Georges Onslow (1784–1853)



Georges Onslow (after a 19th-century lithograph)

Georges Onslow (1784–1853), Louis Spohr (1784–1859), Ferdinand Ries (1784–1838), and Friedrich Ernst Fesca (1789–1826) belonged to a generation of symphonists who have been neglected, understandably but wrongly, in the annals of music history. Most of their symphonies appeared during the period between the time that Beethoven's Symphonies Nos. 8 and 9 became known in 1813 and the gradual spread of the success of Schubert's Symphony in C major, the "Great Symphony", after 1839. Although their symphonies were highly praised by their contemporaries, after 1840 these works disappeared from concert programs. The public had elevated Beethoven's symphonies to the norm and standard by which all following works of the genre would be measured. As a critic of those times rightly noted in 1829, "If these tone poems by other composers are too close to those of Beethoven, they are too easily accused of being imitations; if they are situated too far from them, then in general they do not meet with a favorable response". It is thus not surprising that the individual formal designs and original personal styles of these composers and works were not recognized in keeping with their true significance.

The fact that Georges Onslow is the only French composer mentioned in the above list is hardly coincidental, inasmuch as musical taste in Paris (and with it the rest of France) focused almost entirely on the opera during the first half of the nineteenth century. Although composers mainly obliged to the opera also wrote symphonies, music life in Paris was dominated by the opera to such a great extent

that the symphony and chamber music led only a shadowy existence in the public mind. Among these composers were Étienne-Nicolas Méhul (1763–1817) and Luigi Cherubini (1760–1842). The four symphonies composed by the former between 1808 and 1810 were soon forgotten, at least in France. The latter composed a Symphony in D major in 1815 in response to a commission from the London Philharmonic Society and reworked it into a string quartet in 1829.

The establishment of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire in 1828 did something to change this situation; François-Antoine Habeneck (1781–1849) was its conductor, and it had set itself the task of the dissemination of Beethoven's symphonies. It was again hardly coincidental that a uniquely French symphonic tradition began to establish itself a short time thereafter. The firebrand Hector Berlioz (1803–69) appeared on the scene, creating a sensation in Paris during the 1830/31 season with his *Symphonie fantastique*, and the four symphonies composed by Georges Onslow between 1829 and 1846 also became known. This tradition traces its origins back to the great epoch of the older French symphony linked to the name of François-Joseph Gossec (1734–1829) and continued by way of Louise Farrenc (1804–75) and Henri Réber (1807–80) to César Franck (1822–90) and Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921).

Unlike Berlioz, who set out to cross over every generic boundary in his later symphonic works, Onslow continued to operate within the traditional generic canon throughout the whole of his instrumental oeuvre. During the course of his career he composed four-movement, purely instrumental symphonies, string quartets, string quintets, and other chamber works in various instrumentations.

Since he was financially independent, he was not bound to current fashion. Georges Onslow was born into a family of the English and French nobility on July 27, 1784. His father Edward had been elected to the English Parliament in 1780. One year later, however, a scandal (the exact circumstances have never been explained) forced him to leave England, and he settled in France, where he bought the Chalendrat Castle near Clermont-Ferrand in the Auvergne. In 1783 he married in Marie-Rosalie de Bourdeille de Brantôme, a member of an old and respected French noble family. The young Georges received a carefully planned education under his father's supervision at Chalendrat Castle. His lessons included instruction in piano.

The French Revolution of 1789 caused difficulties for the young family. Edward Onslow was imprisoned for a time and forced into exile in 1798. His son Georges followed him to Hamburg and received instruction there in 1799 and 1800 from the well-known pianist J. L. Dussek (1760–1812). While Edward was able to return to the Auvergne in 1800, his son Georges went to London to continue his education with the Clementi pupil J. B. Cramer (1771–1858). Around 1803 Georges returned to his parents' residence at Chalendrat.

