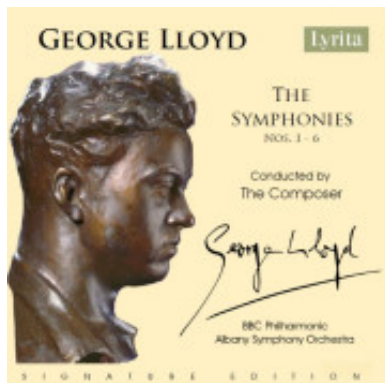


# George Lloyd: The Symphonies Nos. 1 - 6 conducted by the composer [4CDs]



**Catalogue Number: SRCD2417**

## Short Description

**- available to download and stream from all Digital Platforms**

Lloyd became a symphonist despite himself. When he was in his twenties he seemed destined to be a composer of operas and it is likely that, had the vicissitudes of war not intervened, he would have written music for the stage exclusively. In an article for the June 1939 issue of the Musical Monthly Record, Harry Farjeon wondered why music for Lloyd was 'not centred in the concert hall but in the theatre' and quoted the young composer as being 'interested only in opera'.

There are strong traces in the symphonies of what might have been: the intensely lyrical, cantabile nature of the writing; the intermezzo-like movements; the opera buffa qualities of the finales and the feeling for the long line which runs through those supple and sweeping melodies all denote a born opera composer. In the event his operatic aspirations were cruelly cut short and it is to his courageous, life-affirming twelve symphonies that we must look to chart his development, recovery and eventual triumph.

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## Description

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"Nos 1-3 are evidence of a quite amazing burst of activity, an almost unbelievable outpouring of notes, written with style and confidence. However, I feel the composer was yet to discriminate the difference between what emerges as memorable material, and mere note-spinning with a lot of hustle and bustle...Although almost equally as long as no. 4, no. 5 does not quite come up to this level of

reward, nonetheless it is immensely worthwhile. Here, one cannot fail to notice the extraordinary power of the writing for brass. They really have a wonderful time throughout these recordings, but especially in this piece. Lloyd reduces the orchestra in different ways in the first three movements...

The excellent 24-page booklet notes by Paul Conway comprehensively detail Lloyd's life, and he is consistently sympathetic to the music. He quotes Martin Anderson recalling, in 1993, that the BBC's then Controller of Music, Robert Ponsonby (was) *virtually complaining* (my italics) that every time the corporation broadcast a Lloyd work, he was 'submerged by letters from delighted listeners'. This is firm evidence, if you need it, of the bone-headed, cloth-eared, de haut en bas, call it what you will, attitude of the establishment to Lloyd's work during the last recent half-century.

This meant that no 4, composed in 1946, had to wait until 1981 for a first performance. It seems that the only conductor who took an interest was Edward Downes whose performances of 4, 5 and 8, are firm favourites in my collection, and usefully complement these Albany issues." **Geoffrey Atkinson, British Music Society**

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"The Symphonies 1-6 and the Agincourt-themed overture, *John Socman* (written for the 1951 Festival of Britain) are presented on Lyrita's handsome box set, with not only detailed programme notes by Paul Conway and a fascinating assessment of Lloyd's life and times ~ childhood in St. Ives, to inter-war years questing for recognition ~ but a photo-album, too, of the composer with fellow musicians, friends and supportive family. Lloyd's father wrote the libretto for the opera *John Socman*; and the composer's marriage very likely saved his sanity, following the trauma of war spent in the Arctic convoys.

From the box set, the hugely impressive, splendidly designed musical architecture that is the lyrical, hour long *Symphony No. 4*, written at the war's end and subtitled, 'The Arctic', stands out. How poorly served for choice we are by our orchestras today. Lloyd's *Fourth Symphony* is a masterpiece but is rarely played or broadcast in this country. It fell to New York State's Albany Symphony Orchestra to perform the piece under the composer's baton (in a rich, wide acoustic) ~ although to be fair to our own native musicians, the bulk of the box set displays the no less virtuosic playing of Manchester's BBC Philharmonic... But nothing prepares you for the 20 minute long final movement. With perfect, sure footing in its initial sequences that make complete 'conversational' sense (no idle note spinning here), a quietly confident, march theme sweeps up through the orchestra ~ bringing out playing of an infectious, even hypnotic spirit. The marching theme reappears in the movement, leading to a great, optimistic conclusion ~ and causing the listener to ask: could this really be the work of a man so recently scarred by war? Evidently George Lloyd possessed great inner strength...

