind band were written by the Americans **Ernest Williams**, **Robert Sanders** and **Louis Palange**. Symphonies for smaller wind ensembles or the orchestral winds were composed by the Hungarian Tibor Serly, the Belgian Arthur Meulemans and the Dutch Willem van Otterloo.

In 1951 there was another milestone: **Paul HINDEMITH** wrote his **Symphony in B flat for Concert Band** in three movements and conducted the premiere performance by the U.S. Army Band on April 5. This was the first symphony written for an American military band. The next year, two symphonies for wind orchestra by major composers were written for the 150th anniversary of the West Point Military Academy, at the request of the academy's band conductor Francis Resta. **Morton GOULD** composed his **Symphony for Band** and **Roy HARRIS** his **Symphony 'West Point'**. Gould's **West Point Symphony**, known as **Symphony for Band** was premiered by the West Point Academy Band, Gould conducting, on April 13, 1952. The First part '*Epitaphs*' is both lyrical and dramatic, including a passacaglia based on a march theme and some lively variations. The second movement "*Marches*" is a sensitive paraphrase on marching and march music and Gould even prescribed the use of a "marching machine". It should be mentioned that Gould considered this symphony as one of his major compositions. Many American composers, too numerous to enumerate, followed suit. Some however, wrote symphonies for wind orchestra that became standard pieces of the original wind orchestra repertoire. **Vincent PERSICETTI** wrote his **Symphony No. 6 for Band** in four movements in 1956 and **Vittorio GIANNINI** wrote his **Symphony No. 3**, also in four movements, in 1958. One composer is particularly remarkable because of the quantity of symphonies for wind orchestra he wrote. **Alan HOVHANNES**, American composer of Armenian-Scottish descent, wrote no less than 67 symphonies, including six symphonies for wind orchestra or wind ensemble: **Symphony No. 4 for Wind Orchestra** (1958), **Symphony No. 7 'Nanga Parvat'** (1959), **Symphony No. 14 'Ararat'** (1961), **Symphony No. 20 'Three Journeys to a Holy Mountain'** (1969), **Symphony No. 23 'Ani'** (1972) and **Symphony No. 53 'Star Dawn'** (1983). The first three of these symphonies were written for Robert Boudreau's unique wind ensemble "*American Wind Symphony Orchestra*" with a varying instrumentation of winds. Next to Hovhannes many other composers from all over the world wrote symphonies for this peculiar wind ensemble, including Samuel Adler, Henk Badings, Warren Benson, Georges Kleinsinger, Eduardo Mata, Ton de Leeuw, Robert Mc Bride, Ned Rorem and Harry Somers.

In Russia, the composer and conductor **Boris KOZHEVNIKOV** wrote no less than five symphonies for wind (military) band: **Symphony no. 1** (1943), **Symphony No. 2 "Victorious"** (1945), **Symphony No. 3 "Slavyanskaya"** (1950/1958), **Symphony No. 4** (1967/1972) and **Symphony No. 5** (1977/1983).

In France several composers also tried their hand at one or more symphonies. The French composer **Georges MIGOT** wrote thirteen symphonies, including one for wind orchestra and two for smaller wind ensembles between 1954 and 1963. His **Sinfonia da Chiesa - Symphonie No. 5**

(1955) was written for a wind orchestra of 85 players. In 1977 **Pierre Ancelin** composed **Homage à Mistral - Symphonie pour Instruments à vent** (3rd Symphony). Also the triumvirate of French music (Dondeyne, Gotkovsky and Lancen) tried their hand at symphonies for wind orchestra. **Serge LANCEN** wrote successively **Manhattan Symphonie** (1962), **Symphonie de Noël** (1964), **Mini Symphonie** (1967), **Symphonie de Paris** (1973), **Symphonie de l'Eau** (1985) and **Symphonie Ibérique** (1988). **Ida GOTKOVSKY** made a great stir in 1960 with her **Symphonie pour orchestre d'harmonie** (*Symphonie pour 80 Instruments à Vent*), followed by **Symphonie de Printemps** (1986), **Brillante Symphonie** (1989) and **Joyeuse Symphonie** (1999). **Désiré DONDEYNE**, the leading figure of the French wind orchestra music of the second half of the 20th century and mentor of both Lancen and Gotkovsky, also wrote five symphonies for wind orchestra: **Symphonie des Souvenirs - Nr. 1** (1963), **Symphonia Sacra – Nr.2** (1964), **Symphonie No. 4** (1968), **Symphonie No. 5 “A la Mémoire de Germaine Tailleferre”** (1992) and **Symphonie No. 6 “Fidélité”** (1994).

In the meantime, all major American composers, excelling in wind music, wrote one or several symphonies for wind orchestra, among them we should mention **Warren Benson, John Barnes Chance, Jerry Billik, William Bolcolm, Donald Erb, Frank Erickson, Walter Hartley, Ralph Hultgren** (Australia), **Robert Jager, Francis McBeth, David Rakovski, Alfred Reed, Gunther Schuller, Claude T. Smith, Robert W. Smith, Frank Ticheli, Robert Washburn, Dan Welcher, Floyd Werle & Paul Whear. James Barnes & David Maslanka** each wrote respectively six and ten symphonies for wind orchestra.