In the meantime he had come to be regarded, as his contemporary Antoine-François Marmontel reported, as a pianist of "brilliant technique, skillful virtuosity, and beautiful sound". In his native France Onslow joined a circle of music-loving dilettantes who performed chamber music in a small circle. Onslow learned to play the cello and began writing his first compositions in 1806: string quintets, a piano sonata, and piano trios. These works were published during the two following years. Onslow must have felt that his compositional technique had its deficiencies because in 1808 he turned to Antonín Reicha (1770–1836), the later Professor of Counterpoint and Fugue at the Paris Conservatory and next to Cherubini the French capital's most influential music teacher, with a request for instruction in composition.

Onslow then began spending the summer months in his native Auvergne and the winter months in Paris to receive lessons or to have his works performed in the small circle of friends of chamber music in Paris. It is not known how long Onslow received lessons from Reicha, but in the decade from 1808

to 1817 Onslow composed at least twelve string quartets, some duos for violin and piano, and variations and shorter pieces for piano solo. In 1817 he went through a creative crisis, complaining that "my Muse is dead" and refusing to follow the fashionable trend set by "inventors of solos and arpeggios". He composed only a few solo sonatas until 1823, and his composition of his first operas during these same years may have had something to do with these production figures: in 1824 and 1827 he presented *L'Alcade de la Véga* and *Le colporteur* at the Comic Opera. The former met with only moderate success, but the latter enjoyed a more favorable response. In the meantime, however, Onslow's chamber music had brought him international esteem.

In 1830 he was made a distinguished member of the London Philharmonic Society (an honor bestowed on his fellow composer Berlioz only twenty years later) and composed the Symphony No. 2 in D minor op. 42 in honor of the society. In France he was celebrated by the music press as "our French Beethoven", while German music critics staked a claim to him as a composer "of the German school". His third stage work, *Guise, ou Les états des Blois*, was performed in 1837 and went on to hold its own on the stages for same time. After Cherubini's death Onslow become his successor in the venerable Académie des Beaux Arts, and an invitation to direct the Lower Rhine Music Festival in Cologne in 1847 occasioned him to compose the Symphony No. 4 in G major op. 71. After a hunting occident in 1829 Onslow became deaf in one ear and was plagued by constant nervous headaches. From then on he spent almost the whole year in the Auvergne and went to Paris only for one or two months in order to attend Académie meetings to present his latest compositions.

After 1848 his symphonies disappeared from the repertoire of the Paris Conservatory Orchestra. Onslow was hurt and assigned responsibility for the neglect of his works to the enthusiasm for Beethoven which had been spreading in Paris since 1830. Self-doubt also clouded the final years of his life. In 1850 he confessed to a friend that the more he examined his compositions, the firmer his impression became that he lacked invention. After his Opus 83, a piano trio, he abandoned his creative work and did no more composing until his death on October 3, 1853.

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The premiere of the Symphony No. 1 in A major op. 41 by Georges Onslow on April 10, 1831, marked the new beginning of a specifically French tradition of the symphony – if we omit from consideration the exceptional case formed by Hector Berlioz and his *Symphonie fantastique* premiered four months earlier, on December 5, 1830. This tradition had been connected with the name of François-Joseph Gossec (1734–1829) during the eighteenth century, but the turning of the Parisian public to the more pleasant genre of the symphonie concertante meant that the symphony increasingly fell by the way-side.

The revolution of 1789 then almost brought symphonic production to a total halt. The public of the First Republic, Empire, and Restoration turned to the opera. A few composers mainly obliged to the opera still engaged in the writing of symphonies after 1800: Étienne-Nicolas Méhul (1763–1817), whose four completed work s of this genre were composed between 1808 and 1810 and quickly, at least in France, fell into oblivion, and Luigi Cherubini (1760–1842), whose Symphony in D major written in 1815 was a commissioned work for the London Philharmonic Society and later (1829) was reworked by its composer into a string quartet. Nevertheless, music life in Paris was dominated so much by the opera that symphonic music and chamber music led nothing more than an obscure existence in the public's mind.

Things changed in 1828, however, with the founding of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. The society's conductor, François-Antoine Habeneck (1781–1849), had taken up the cause of disseminating Beethoven's symphonies and also assumed responsibility for the premiere of

Onslow's op. 41 together with the Orchestre du Conservatoire. Onslow composed three further symphonies during the years until 1846, and the line of tradition continued in this way then followed by way of Louise Farrenc (1804–75) and Henri Réber (1807–80) to César Franck and Camille Saint-Saëns.

