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BAX
Symphony No. 6
Into the Twilight

Royal Scottish National Orchestra
David Lloyd-Jones



Arnold Bax (1883-1953) Symphony No. 6 • Into the Twilight • Summer Music

A commemorative plaque graces the house in Streatham where Arnold Bax was born in 1883, but it is unlikely that he would now recognise this busy London suburb as being what was then a quiet parish in the county of Surrey. Although there was no long-standing musical tradition in the family, his paternal uncle, Ernest Belfort Bax, a well-known socialist philosopher, had studied music in his youth and had even published a rousing song entitled 'All for the Cause' with words by his friend William Morris. According to his autobiography, Arnold's own first composition was a piano sonata written at the age of twelve while he was recovering from sunstroke ('very fittingly my enemies might snarl', he quipped). Four years later he entered the Royal Academy of Music, where he soon gained a reputation as a phenomenal sight-reader at the piano but was overshadowed as a composer by several of his fellow students, though it is Bax's work that has proved the most enduring. The turning-point in his life came in 1902, when he discovered the Celtic world through the poetry of W. B. Yeats. He soon visited Ireland, where he enthusiastically explored its culture, history and landscape; he even learned to read Irish Gaelic with ease but shied away from using it in the presence of native speakers. His music, which for some years had been under the sway of Wagner, now assumed an Irish identity, and he began to write what he called 'figures of a definitely Celtic curve'. Having no need to earn a living, he was able to spend months at a time in a small coastal village in Donegal imbibing the local atmosphere and pouring forth a stream of emotionally charged poetry and music.

It was here, in November 1907, that Bax completed a five-act play based on the story of the legendary Irish heroine Deirdre of the Sorrows. He had intended it as the libretto for an opera, and during the following months he made some sketches for the music before eventually abandoning the project. Reluctant to waste good ideas, however, he turned the opera's prologue into an independent orchestral piece, which he called

Into the Twilight after the poem of that title by Yeats. It was to be the first in a trilogy of 'symphonic pictures' collectively entitled *Éire*, the other two being *In the Faery Hills* (1909) and *Rosc-catha* (1910), the latter also based on the Deirdre sketches. The manuscript of *Into the Twilight* is prefaced by Yeats's poem, and in a programme note for the work's only performance during his lifetime (under Thomas Beecham in 1909) Bax wrote that it 'seeks to give a musical impression of the brooding quiet of the Western Mountains at the end of twilight, and to express something of the sense of timelessness and hypnotic dream which veils Ireland at such an hour'. The opening theme was almost certainly intended to represent Deirdre herself in Bax's aborted opera, while the other main theme is borrowed from an earlier homage to Ireland, the 'orchestral poem' *Cathaleen-ni-Hoolihan*.

By the time Bax came to write *Summer Music* his reputation had grown considerably, due in part to a series of colourful tone-poems of which *The Garden of Fand* and *Tintagel* are the best known. The new work, which is scored for a small orchestra, was written in London during the spring of 1921 and revised for publication in 1932 with a dedication to Beecham. Bax originally called it *Idyll* but later decided that there were already too many pieces of English music with this title and opted instead for something more evocative. Ever laconic in describing his own music, Bax wrote in a programme note that 'The piece, a musical description of a hot windless June mid-day in some wooded place of Southern England, is lyrical throughout. During the greater part of it the strings are occupied in providing a murmurous accompaniment to the pastoral reveries of the various wind instruments, and not until near the end is there any great climax of sound'. In a letter to the conductor Adrian Boult he confided: 'I am rather fond of this little bit of southern England under the sun and enjoyed revising the orchestration'.

During the decade that separated the original

version of *Summer Music* from its revision, Bax completed five of his seven symphonies and found himself acclaimed by a German critic as 'the head of the modern English school'. The slow movement of the *Sixth Symphony*, and perhaps also the bulk of the first movement, had begun life as part of a *Viola Sonata* that Bax had started writing in 1933. He soon realised, however, that the material was more suited to orchestral treatment, and the symphony was completed in Morar, on the west coast of Scotland, on 10th February 1935. It was originally dedicated to the Polish composer Karol Szymanowski, whom Bax had met in England, but his name is crossed through on the manuscript and replaced by that of Adrian Boult.