Also Japanese composers wrote symphonies: **Yasuhide Ito** wrote **Symphony** (1990), **A Jubilee Symphony** (1994) and **‘La Vita’ Symphony** in 3 scenes (1998). In China, **Chen Qian** wrote **Symphony No. 1 for Band** and **Symphony No. 2 ‘Lotus’** for the Central Band of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army.

In Great Britain, **Gordon Jacob** wrote **Symphony A.D. 78** in 1978, but had been preceded by his lesser-known contemporaries **Stephen Dodgson** and **Wilfred Josephs** who each composed a symphony for wind orchestra. And so did **Martin Ellerby** and **Peter Graham. Philip Sparke** also wrote several symphonies, however, the Champion of the band symphonies in Britain is, no doubt, **Derek BOURGEOIS** who wrote four symphonies for wind orchestra: **Symphony of Winds** (1980), **Symphony No. 8 The Mountains of Mallorca** (2002), **Symphony for William** (2004) and **Symphony No. 41 in C major: Sinfonia Andaluca** (2007). Bourgeois also re-orchestrated two of his orchestral symphonies for wind orchestra: **Symphony No. 4: A Wine Symphony** (1978) and **Cotswold Symphony** (1988/2000).

In Germany we find only a few examples with symphonies by **Paul Höffer, Alfred von Beckerath, Fried Walter** and **Hans Mielenz** and in Austria we have **Werner Brüggemann’s Sinfonia Carinthia** (1996) and **Thomas Doss’s Sinfonie No. 1 ‘Zeppelin’** and **Sinfonie No. 2 ‘Symphony in Green’**. In Hungary, **Frigyes Hidas** wrote the **Symphony ‘Save the Sea’** (1997).

In Sweden **Csaba Deak, Maurice Karkoff** and **Miklos Maros** wrote symphonies for wind orchestra. In Spain, and especially in the Valencia area where there is a famous wind orchestra culture, symphonies for wind orchestra are rather recent. Besides symphonies by **Salvador Chulià Hernandez** and **Francisco Zacaes Fort**, we have **Ferrer FERRAN’s Symphony No. 1 ‘Tormento del Desierto’, Symphony No. 2 ‘La Passió de Crist’** (2002), **Symphony No. 3 ‘The Great Spirit’** (2006) and **Symphony No. 4 ‘El Coloso’**(2011) and **Teodoro APARACIO BARBERAN’s Symphony No. 1 ‘Asgard’** (2002) and **Symphony No. 2 ‘States of Mind’** (2006) and **Andrés Valero-Castels** wrote **Symphony No. 1 ‘La Vall de la Murta’** (2002) and **Symphony No. 2**

'Theogonic' (2003).

In Belgium we can mention Victor Legley's **Symphony No. 7** created by the Belgian Guides in 1989, Jan Van der Roost's **Sinfonia Hungarica** (2001) and Bert Appermont's **Symphony No. 1 'Gilgamesh'** (2002).

In The Netherlands, only few symphonies had been conceived originally for wind orchestra. Next to **Symphoniecën der Nederlanden** (1974) by Louis Andriessen, **Sinfonia Il Fiume** (1984) by his brother Jurriaan Andriessen, **Symphony No. 6 'Panthalassa'** (1995) by Peter-Jan Wagemans and two symphonies by Hardy Mertens, **Symphony No. 1 'Voice of Mind'** (1985) and **Symphony No. 2 'Revelation'** (1989), we have a major composition **Symphony XV "Conflicts and Confluences** (1983) by **Henk BADINGS**.

Notwithstanding the most valuable symphonies for wind orchestra by numerous composers, none had the same immediate international success and unanimous approval as Johan de Meij's **Symphony No. 1 "The Lord of the Rings"**. It was one of his friends, the Dutch conductor Arie van Beek, who introduced Johan to Tolkien's famous trilogy "*Lord of the Rings*". The temptation to write a composition inspired by this literary masterpiece was enormous and soon Johan selected five scenes and characters to write a five-movement symphony for wind orchestra. He started in 1984 and completed the symphony in 1988. The work was premiered in Brussels by the Royal Symphonic Band of the Belgian Guides, Norbert Nozy conducting, on March 15, 1988. Some months later it was also performed by the Royal Dutch Military Band (K.M.K.), Pierre Kuijpers conducting, and this band also made the first recording in January 1989 (KMK 001). Numerous recordings by prestigious wind orchestras, including the US Air Force Band, the Danish Concert Band, The French National Police Band etc., were to follow. Still in 1989 Johan de Meij was awarded the "Sudler Award"; he was the first European and also youngest composer ever to win this prestigious American wind band composition prize. Several other national and international prizes followed. In 2007 Johan was awarded the "Wind Band Prize of the Netherlands" at the Kerkrade World Music Contest.

Johan de Meij later wrote four more symphonies for wind orchestra: **Symphony No. 2 "The Big Apple"** (1993), **Symphony No. 3 'Planet Earth'** (2006), **Symphony No. 4 'Sinfonie der Lieder'** (Symphony of Songs, 2013) and **Symphony No. 5 'Return to Middle Earth'** (2017).

Yet, the **Symphony No. 1 "The Lord of the Rings"** was undoubtedly one of the most successful original wind orchestra compositions of the last quarter of the 20th century. It brought about numerous commissions for Johan but, above all, it certainly inspired and incited numerous contemporary composers to venture to write one or more symphonies for wind orchestra (as quoted above). This memorable symphony for wind orchestra wrote history and will remain a milestone in the modern wind orchestra repertoire.

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