Symphonies

Symphony No 1 in A major op. 41

1. Introduzione. Largo – Allegro spiritoso
2. Adagio espressivo
3. Minuetto. Vivace
4. Finale. Vivace

The Paris premiere of Onslow's first symphonic composition met with what was largely a positive reception from the critics and public. Joseph d'Ortigue, a friend of Berlioz, reported shortly thereafter in an unusually extensive review in the journal *L'Avenir* that artists and connoisseurs of art alike who attended the performance had showered Onslow with extremely flattering and unanimous declarations of praise after the performance. D'Ortigue himself declared in his concert review that Onslow, as far as style, structure, and development of the motifs in his compositions were concerned, belonged among the composers of the first rank. Reservations were expressed, however, when d'Ortigue expressed his expectation that Onslow would not rest content with what he had attained and would further develop his compositional style. A few days after the concert, in the *Revue musicale de Paris* edited by him, even François-Joseph Fétis, a critic feared for his sharp tongue, praised the marvelous writing style of the work, its pure and graceful melodies, finely invented effects, and the elaboration of themes with rare skill. In the end, however, he could not suppress the malicious remark that the symphony would have produced more of an effect if it had been performed a few years earlier. No matter how different the evaluations by the two critics may be in detail, both agree, for all their esteem for the work, that there was something old-fashioned about it, a sort of classicism that had been superseded by the more recent development of music. In the case of these testimonies conveying immediate impressions, it should nevertheless be taken into consideration that it was not only the premiere of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* that had occurred only four months earlier but also that the Paris first performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony had taken place on March 27, 1831, in the immediately preceding conservatory concert.

Performances of Onslow's first symphony immediately followed outside France. On its Leipzig first performance in the autumn of 1831, it reaped, as the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* published there reported, "Such outstanding applause that it had to be repeated eight days thereafter, on which occasion it was presented and received just as livelily". The Leipzig public in general proved to be very receptive to the symphony; until 1845 it experienced (at least) seven further performances – as far as is known, more than in any other city. Performances followed in Würzburg (autumn of 1831), Berlin (first in 1832, then several times until 1845), Vienna (1833 and 1835), Copenhagen (1833), London (1837), and Jena (1839).

The printed edition of the parts and a piano transcription of the symphony for four hands had already been published in Leipzig and Paris in 1831 and had met with major resonance in the contemporary music press. Although Onslow's art of "diligent elaboration" (thus a Vienna critic in 1834) as a rule was generally recognized in concert reviews, one fault just also clearly found repeated mention in them. In Berlin, for example, it was believed that the not-entirely-resounding success could be explained as follows: "In part this must have its explanation precisely in the too-exact treatment of

the details and the resultant mixing of the orchestra ensemble with the chamber-music style." Ludwig Rellstab, the reigning Berlin music critic ("too much detail-work"), and Gottfried Wilhelm Fink, the then editor of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in Leipzig ("smaller figures such as primarily would be proper to the quartet writer"), expressed themselves in similar terms in their reviews of the part edition. Admittedly, this fault could also be turned into something positive, if one allowed Onslow the right to his own individual symphonic style, as is attested by a review of a performance held in Jena at the beginning of 1839: "Apparently, this symphony is in its design, execution, and tendency essentially different from the works of the favorite masters in the symphonic genre, and if one does not judge it only by such masters but more on its own, then it will easily obtain a more appropriate estimation than has been the case thus far."

This demand was not followed, however: in the middle of the 1840s the symphony quite suddenly vanished forever from the concert programs. The last performances were held (on Onslow's own initiative) in April 1845 in Paris and in December of the same year in Leipzig. If would be worth investigating more precisely why concert societies so quickly banned this work from their programs, even though it continued to receive very positive reviews. In Leipzig it was said that the symphony was "just as original in its invention, as outstanding in its execution", that if was, to be sure "in general not so easily graspable for everyone, but nevertheless has its effect on the hearer through its inner content and obtains his esteem".

