

## The music of Ingolf Dahl

Anthony Linick

Born in Hamburg of Swedish parents on 9 June 1912, Ingolf Dahl was a member of that distinguished community of emigre composers who settled in Southern California in the years immediately before the beginning of the Second World War.

For a time, his Los Angeles neighbours included such diverse and potent talents as Igor Stravinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, Darius Milhaud, Ernst Krenek, and Mario Castelnuovo - Tedesco. In Los Angeles, Dahl worked closely with Stravinsky as a musical assistant, arranging for piano the scores of *Danses concertantes* and *Scenes de ballet*.

Appointed to the faculty of the University of Southern California in 1945 and as head of the Tanglewood Study Group of the Berkshire Music Center for the summers of 1952/53 and 1955/56, Dahl remained an inspired and inspiring teacher until his death in August of 1970. One of his bestknown pupils is Michael Tilson Thomas.

A fastidious craftsman whose music is as distinctive for its intellectual integrity as its emotional depth, Dahl - like his near contemporary Paul Hindemith - was fascinated by the problems of dissonant counterpoint and constantly strove to connect the music of the twentieth century with the great Austro-German contrapuntal tradition.

*Music for Brass Instruments* was completed in Toronto on 3 May 1944, during a Gracie Fields tour (Dahl was the regular accompanist for the comedienne when she toured North America), and may be seen as Dahl's first composition in the tonal, neo-Classical style. After the premiere, Lawrence Morton noted that: "The spontaneous expression of approval and appreciation by a sophisticated audience, after a joyful and very American second movement and again at the end of the performance, should indicate to the composer that he has found here what he has long been seeking - the matter and manner of his own music." As in many other works of the era Dahl embraced musical traditions that hovered between the Baroque and a jazzy American



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been taxed to their limits, the rondo returns to drive the work to its giddy conclusion. It might also be said that the final movement echoes Dahl's affection for the traditions of American big band music; he had himself worked as an arranger for Tommy Dorsey.

Dahl played Etta, his wife, the first bars of a new solo piano work called *Hymn* in November 1947, and by 3 December the work was finished. Practice was furious for the next few days and on 8 December the work was performed in public, paired with the last surviving movement of an old piano suite, *Tocatta*. The two were performed together as *Hymn and Tocatta* for a number of years, but when, in the 1960s, the pianist Ronald Tarr asked to play *Hymn* alone, the composer agreed, regarding the more recent work as stronger than its companion and discouraging any further coupling of the pair. Several years after Dahl's death, Michael Tilson Thomas commissioned Lawrence Morton to score the orchestral version of this piece.

The saint whom Dahl invokes in his ballet *The Tower of Saint Barbara* was an early Christian martyr whose image he discovered in a church near Schruns, a village in the Austrian Vorarlberg where he lived during a sabbatical in 1952-53. Seeking a libretto for a ballet, he decided to explore the world of the medieval legend. The ballet is based on the saint's refusal to accept a marriage proposed by her heathen father, the king, or to abandon her Christian faith. After a period of imprisonment Barbara is tormented by the fury of the king's people and finally slain by her own father. On concluding the project in the autumn of 1954 Dahl wrote:

Some kind of symbolism had to be found for the two worlds (or two personalities) that are in conflict: Barbara's 'inward' world, and the 'outward' world of the king. The contrast is achieved in several ways. The king and his heathens have diatonic but dissonant music, set for wind instruments, while Barbara has chromatic but consonant music, set for strings. Opposition of keys also plays a part (Phrygian E for Barbara, B flat for the heathens). This must not be interpreted in too literal a sense, or too mechanically. If there were not many shifts, evasions, insertions, subtleties, reminiscences, references, this would not be a living organism of music.

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idiom. In the opening movement he employed the chorale fantasy *Christ Lay in the Bonds of Death*. Elsewhere he was inspired (but not compelled) by the musical possibilities of the telephone number of Universal Studios and the dog tag number of his good friend, the composer Gail Kubik.

It had been Dahl's belief, while writing the work, that "there are hardly any performance possibilities at all for a piece of this kind", and indeed the number of ensembles composed of two trumpets, french horn, two trombones (and optional tuba) must have been small, but the work itself is credited with a revival of interest in the brass quintet. Within a few years Julian Menken referred to it as "the most outstanding work in brass repertory."

