**Three Dance Episodes**

In 1974 Gregson was approached by a new eight-piece brass ensemble, the James Shepherd Versatile Brass (JSVB), to contribute a work to its first recording. One of the most highly-regarded cornet soloists of his generation, James Shepherd was principal cornet of Black Dyke Mills Band for ten years (1963 -73) before leaving to form a flexible ensemble, mixing brass band and symphonic instruments. Scored for three trumpets, horn, two trombones, euphonium and tuba, *Three Dance Episodes* matches JSVB’s artistic ambition with music that combines a neo-classical precision with Gregson’s take on English song and dance.

The opening *Toccata* contrasts two ideas: a crisp antiphonal dance measure (in which the low brass presents the theme like a chorale at half speed), and broader melody derived from the opening dance. The second movement is a lilting *Siciliana,* rather nostalgic in tone to begin with, but building through a characteristic weft of modal melody - with euphonium and first trumpet particularly prominent - to an impassioned climax. A life-long admirer of the music of Bela Bartok, Gregson’s lively final dance is a deliberate ‘hat tip’ to the Hungarian master’s folkdance arrangements.

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