Nevertheless, from today's perspective, the objection of the Jena reviewer has its justification: one will take all the more pleasure in Onslow's symphony (and the same applies to all his orchestral works), the less one's idea of what a symphony has to be is determined solely by the model provided by Beethoven's symphonies, which anyway is usually reduced to the uneven numbers 3, 5, 7, and 9, and by the Beethovian succession based on them. For both points of criticism introduced above, the obsolete classicism referred to in the French reviews and the chamber-musical structure criticized by the Germans, are thoroughly justified by the standards of this model. For all the harmonic wealth around 1830, in full knowledge of the Ninth Symphony and the *Symphonie fantastique*, not only the maintenance of the traditional four-movement structure but also the regular period formation of most of the themes of the symphony had to produce a classicistic effect.

In the main theme of the first movement the eight-measure period with the dominant half cadence in the fourth measure remains clearly recognizable, despite the harmonic sophistication and the splitting on the instrumental plane. Even the thematically unspecific tutti block following the theme follows pre-Beethovian patterns, while nevertheless being charged with nervous tension by closely imitating, broken diminished sixth chords in the woodwinds. The second subject, intensified to hymnic pathos on its repetition, is also a regular period, even if the half cadence is veiled in the instrumentation. In the development section the middle Beethoven (less of the symphonies than of the sonatas) is recognizable as a model in that the thematic material of the first subject, tutti block, and second subject is elaborated in order. Even the fact that the tutti block is omitted in the recapitulation, only then in the coda to introduce the last climax prior to the conclusion of the movement, belonged to the then current formal repertoire. Nevertheless, numerous innovative fine points, precisely that wealth of unique "details" always emphasized by contemporary reviewers, are to be found under this surface of formal conventionality: the basic idea, say, of equally exploiting the polarity between minor and major for thematic formation and basic foundational design. The slow introduction in A minor anticipates the theme head of the first subject in A major, which, in turn, is modulated to minor after the initial characterizing sixth interval, then in the next measure resumes the major key, in order, in the third measure, just prior to the half cadence, to present a suspension with a minor (minor-key) sixth. Reduced to this elemental tension, the major-minor polarity again appears at the beginning of the second subject in the slow movement. A further Onslowian detail is the combination of this tonally

oscillating theme with the stable beginning of the first theme (which is similar to the beginning of the Allegretto from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, as Fétis already critically noted) at the conclusion of this movement.

As far as the objection about obsession with chamber-musical detail is concerned, it can be made to hold above all in the first movement and finale. The main theme of the first movement is expounded in what is almost soloistic laconism; a greater contrast to the monumental thematic presentations in works such as Beethoven's Third, Fifth, or Ninth Symphonies would hardly be imaginable. The development section of the first movement also works less with powerful shifts and orchestral-layer formations increasing the tension (the tutti block forming the center of the development section almost has the effect of an interpolated foreign body) but rather with a wealth of nuancing that to a certain extent is artificial. The listener is not spellbound by impassioned outbursts but believes (taking up a cliché widespread in France) that he or she is following the dialogic interaction of several partners in conversation engaging in intelligent discourse.

The whole ambivalence of Onslow's symphonic music, however, becomes particularly apparent in the finale, in its meticulous detailed work under the surface of classicistic formal language as well as in the opposition of detail-obsessed, almost soloistic passages (above all in the development section and recapitulation) and sudden implosion of tutti or unison blocks. Formally, it is a sonata-form movement of most highly original design, but its head theme has a pronouncedly rondo character. This theme commands almost the whole movement in what is a unique motivic economy: the motivic figures of the transition, in the course of which the major-minor polarity once again becomes virulent, are dependent of it, and the second theme is identical to it.

Symphony No 2 in D minor op. 42

1. Allegro vivace ed energico
2. Andante grazioso con moto
3. Menuetto. Allegro
4. Finale. Presto agitato

The success of the Symphony No. 1 in A major op. 41 in 1831 probably encouraged Onslow to undertake the composition of his Symphony No. 2 in D minor op. 42 during the same year. His admission to the London Philharmonic Society occasioned him to dedicate the symphony to this society, but the premiere took place in Paris in a concert of the Conservatory Orchestra on March 4, 1832. The London first performance followed on June 18 under Onslow's old teacher J. B. Cramer. The symphony was published in Leipzig during the following year and soon became well known in German-speaking Europe. It was performed in the Gewandhaus in Leipzig during the 1832/33 season and made its way to Berlin, Breslau, Königsberg, Vienna, Jena, and Frankfurt am Main within the next two years.