Sometime in the spring of 1948, the saxophone virtuoso Sigurd Rascher wrote to Dahl to complain of the lack of suitable concerti for his instrument and to express his desire for a large-scale work which he could use on his tours. Intrigued by the possibility of writing for the saxophone, Dahl began the task in earnest the next winter, evidently undeterred by the raised eyebrows of Stravinsky who, when informed of the project, said: "I don't know, to me a saxophone always sounds like a pink slimy worm". The premiere took place on 17 May 1949 in Urbana, with Rascher as soloist and Mark Hindsley conducting the University of Illinois Concert Band; revisions followed this first performance, as Dahl reduced the size of the accompanying ensemble. The Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Wind Orchestra was premiered in its final version on 11 January 1954, and has been a favorite show piece for a number of outstanding saxophonists. A work that asks the soloist to master the full range of the instrument's possibilities, covering a wide span of octaves in tones sometimes expressive, sometimes brutal, the Concerto is full of diverting melodies, good spirits, and driving energy. It is written in the composer's neo-Baroque manner, as the prevalence of stately dotted rhythms and the titles of the first two movements *Rectitative* and *Passacaglia*, which are run together without pause - might suggest. This is not to say the Concerto is in any way a somber or dryly academic work; the final movement, an infectious *Rondo alla marcia*, bubbles over with good humor and concludes with a fabulously difficult cadenza. After the soloist's skill and courage have

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To complicate matters for himself, Dahl also insisted that even the second horn player had to be given a score that was interesting to play; if it wasn't, more rewriting would have to be undertaken.

The work was ultimately never choreographed as a ballet. *The Tower of Saint Barbara*, a symphonic legend in four parts, was first performed by the Louisville Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Robert Whitney on 29 January 1955; it was revised in 1960, and it is this version that appears here.

### A tribute to Ingolf Dahl

Michael Tilson Thomas

I first met Ingolf Dahl during registration at the University of Southern California. He was conducting the orchestra that semester and bustled with his endless curiosity among the offices of the instrumental departments, to see in person what kind of students were coming in.

During our first ten-minute encounter, he asked me about my familiarity with the Webern *Six Pieces*, in which I was to play, and simultaneously advised other waiting students about performance practice in Polish Renaissance music, notation paradoxes in serial writing, and the importance of rubato as a device of delineating form in Beethoven and Webern.

Having charged all of us up with his spontaneous pyrotechnics, he dashed off to meet with other students and faculty. His greetings and distinctive high-pitched laugh seemed to be coming from every office of the building at once.

The six years I spent at USC were in no way to diminish this spectacular first impression, but rather to increase the effect as I began to perceive the vast reserves of knowledge, inspiration and humanity that lay behind it. He was a musician's musician, and above all a real composer. His output of more than 30 compositions includes masterworks, among which especially the *Sonata seria*, *Concerto a tre*, *Trio*, *Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Wind Orchestra* and *Music for Brass Instruments* stand as some of the finest pieces of the last 30 years.

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He never took the easy or fashionable way out in his works and would revise them until, like the works of Bach and Ockeghem which he much admired, they had a sense of oneness, of tension and balance and hidden craft like a work of architecture. At the same time he delighted in expression, and in fashioning a piece for a specific player. A final step in his composing was looking over each individual part to make sure it would be satisfying to play. This balance between the abstract and the personal is a perfect portrait of himself.

As I think of Ingolf now, I feel immensely grateful to have known him as my teacher, colleague, and friend. I know too that for the rest of my life, whenever I ponder an artistic decision or think of what would be the most exciting, important and courageous thing to do, his voice will be there giving with humor, conviction and love his always sage advice.

(Adapted from an article which appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on 20 September 1970, a few weeks after Dahl's death)

#### Michael Tilson Thomas and the New World Symphony

In the tradition of the master musicians who guided his early years, Michael Tilson Thomas founded the New World Symphony as a unique 'orchestral academy' in which young musicians could refine their skills and hone their musical aspirations. Since 1987, more than 150 New World Symphony 'graduates' have moved on to professional careers in music.