The first movement opens with a prelude in which a repeated figure in the bass provides the accompaniment to a march-like theme on horns and woodwind. The turbulent *Allegro*, which follows a series of grandiose chords, is based on the preceding material and eventually gives way to a slower section with a new theme played by three flutes in unison. The fast music resumes for a stormy development section, followed by a brief respite before the movement rushes on in a whirlwind to its emphatic ending, like the slamming of a door. The slow movement is founded on two contrasting ideas: an expressive melody first heard on strings, and then a soft trumpet theme with a 'Scotch snap', characteristic of Scottish folk-music. Development of this material culminates in two march-like sections, the first harsh and baleful, the second a calm, stately procession leading to the peaceful coda. The tripartite finale (*Introduction, Scherzo and Trio, and Epilogue*) is the only one among Bax's symphonies

to open quietly. The solo clarinet's sinuous melodic line, from which the movement grows, is repeated by the strings, now with accompanying harmonies, before the woodwind announce a new theme of a liturgical nature, very similar to the 'Sine Nomine' melody in Vaughan Williams's later *Fifth Symphony*. At the end of the *Introduction* the pace gradually quickens, leading into the *Scherzo*, in which the opening material is now transformed into a kind of symphonic jig full of nervous energy. Contrast is provided by a slower section (the *Trio*), after which the *Scherzo* resumes its headlong course with an inflexibly rigid rhythm. A strikingly dramatic moment occurs with the horns braying furiously and the strings above them singing out a theme taken from Sibelius's *Tapiola*, a work that had reduced Bax to tears when he first heard it. (The two composers' admiration was mutual: in acknowledging the dedication of Bax's *Fifth Symphony*, Sibelius called him 'one of the great men of our time'.) There is a tremendous climax, with the liturgical theme blared out triumphantly by the brass, and this leads to the peaceful *Epilogue*, in which the clarinet's enigmatic opening music is transformed by the solo horn into something of exquisite beauty set against a backdrop of rippling harp and divided strings. The musical texture becomes gradually sparer and the movement fades slowly away, bringing to a close what some regard not only as Bax's symphonic masterpiece but as one of the finest symphonies from the twentieth century.

Graham Parlett

Conductor's Note

At fig. 13 in the second movement of the symphony the autograph and published score show 14 bars for tambourine. However, they are not given in the printed orchestral part, and as parts were, and still are, usually produced after the publication of the score, I believe that the omission represents a revision on Bax's part and have consequently not included them.

David Lloyd-Jones

Royal Scottish National Orchestra

Formed in 1891 as the Scottish Orchestra, in 1951 the ensemble, now full-time, took the name of the Scottish National Orchestra, later assuming the title Royal, a recognition of its importance in the musical life of Scotland. Distinguished conductors who have worked with the orchestra include Sir John Barbirolli, Karl Rankl, Hans Swarowsky, Walter Susskind, Sir Alexander Gibson, the first Scottish-born Principal Conductor, Bryden Thomson and Neeme Järvi. Walter Weller, now Conductor Emeritus, served as Music Director and Principal Conductor from 1992 to 1997, when he was succeeded by Alexander Lazarev. The Principal Guest Conductor is Marin Alsop, who has recorded with the orchestra a series for Naxos devoted to the orchestral music of Samuel Barber. The orchestra also made an important contribution to the authoritative Naxos series of Bruckner Symphonies under the late Georg Tintner, and has added significantly to the stock of recordings of film music, with award-winning releases in London and in Germany. A busy schedule in Scotland brings regular seasons in its home-town of Glasgow, annual appearances at the Edinburgh Festival and regular performances in the BBC Promenade Concerts in London. In addition to concerts in England, the orchestra has travelled to other countries, with tours of North America and Japan, and throughout Europe. The wide repertoire of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra extends from the Baroque to the contemporary.

David Lloyd-Jones

David Lloyd-Jones began his professional career in 1959 on the music staff of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and soon became much in demand as a freelance conductor for orchestral and choral concerts, BBC broadcasts and TV studio opera productions. He has appeared at the Royal Opera House, Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera and the Wexford, Cheltenham, Edinburgh and Leeds Festivals. In 1972 he was appointed Assistant Music Director at the English National Opera and during his time in that position conducted an extensive repertory which included the first British performance of Prokofiev's *War and Peace*. In 1978, on the invitation of the Arts Council of Great Britain, he founded a new full-time opera company, Opera North, with its new orchestra, the English Northern Philharmonia, of which he became Artistic Director. During his twelve seasons with the company he conducted fifty different new productions, including *The Trojans*, *Die Meistersinger* and the British stage première of Strauss' *Daphne*, as well as numerous orchestral concerts, including festival appearances in France and Germany. He has made a number of very successful recordings of British and Russian music and has a busy career as a conductor in the concert-hall and the opera-house that has taken him to leading musical centres throughout Europe and the Americas.