Like its predecessor, it met on the whole with a mixed response from the critics. Onslow's compositional skill, his "diligent elaboration" (thus a critic in Vienna) gained notice and respect, but fault was found with his "lock of set ideas" (London) and "proper introspection, deeper spiritual life" (Leipzig). Even the principal charge running through the reception of Onslow's symphonic oeuvre was not lacking on this occasion. Here a review from Jena, according to which the work was "less a genuine symphony than a brilliantly elaborated double quartet or quintet for string and wind instruments", can be cited as an example of many other reviews.

It is indeed the case that the first movement (*Allegro vivace ed energico*, 2/2 time) in particular is of a thematic economy and formal stringency thoroughly unusual in symphonic music. The constitutive features of the four-measure main motif opening the movement in a powerful *fortissimo*

style (a descending fourth, upbeat auxiliary note in eighths, and a triadic-chord descent with suspension emphasis followed by a triadic-chord ascent) are almost omnipresent either singly or in different combinations during the further course of the movement. A short fugato develops from the first two measures of the motif at the beginning of the transition. The variant of the eighth suspensions formed during the further course of the fugato, which goes on to build up to *fortissimo*, continues to have its underground effect in the accompaniment of the low strings in the second subject (clarinet). The second subject is in the parallel key of F major and belongs to an entirely different, lyrical expressive field. During the repetition of the second subject in the cello, what had been the underground accompaniment becomes nervous upper-voice ornamentation on its transfer to the violin parts. After the repetition the *fortissimo* of the second transitional part again makes a breakthrough. The triadic-chord tones are augmented and retarded to fourths (with a much shorter version of this passage already having directly preceded the second subject), another short fugato passage follows, and then the exposition concludes with a *scherzando* version of the main motif tossed back and forth between the high and low wind instruments. The development section elaborates in succession the component elements of the four-measure main motif amid thematic fragmentations, accelerated harmonic shifts, stretti, and a surprising passage set in double counterpoint and the remotest imaginable key of F sharp major, only then, after a melancholy reminiscence of the second subject in the oboe and clarinet, to build up its first two measures to demonic intensity in the bass part. The recapitulation entering after a sixteen-measure pedal point on the dominant resumes merely the first eight measures of the exposition and omits the first subject following in the exposition and most of the transition. The second subject appears in D major, but its repetition in the cello is now in minor and an echo of its appearance in the development section. An extended coda of fifty-five measures concluding the movement initially thins the texture down to one voice (needless to say, with an element from the initial motif, the rising triadic chord) and then builds up to a magnificent intensification the part of the first-subject complex left out in recapitulation.

Like the first movement, the second movement (*Andante grazioso con moto*, F major, 2/4 time) follows the sonata-form scheme with a characteristic deviation, however, in that the "development section" consists only of eight measures, while the recapitulation has a weighty "coda appendix" of twenty-seven measures. The first and second subjects contrast in character and instrumentation. The former functions as an anticipation at the beginning of the movement in string *pizzicato* to stationary wind chords and plays out the regular to-and-fro of the 6/8 time in a quiet cello cantilena, and the latter consists of dainty woodwind trill figures to be played *dolce con grazia*. The recapitulation omits the transitional section and takes a surprising deceptive-cadential and Neapolitan turn back to the second subject in the main key. This harmonic constellation is heard again at the beginning of the coda before the movement concludes amid employment of the beginning of the main theme of triadic-chord emphasis and with cadencing modulations.

