

MOERAN

SYMPHONY IN G MINOR, R71

THE HALLÉ ORCHESTRA

CONDUCTED BY LESLIE HEWARD

- 1 1st mvt. - Allegro (13:12)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Lento (11:13)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Vivace (5:09)
- 4 4th mvt. - Lento - Allegro molto (13:51)

Recorded "under the auspices of the British Council" in Manchester, England on 26th & 27th November and 1st December 1942, partially in the presence of the composer.

Issued in January 1943 as HMV 78s C.3319-3324 and C.7566-7571

Matrix numbers 2ER641-51, takes 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 2, 2, 1, 1, 2, 1

Transfer and XR remastering by Andrew Rose at Pristine Audio, July 2009
Cover artwork based on a mid-1940s BBC portrait photograph of E. J. Moeran

Total duration: 43:25 ©2009 Pristine Audio.



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Moeran's only symphony was started in 1924, but abandoned and only taken up again ten years later, being finally completed in 1937. It contains some of Moeran's darkest and most brooding moments, and despite the levity of his brilliant (and it has been said, unique to British music) Scherzo, the final conclusion is one of bitterness.

A variety of interpretations have been put on the symphony, including many references to a perceived similarity to Sibelius, and yet further examination by Geoffrey Self suggests Moeran is also passing comment on works by composers as diverse as Mozart, Brahms and Tchaikovsky. Ultimately, however, it is the firm fingerprint of Moeran himself which defines his longest piece of work.

Unlike the Violin Concerto which followed it, and perhaps offers answers to the questions posed in it, the evocations of landscape and mood are often so bleak as to suggest that in this work Moeran is for the first time confronting some of his own darkest ghosts, those he has apparently avoided comment on in his music up to this point: his experiences of the First World War. Without doubt Moeran had a particularly bad time during the war, and was left with a head injury which never allowed him to forget his trauma, and which probably contributed to his untimely death in 1950. However, during his time in military service he was also stationed in Ireland, and this gave him his first taste of the country he came to love so much.

Thus the third movement, which itself is a brief interlude at less than half the length of any of the other movements, may in some way be representative of Moeran's place of escape during the war. Other pointers to this hypothesis can be heard in the end of the first movement, where after a long, brooding section carried by the horns an almost mechanistic rhythm breaks out, and the movement ends on a series of percussive strikes which might surely be representative of gunfire.

During the second movement we hear an episode which, it has been suggested, is reminiscent of rippling water, seemingly offering a moment of calm in this dark and troubled music. Yet, if one is to push further the war idea, a re-examination of this section can also suggest the freedom of air flight: the twisting this beautiful and light section into something dark and sinister then becomes a commentary on humanity's ability to take a wonderful new invention and turn it to destructive use. Moeran had a love of all things mechanical, indeed, Lionel Hill described how Moeran could identify a steam locomotive by its sound alone, and one can only wonder at his feelings when such marvels of the age were put to wartime use.

This idea of flight returns in the final movement, where a bitter wind seems to blow through the flutes, one which serves to heighten the tension slowly mounting in the tympani before finally breaking into the six percussive cracks of the end of the work.

Geoffrey Self's analysis of the work in his book, *The Music of E. J. Moeran* comes to a similar conclusion, albeit through a different and more thorough musical analysis. He suggests the use of a folksong, 'The Shooting of His Dear', may hold some of the melodic keys to the symphony, and in particular homes in on the line "for young Jimmy was a fowler". Self writes: "*Could there not be a loose allegory here of a young soldier - Jack [Moeran] rather than Jim - called by duty to the war, his illusions of military duality and nobility to be shattered by the awesome reality of the sordid carnage and its bleak aftermath.*" In addition he believes the Symphony to be "*some kind of Requiem or In Memoriam*".

Certainly its bleak outlook remains unresolved in this work, and perhaps one does need to look to Moeran's next major work, his Violin Concerto, begun almost immediately after the completion of the Symphony, to find Moeran's personal answers to the existential questions raised here.

Technical Notes

This is the third transfer I've made of this recording, which was the first to gain a limited release on the Pristine Audio label as a CD back in 2002. A second, and much more accomplished transfer, is currently available on the Divine Art label, coupled with a many other works by Moeran issued on 78rpm discs during the composer's lifetime. As a long-time promoter of the music of Moeran and editor of The Worldwide Moeran Database, I had long regretted that this Divine Art release was prepared just a few weeks prior to the development of what was to become the Pristine Audio XR remastering system, which has proved so effective in the present transfer, together with a host of other technical advances in the field of audio restoration during the last 3 years. I was inspired, therefore, by the highly successful resurrection of the Symphony in the 2009 BBC Proms season to revisit the recording with a fresh transfer and see what results might be achieved. Despite the obvious end-of-side shortcomings of the often slightly overlong wartime discs, I was delighted to find further great advances in sound quality were possible. The composer, told to stay away from the recording sessions, had concealed himself behind closed doors - only to make a dramatic appearance in support of principal clarinetist Pat Ryan over a disputed interpretation of a solo line - ultimately pronounced himself delighted at this definitive recording. I trust he would be equally surprised and delighted at the additional sonic progress made here.

NOTES BY ANDREW ROSE - FURTHER NOTES ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM & WWW.MOERAN.COM