With its home base in the newly restored Lincoln Theatre at Miami Beach, the New World Symphony presents a season of fullscale orchestral concerts, chamber music and chamber orchestra concerts, family and children's concerts, and solo recitals. The orchestra works with the world's leading conductors and soloists, and coaching sessions and masterclasses are a part of the musicians' regular schedule.

Orchestra members are recruited from among the graduates of the most prestigious music schools and conservatories, who come from all over the world to live and learn together in the renovated Art-Deco Plymouth and Ansonia Hotels at Miami's South Beach. Each musician possesses not only talent and potential, but a desire to become

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composition of the score for *Voyager*, directed by Volker Schlöndorff and featuring the singer Ute Lemper.

In 1988, John Harle was featured in a BBC TV special, 'One Man and his Sax', when his playing and composition reached more than eight million viewers. He has programmed and conducted concerts for the London Symphony Orchestra's 'Summer Pops' series, including his own 'Berlin Nights' which featured Ute Lemper and Kate Westbrook in Kurt Weill's *Seven Deadly Sins*.

He is the most recorded classical saxophonist in the world. His long-term association with the DECCA/Argo label began with the best-selling recording of Michael Nyman's *Where the Bee Dances*, Gavin Bryars's *The Green Ray* and Mike Westbrook's *Bean Rows and Blues Shots*, nominated for a Mercury Award in 1992. Other recordings for this label include the Frank Martin *Ballade for Alto Saxophone* with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra under Riccardo Chailly.

In 1988, John Harle was appointed Professor of Saxophone at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where he has created the Saxophone Department and was awarded a fellowship in 1993. He has become the mentor of a new generation of saxophonists all over the world.

#### New World Brass:

Jeffrey Biancalana, Derek Lockhart *trumpets*  
Gregory Miller horn Brian Diehl *trumpet*  
Robert Lawless bass trombone Edwin Diefes *tuba*

part of this close-knit musical community.

Under Tilson Thomas's direction, the orchestra has appeared worldwide, including New York, London, Paris, Buenos Aires and Tokyo. Hailed by critics the world over for its trademark balance of technical brilliance and youthful enthusiasm, the New World Symphony nurtures the next generation of classical musicians.

Long a champion of American music, Tilson Thomas has promoted the music of, among others, Carl Ruggles, Charles Ives, George Gershwin, Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, Charles Wuorinen, Steve Reich and, of course, his teacher Ingolf Dahl. He has worked with all the major American and European orchestras, and has been principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra. In 1995 he took up his post as music director of the San Francisco Symphony, while becoming principal guest conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra and continuing in his role as artistic director of the New World Symphony.

#### John Harle

John Harle is one of the most outstanding musicians in Britain today. As a saxophonist, composer and conductor, he has the unique ability to stay on the cutting edge of musical style and innovation.

After a classical training on the saxophone in London and Paris, he was quickly established as a top-ranking soloist. Concert appearances have included performances at Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall, the South Bank Centre, Germany, Switzerland and the Far East, with orchestras including the English Chamber Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, London Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and the New World Symphony. Much of his current repertoire has been written for him by composers such as Luciano Berio, Michael Nyman, Gavin Bryars, Mark Anthony Turnage and Michael Torke.

John Harle has composed scores for major feature films including *Butterfly Kiss* and *Breed of Heroes*. The Stanley Myers/John Harle score for *Prick Up Your Ears* received the 'Best Artistic Achievement in a Feature Film' award at the Cannes Film Festival in 1989, and his collaboration with Stanley Myers continued with the

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**The Music of Ingolf Dahl**  
John Harle, New World Brass  
The New World Symphony  
Michael Tilson Thomas

**Concerto for Alto Saxophone**  
John Harle saxophone

1	Recitative	6:05
2	Adagio (Passacaglia)	7:34
3	Rondo alla marcia: Allegro	7:37
4	Hymn	9:50

**Music for Brass Instruments**  
New World Brass

5	Chorale Fantasy (Christ lay in the Bonds of Death)	6:53
6	Intermezzo	3:08
7	Fugue	5:46

**The Tower of Saint Barbara**

8	Barbara	4:34
9	The King	3:37
10	The Tower	7:31
11	The Martyrdom	8:46

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