Arnold Bax (1883-1953)

Symphonie n° 6 • Into the Twilight • Summer Music

Une plaque commémorative orne la maison de Streatham où naquit Arnold Bax en 1883, mais il ne reconnaîtrait sans doute plus dans cette banlieue londonienne affairée ce qui était alors une paisible paroisse du comté du Surrey. Il n'existait pas de tradition musicale bien ancrée dans sa famille, mais son oncle paternel, Ernest Belfort Bax, célèbre philosophe socialiste, avait étudié la musique dans sa jeunesse et avait même publié un chant vibrant intitulé *All for the Cause* sur des paroles de son ami William Morris. D'après son autobiographie, la première composition d'Arnold fut une sonate pour piano écrite à douze ans alors qu'il se remettait d'une insolation (« de quoi faire ricaner mes ennemis », plaisanta-t-il). Quatre ans plus tard, il entra à la Royal Academy of Music, où il se forgea vite la réputation d'un déchiffreur hors pair au piano mais où ses talents de compositeur furent éclipsés par plusieurs de ses camarades d'études, même si ce sont ses œuvres qui ont perduré.

Sa vie changea en 1902 lorsqu'il découvrit l'univers des Celtes à travers la poésie de W. B. Yeats. Il ne tarda pas à se rendre en Irlande, dont il explora avec enthousiasme la culture, l'histoire et les paysages ; il alla jusqu'à apprendre à lire couramment le gaélique sans oser toutefois le parler avec des personnes dont c'était la langue maternelle. Sa musique, qui depuis quelques années subissait l'influence de Wagner, prit alors une identité irlandaise, et il commença à écrire « des figures à l'inclinaison résolument celte ». Étant suffisamment aisé pour ne pas devoir gagner sa vie, il put passer de longs mois dans un petit village côtier du comté du Donegal, s'imprégnant de couleur locale et laissant libre cours à sa poésie et à sa musique.

C'est là, en novembre 1907, que Bax acheva une pièce en cinq actes inspirée de l'histoire de la légendaire héroïne irlandaise Deirdre of the Sorrows. Il comptait en faire le livret d'un opéra, et pendant les mois qui suivirent, il en esquissa quelques pages avant de renoncer à son projet. Mais il renâclait à l'idée de

gâcher de bonnes idées, et il fit du prologue de son opéra un morceau orchestral indépendant, qu'il intitula *Into the Twilight*, empruntant ce titre à un poème de Yeats. Ce devait être le premier d'une trilogie de « tableaux symphoniques », *Éire*, les deux autres morceaux devant être *In the Faery Hills* (1909) et *Roscatha* (1910), ce dernier s'appuyant également sur les esquisses de Deirdre. Le poème de Yeats figure en préface du manuscrit de *Into the Twilight*, et dans une note de programme qui accompagna la seule exécution de l'ouvrage donnée de son vivant (sous la direction de Thomas Beecham en 1909), Bax écrivait qu'il « cherche à donner une impression musicale du calme menaçant des montagnes de l'ouest quand s'achève le crépuscule, et à exprimer l'impression éternelle et onirique qui règne sur l'Irlande à la tombée du jour ». Le thème d'ouverture devait certainement représenter Deirdre, tandis que l'autre thème principal est emprunté à un hommage antérieur à l'Irlande, le « poème orchestral » *Cathaleen-ni-Hoolihan*.

À l'époque où Bax s'attela à la composition de *Summer Music*, sa réputation s'était considérablement accrue, notamment grâce à une série de poèmes symphoniques pittoresques dont *The Garden of Fand* et *Tintagel* sont les plus connus. Cette nouvelle œuvre, destinée à une formation réduite, fut écrite à Londres au printemps 1921 et révisée pour être publiée en 1932 avec une dédicace à Beecham. Bax l'avait d'abord intitulée *Idyll*, mais décida plus tard qu'il y avait déjà trop de morceaux de musique anglaise portant ce titre et opta alors pour quelque chose de plus évocateur. Toujours laconique à l'heure de décrire sa propre musique, Bax écrivait dans une note de programme que « Ce morceau, description musicale du milieu d'une journée de juin immobile et caniculaire dans quelque région boisée du sud de l'Angleterre, est lyrique du début jusqu'à la fin. Les cordes y sont surtout chargées d'apporter un murmure d'accompagnement aux rêveries pastorales des divers instruments à vent, et on

ne rencontre pas de grand apogée avant d'atteindre la conclusion ». Dans une lettre au chef d'orchestre Adrian Boult, il avouait : « Je suis assez content de ce petit coin d'Angleterre méridionale ensoleillé et j'ai aimé en réviser l'orchestration ».