From today's perspective the *Menuetto. Allegro* superscription of the third movement (3/4 time, D minor) seems somewhat anachronistic inasmuch as the tempo indicated by the metronome marking certifies that it is a scherzo of fiery animation. Moreover, Onslow himself designated the corresponding movement of his fourth symphony as a scherzo. Since the symphonic movement is in 6/8 time, however, it cannot be dismissed out of hand that Onslow automatically associated 3/4 time with the minuet. The beginning of the movement exhibits clear analogies to the beginning of the first movement: a *fortissimo* entry with an abrupt breaking off on the dominant after four measures, repetition of the beginning with another breaking off, this time on the subdominant. With its triadic-chord modulations the minuet middle section also refers back to the first movement. AIthough it does without a change of tempo, the B flat major trio contrasts strongly to the minuet with its intonation of a pastoral horn melody in the manner of a country dance. The da capo of the minuet has an appendix

in the form of a coda of twenty-six measures in accelerated tempo. The coda submits the head of the main theme to one last elaboration over a tonic pedal point.

The beginning of the finale (*Presto agitato*, D major, 2/2 time) draws on the harmonic constellation of the first movement and the beginning of the minuet. The melody of the main theme in the bass is repeated on the G major subdominant. A dominant passage introduces an intensification surprisingly modulating to F sharp major and then coming to a standstill in a general rest with a fermata. The main theme reenters but now introduces a tutti outburst in the B minor tonic parallel. Chromatically modified versions of the main theme form a transition to the second subject in the A major dominant key, and the second subject reverses the direction of the chromatic version of the main theme amid pulsing chord repetitions in the winds. It is not until the closing group that we encounter an idea of lyrical cantability, but this is only episodic. The development section elaborates only the main theme and the intensification part following it. A twenty-measure dominant pedal point forms a transition to the recapitulation, which is abbreviated over against the exposition. In contrast, the coda ranging over 108 measures hos been expanded to a second development section. The elaboration of the chromatic second subject omitted from the development section proper is made up for here, and one last entry of the main theme together with the intensification part, now taking on grand dramatic proportions, brings the work to a dazzling conclusion.

Symphony No 3 in F minor o. op.

1. Largo – Allegro espressivo
2. Allegro impetuoso
3. Andante soave
4. Finale. Allegro agitato

The success of this work and the Symphony No. 2 in D minor op. 42 composed immediately after it may have motivated Onslow to have these two works quickly followed by a third symphony. In a letter from Onslow to Habenack of April 8 (without an indication of the year), there is talk of having one of his string quintets tried out by the conservatory orchestra in a large instrumentation. An anecdote transmits the story that such a trial performance actually took place. The music critic Maurice Bourget reported in retrospect and with romantic ornamentation on the occasion of a performance of the symphony in March 1846: “Among the many remarkable quintets [...], there was one that the Société des Concerts wanted to perform in a version for string orchestra. The composer attended the rehearsal. But he had hardly heard the mighty sound of these stringed masses when a special idea ran through his mind. [...] Suddenly the quintet passed before his mind’s eye as a symphony. This sudden inner vision of a new composition occasioned him to ask for a postponement. The quintet was withdrawn and later replaced by the score such as it exists today.”

The reworking is thought to have been committed to paper during the winter months of 1833–34. This is suggested by a letter of September 27, 1833, from Onslow to Joseph d’Ortigue in which Onslow stated that he had not yet materially begun work on it but that it had already ripened in his mind. Onslow based the reworking on the Quintet in F minor op. 32 (composed in 1826), while of course submitting it to “substantial revisions”, as is noted on the title page of the printed edition of the parts (“avec de notables changements”). The work composed in this manner was presented to the public as the Symphony No. 3 in F minor. Its premiere by the conservatory orchestra under Habeneck was held on April 6, 1834. The critics reacted positively. The review published in the *Revue musicale de Paris* one week after the concert is remarkable for the justification given to Onslow’s symphonic style: “In the midst of various musical lines of thought, some continue, despite the innovations of the reformer Beethoven, to adhere to the cult of Haydn and Mozart. Mr. Onslow belongs to these latter [...]. [...] Far from finding fault with him for this, we instead congratulate him. For from the fact that one

regards their works as great models it does not necessarily follow that one follows them at every turn and limits oneself to the circle traversed by them [...].” Even the greatest Beethoven enthusiast among the French composers, namely Hector Berlioz, found the work “brillant”, while refraining from pronouncing a more detailed verdict.

