

Composer of the Week: Edward Gregson & Alan Bush

to be broadcast on BBC Radio 3: 14 – 18 February 2022 at 12 noon

Programme Descriptions

Episode Title

1/5 Exposition and Developments (14 Feb)

Edward Gregson talks to Donald Macleod about his early setbacks and successes

All this week, Donald Macleod is in conversation with British composer, Edward Gregson, who offers a fascinating window into his own story and also the life and work of his mentor, Alan Bush. We'll see how both composers have made significant contributions to Britain's musical story, and we explore the events that led to the very different trajectories of their careers.

Edward Gregson knew that classical music would be his life after encountering Brahms's music as a teenager. He studied composition with Alan Bush, and his natural instinct for melody and brilliant orchestral colour have made him a popular choice with audiences and performers across the world. He also prides himself in rising to a challenge, including taking on the leadership of one of Britain's major musical conservatoires.

In the early part of the twentieth century, Alan Bush seemed destined to become one of the regular stalwarts of Britain's music scene, alongside his contemporaries William Walton and Michael Tippett. It was not to be. Bush's conversion to communism put him at odds with the British establishment and sent his career in a very different direction. His story is intriguing and frustrating in equal measure but, Edward argues, Bush's ever-present political agenda shouldn't detract from the intrinsic quality of his music.

In today's programme we focus on some significant moments in Edward Gregson's early career including his upbringing within the Salvation Army, an early knock-back from an influential conductor, and his first forays into the world of brass bands.

Gregson: Concerto for Orchestra (III. Toccata)

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra,
Douglas Bostock, conductor

Gregson: Quintet for Brass, (1st mvt)

London Brass

Gregson: Music for Chamber Orchestra (I. Lento maestoso)

BBC Concert Orchestra
Bramwell Tovey, conductor

Gregson: Connotations

Grimethorpe Colliery Band
Elgar Howarth, conductor

Gregson: Six Little Pieces for piano (Nos. 1-4)

Murray McLachlan, piano

Gregson: The Kings go Forth (I. The Church)

Royal Northern College of Music Wind Orchestra
James Gourlay, conductor

Producer: Chris Taylor

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2/5 A Political Awakening (15 Feb)

Donald Macleod and Edward Gregson explore how Marxism became a driving force in Bush's music.

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Today Donald and Edward turn their attention to Alan Bush's story. We see how Bush's dazzling talent catapulted him to early attention and follow him to 1920s Berlin where he witnessed, first-hand, the rise of German fascism.

Bush: Concert-Piece for cello and piano (opening)

Joseph Spooner, cello

Catherine Summerhayes, piano

Bush: Relinquishment

Piers Lane, piano

Bush: Dialectic

Medici Quartet

Bush: Piano Concerto (extract)

Rolf Hind, piano

Apollo Voices

BBC Symphony Orchestra

Leonard Slatkin, conductor

Bush: Symphony No 1 (1st mvt)

Royal Northern College of Music Symphony Orchestra

Douglas Bostock, conductor

Producer: Chris Taylor

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3/5 The Manchester Years (16 Feb)

Edward Gregson talks to Donald Macleod about a new role with new responsibilities and a trip to China that nearly ended in disaster.

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Today we return our focus to the music of Edward Gregson. Donald talks to the composer about his move to Manchester, as principal of the Royal Northern College of Music, and a trip to China that nearly ended in disaster. Plus, they discuss Edward's fascination for writing concertos.

Gregson: Stepping Out
BBC Concert Orchestra
Bramwell Tovey, conductor

Gregson: Violin Concerto (2nd mvt)
Olivier Charlier, violin
BBC Philharmonic
Martyn Brabbins, conductor

Gregson: Shadow of Paradise
Melinda Maxwell, oboe
Richard Benjafield, percussion

Gregson: Make a Joyful Noise
East London Chorus
Paul Ayres, organ
Locke Brass Consort
Michael Kibblewhite, conductor

Gregson: Clarinet Concerto (Part 1)
Michael Collins, clarinet
BBC Philharmonic
Martyn Brabbins, conductor

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4/5 Rejection and Renewal (17 Feb)

As the Cold War takes hold, Alan Bush discovers new opportunities behind the Iron Curtain. With Donald Macleod and Edward Gregson

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Today, Bush turns to opera which brings him enormous success, though not in Britain, where his communist views were being viewed with increasing suspicion. His stage works were staged many times and to huge acclaim in East Germany and the USSR. Donald and Edward reflect on what British audiences have yet to discover about Bush and his legacy.

Bush: Three Concert Studies (I. Moto Perpetuo)
Summerhayes Trio

Bush: Violin Concerto (II. Andante espressivo)
Manoug Parikian, violin
BBC Symphony Orchestra
Norman del Mar, conductor

Bush: Symphony No 2, 'The Nottingham Symphony' (III. 'Castle Rock' & IV 'Goose Fair')
Royal Scottish National Orchestra
Martin Yates, conductor

Bush: Voices of the Prophets (Nos. 1-3)
Philip Langridge, tenor
Lionel Friend, piano

Bush: Africa - Symphonic movement for piano and orchestra (extract)
Peter Donohoe, piano
Royal Scottish National Orchestra
Martin Yates, conductor

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5/5 Dream Song (18 Feb)

Edward Gregson tells Donald Macleod what inspires him today, after a lifetime in music

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Today, we focus on Gregson's more recent works. Edward tells Donald why he waited until he was nearly seventy to write his first String Quartet, and he shares the very personal feelings that lie behind his Mahler inspired, Dream Song for Orchestra.

Gregson: Symphony in two movements (I. Toccata)
Black Dyke Band

Gregson: String Quartet No 1 (1st mvt)
Navarra Quartet

Bush: Symphony No 4, 'Lascaux Symphony' (II. 'The Children')
Royal Scottish National Orchestra
Martin Yates, conductor

Gregson: Dream Song
BBC Philharmonic
Bramwell Tovey, conductor

Producer: Chris Taylor