Pendant les dix ans qui séparent la version originale de *Summer Music* de sa révision, Bax acheva cinq de ses sept symphonies et se vit acclamer par un critique allemand comme « le chef de rang de l'école moderne anglaise ». Le mouvement lent de la *Symphonie n° 6*, et sans doute la majeure partie de son premier mouvement, avaient vu le jour dans le cadre d'une sonate pour alto que Bax avait commencé à composer en 1933. Mais il réalisa vite que ce matériau était plus propice à un traitement orchestral, et la symphonie fut achevée à Morar, sur la côte occidentale de l'Écosse, le 10 février 1935. Elle fut d'abord dédiée au compositeur polonais Karol Szymanowski, que Bax avait rencontré en Angleterre, mais son nom est rayé du manuscrit et remplacé par celui d'Adrian Boult.

Le premier mouvement démarre par un prélude où un dessin répété à la basse fournit l'accompagnement d'un thème de marche confié aux cors et aux bois. Le turbulent *Allegro*, qui suit une série d'accords grandioses, s'appuie sur la matière qui précède et finit par laisser place à une section plus lente avec un nouveau thème joué par trois flûtes à l'unisson. La musique rapide reprend pour une section de développement orageuse, suivie d'un bref répit avant que le mouvement ne redémarre précipitamment comme un tourbillon vers sa conclusion pleine d'emphase. Le mouvement lent s'appuie sur deux idées contrastées : une mélodie expressive d'abord entendue aux cordes, puis un doux thème de trompette évoquant la musique populaire écossaise. Le développement de ce matériau culmine dans deux sections apparentées à

des marches, la première âpre et menaçante, la deuxième comme une procession, calme et élégante, menant à la paisible coda. Le finale tripartite (*Introduction, Scherzo et Trio, Epilogue*) est le seul au sein des symphonies de Bax à commencer doucement. La ligne mélodique sinueuse de la clarinette soliste, à partir de laquelle va croître le mouvement, est répétée par les cordes avant que les vents n'annoncent un nouveau thème de nature liturgique, rappelant beaucoup la mélodie *Sine Nomine* de la future *Symphonie n° 5* de Vaughan Williams. A la fin de l'*Introduction*, le tempo accélère peu à peu, menant au *Scherzo*, dont le matériau d'ouverture devient une sorte de gigue symphonique pleine d'énergie. Une section plus lente (le *Trio*) apporte son contraste, après quoi le *Scherzo* reprend son implacable fuite en avant. Un moment dramatique se produit avec les cors retentissant furieusement et les cordes au-dessus d'eux chantant un thème emprunté à *Tapiola* de Sibelius, œuvre qui émut Bax aux larmes. (Les deux compositeurs s'admiraient mutuellement ; ayant entendu cette dédicace, Sibelius déclara que Bax était « l'un des grands hommes de notre époque ».) Après un apogée monumental où les cuivres clament triomphalement le thème liturgique, c'est le tranquille Epilogue, dans lequel la musique d'ouverture énigmatique de la clarinette est transformée par le cor soliste en un passage d'une beauté exquise dont la toile de fond est tissée par la harpe et les cordes divisées. La texture musicale s'amenuise graduellement et le mouvement s'efface lentement, concluant ce que certains considèrent non seulement comme le chef-d'œuvre symphonique de Bax mais aussi comme l'une des plus belles symphonies du XX^{ème} siècle.

Graham Parlett

Version française : David Ylla-Somers

Arnold Bax drew on Celtic inspiration for his *Into the Twilight*, its title derived from W.B. Yeats, and on a June day in the south of England for *Summer Music*. Described as one of the finest symphonies of the twentieth century, Bax's *Sixth Symphony* was written largely at Morar, on the west coast of Scotland. Notable for its conflict of lyrical and dramatic episodes, underpinned by an ambiguous, shifting tonality, it marks a high point of his achievement.

**Arnold
BAX**
(1883-1953)

	Symphony No. 6	35:47
①	Moderato – Allegro con fuoco	9:45
②	Lento molto espressivo	8:53
③	Introduction (Lento moderato) – Scherzo & Trio (Allegro vivace – Andante semplice) – Epilogue (Lento)	16:55
④	Into the Twilight	12:40
⑤	Summer Music	9:02

Royal Scottish National Orchestra • David Lloyd-Jones

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Booklet Notes: Graham Parlett

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