The edition of the parts appeared in Leipzig already in April 1835 and was followed by the piano transcription in May. The Leipzig first performance had taken place an March 5, 1835, and further performances followed during the next years in Utrecht, Paris, and Copenhagen. Onslow nevertheless was unable to continue the successes that he had attained with his first two symphonies. One reason for this may be seen in what had now become an explicit reference to chamber music. Gottfried Wilhelm Fink, the then editor of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of Leipzig, formulated his objection in the following words: “Even though we may thus call the reworking itself only thoroughly masterful, the original work (Op. 32) forming the basis of it will for this very reason also make itself heard and, for all the worth of its content, form a lighter style of symphony than that of polyphonic invention by our great masters in this style [...].”

As we see, French and German music critics continued to hold, also with respect to the third symphony, the estimation that Onslow’s first symphony had already occasioned. As far as the charge of chamber-musical structure is concerned, Onslow to a certain extent officially admitted to it in that he reversed Cherubini’s procedure of producing a work for a string ensemble of soloists from a symphony. Nevertheless, one is also tempted to believe that Onslow wanted to offer the proof that a symphonic work very much indeed could be produced by a skillful arrangement on the basis of a chamber-musical structure. For, apart from the extension of the outer movements and entirely unheroic character (Fink seems to be aiming at this point), the structure of the work is much more symphonic than, say, that of the first symphony: the string part is considerably more compact, and Onslow does largely without string voices in soloistic leading. The infatuation with detail in the elaboration of thematic material yields to longer lines of suspense without the work subjecting itself to charges of lack of thematic strictness. Even the classicistic periodicity of the themes is abandoned in the interest of a thematic formation in principle consisting of two-measure units and turning out to be harmonically much more variable than periodic symmetry.

Like the first symphony, the third symphony continued to receive positive reviews (despite its comparatively fewer performances) until its final disappearance. Its last Paris presentation on March 8, 1846, inspired Maurice Bourget, the critic already cited, to genuine enthusiasm in the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*: ”[...] But we dare without fear of contradiction to say that this symphony by Mr. Onslow numbers among his most successful, most inspired, and most concentrated works. One finds united in it an interesting manner of thinking, skillfully and carefully elaborated, and finally that animated verve that fills the whole work with life and warmth.” This Paris performance was not destined to be the last performance: the work was heard one last time in the winter of 1846 in Copenhagen.

Symphony No 4 in G major op. 71

1. Introduzione. Largo – Allegro spirituoso
2. Scherzo. Presto
3. Andantino molto cantabile
4. Le Coup De Vent (Souvenir du Rhin). Allegro animato

Onslow composed the Symphony No. 4 in G major op. 71 in 1846 and dedicated it to the organizing committee of the Lower Rhine Music Festival in gratitude for the invitation to direct the festival in 1847. Nevertheless, this symphony too was premiered in Paris, namely under Habeneck on

March 28, 1847. Two months later it was heard under the composer in Cologne, and on October 21, 1847, it was conducted by Niels W. Gade at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig. Onslow could not continue the success of his first two symphonies with this work, and further performances of it during his lifetime are at present not documented. The Leipzig concert commemorating the composer's death in 1853 returned to his second symphony. According to the dating in the autograph, the fourth symphony was composed within the short time of seven weeks and drew on earlier musical material. The *Andantino* draws on the *Romance* from the Piano Duo op. 7, and the finale entitled *Le coup de vent* (The Gust of Wind) employs musical material from the opera *Guise*. Critics in France and Germany were of the unanimous opinion that the symphony had nothing to odd to Onslow's reputation but demonstrated once again the customary high level of his composing. In Germany objections were voiced about the last movement, "a [...] very superficially maintained, in no way successful tone painting", to which "more right is given than the art of composition can grant to it", as we read in two reviews of the Leipzig performance.

The basic musical idea behind the symphony seems to be the testing and probing of the potential of chromaticism, both melodically as characteristic coloration and harmonically as an unmediated major-minor shift or in suspension formation. Like the first movements of Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3, the first movement of Symphony No. 4 begins with a slow introduction. In the first and fourth symphonies the introduction is in the minor variant of the main key. The main key of G minor or G major is set in two mighty cadences without thematic profile sharpened by diminished seventh chords. The main key remains unsettled even with the change of the signature to G major occurring at the entry of the *Allegro con spirito*. The initial theme is a complex form consisting of a quiet upper-voice melody, harmonic filling parts, and chromatic accompaniment parts in retrograde motion. It first goes back and forth between major and minor but then confirms the main key with a decisive cadence. The repetition of the theme in the woodwinds and a few transitional measures, again touching on G minor and B flat major, are fallowed by the second part of the first subject. Here violins and woodwinds again contend for the motifs in a *scherzando* manner. A renewed modulation to B flat major turns out to be part of a Neapolitan suspension before the A major double dominant introducing the second subject, which is presented first by the clarinet and then by the first violin. Although the second subject itself is diatonic, if too receives a characteristic stamp from the chromatic descent and ascent of accompaniment voices. The exposition concludes with a closing group intensifying up to the *fortissimo* of the orchestra tutti – and not without emphasis on the Neapolitan suspensions and chromatic bass passages. The development section breaks the main theme down into his component parts step by step, until only its bass, a stepwise descent preceded by an octave interval, is submitted to elaboration. Lastly, a fugato with the head of the second subject is combined with the bass of the main theme at the climax of the contrapuntal development. The complete reduction of the texture to orchestral beats is followed by a twenty-four-measure dominant pedal point emphasized as a sort of new beginning by a general rest and forming a transition to the recapitulation. Apart from a few small abbreviations, the recapitulation adheres to the course of the exposition but draws consequences from the development section inasmuch as the main theme is fragmented on its repetition and surprisingly modulates to B flat major. The *scherzando* part also begins in this key, but the much more strongly instrumented wind chords make its character seem dampened. The coda concluding the movement again brings the chromaticism into the foreground through half-tone ascending modulation and in its further course briefly touches on the second subject.

The scherzo (*Presto*, C major, 6/8 time) forms an exception within Onslow's symphonies (but not in his chamber music) in that it occurs in the second position. If is in five parts: the scherzo main part forming the frame and repeated three times (in a very abbreviated version the third time) is punctuated by a trio in a slower tempo. Continuous, driving eighth motion lends the scherzo main part its

rhythmic stamp, and its stands out harmonically on account of its abrupt second shifts and major-minor transfers. The trio (*Poco meno presto*, A flat major) develops a lyrical triadic-chord melody in the woodwinds and over lying string parts.

The third movement (*Andantino molto cantabile*, E major, 2/4 time) quite clearly goes back to an earlier work, to the Duo for Piano Duet op. 7 of 1811. It follows the pattern of the three-part symmetrical form (A-B-A') which had fallen increasingly out of fashion for slow movements ever since Haydn's symphonies. The A part is marked by an expressive cantilena initially presented in the cellos and then repeated by the flute and first violin. The middle part in C sharp minor takes on the character of a funeral march to a beating bass accompaniment and with a sharply dotted rhythm. In the coda added to the repetition part, the resumption of the funeral-march rhythm builds up to a magnificent fifth-interval sequence forming the climax of the movement as a whole.

The finale (*Allegro animato*, G major, 2/4 time) bears not only the already mentioned subtitle *Le coup de vent* but also the designation *Souvenir du Rhin*, with which Onslow signaled his intention to pay tribute to his Cologne hosts in the musical content of his work. The tone-painting element dominates over long stretches of the movement. Tremolandi in the strings and woodwinds alternate with chromatic glissandi and are punctuated by a number of orchestra tutti passages stamped by octave intervals, string passages in chromatic descent, or wind chords as well as by two lyrical second subjects which, admittedly, do not remain untouched by chromaticism. Formally, the movement follows the general outline of the sonata form with its development section returning to the beginning of the movement and then presenting the orchestra tutti in C major and one of the second subjects in E minor as well as with its recapitulation omitting the entire first-subject complex. Two general rests mark the coda as a new beginning, and the coda brings the movement to its conclusion with the rushing of the wind and surging of the waves.

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Translated by Susan Marie Praeder