Herewith, music that lives in its own fleeting dimension, and which is superbly recorded in glowing detail." **Stuart Milson, The Quarterly Review**

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"The good news for admirers of George Lloyd is that Lyrita and the Lloyd Society have reached an agreement...This 'signature edition' will initially arrive in two big boxes that contain his entire symphonic canon, all twelve symphonies, and this is the opening salvo, symphonies one to six with a couple of smaller pieces for good measure. These BBC Philharmonic and Albany Symphony (Nos. 1 and 4) recordings were made between 1986 and 1992 in New Broadcasting House, Manchester and in Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, Troy, NY and were excellent in every way. Old hands will know that Lyrita was responsible for bringing Lloyd to wider notice with its recordings of Symphonies 4, 5 and 8 in the early 1980s; Edward Downes conducted the Philharmonia...

The first six symphonies offer a gamut of feelings expressed in musical language of rich colour, intrepid rhythms, firm and cogent structures that are strong in feeling but resilient, and sometimes

stoic in the face of adversity and always beautifully orchestrated.

There are two booklets. The first is 24-pages and contains full track and recordings details and an extensive and wide-ranging essay by Paul Conway that cites source material including Lloyd's own comments in LP sleeve notes and articles in *Tempo* and *Radio 3* magazine, amongst others. The other booklet is 'A Life in Pictures', an eight-page largely black and white sequence of photographs that trace the composer from a young man... to the later years... I wrote to Lloyd once asking him about his then-unrecorded Violin Concertos and he replied offering the hope that they'd be recorded, as indeed they were. They will be forthcoming in this series as will much else. Next, though, will be the second symphonic tranche. Those of us who have admired Lloyd's music for many years will welcome the consolidation of his legacy in this way and will hope it stimulates more performances and perpetuates his name even more." **Jonathan Woolf, MusicWeb International**

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"Rejoice! A glorious symphonic cycle by a British composer has been issued as a set for the first time. George Lloyd (1913-98) was treated with lofty condescension by the musical establishment because his twelve symphonies contain barely a single dissonance...But he was no amateur: he could write perfect fugues as a teenager and by his early twenties had a fine opera under his belt. Then in 1942, the ship on which he was serving as radio engineer was hit by a torpedo. Lloyd nearly drowned in oil; shell shock ruined his health and he and his wife retreated to their smallholding. He continued to write symphonies, but they waited decades for a premiere. His masterpiece, the Fourth, was written in 1946 and first performed in 1981. Icy glissandos depict the seas in which he nearly died – 'a world of darkness, storm, strange colours and far-away peacefulness'. There are violent outbursts but cheerfulness keeps breaking through.

In these two boxed sets, Lyrita has reissued all the symphonies in splendid performances by the BBC Philharmonic and Albany Symphony Orchestra conducted by the composer. Paul Conway's excellent notes steer clear of exaggerated claims." Damian Thompson, *The Spectator*

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"The first three symphonies date before Lloyd's success with his 1934 opera *Iernin* and are typically post-romantic, often sounding like music for film. That is not meant as a criticism. The music is well argued and abounds in melody, such as the Rimsky-Korsakov like melody early in Symphony No.1, and with something of that master's ear for orchestration.

The second is slightly more mature with its 'puckish' first movement themes and the soaring string melody in the second movement hinting fleetingly at Vaughan Williams. The following Alla Marcia could be by Coates, while the final movement opens with a Sibelian landscape giving way to more high-jinks. Some of the themes in the third symphony again sound Russian to me with echoes of Khachaturian and Shostakovich.

Then there is a gap: Symphony No.4 *The Arctic* of 1945-6 was informed by Lloyd's war experience. The eerie second movement gives a sense of the Arctic cold, but after the perky the third movement we are soon woken up with lighter musical 'rum-te-tum' themes reminding me of Coates' *Dam Busters March*.

Symphonies 5 and 6 have a sunnier disposition. In the fifth I get a strong feeling that Lloyd did not know how to end the first movement as there many attempts. The funereal second movement and the subdued third carry a sense of unease. Gradually a fandango rhythm takes over, but I still feel the dance is held in check. The harp at the end evokes the celesta in Shostakovich 5. The finale is a hectic 11-minute *vivace* recalling the cacophony of Charles Ives.

Taking stock it is clear that the first three symphonies are somewhat frivolous and aim to please. The fourth takes on a more serious sense of symphonic argument and the fifth and sixth show Lloyd fully

confident of what he means to say – and he says it well.

Also on the discs are the overture to *John Socman* and an orchestral suite *Charade* of 1968." **Ronald Corp, *British Music Society***

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"Symphony No. 1 in A (1932, rev. 1982) is his auspicious first entry in the genre. It has the attractive melodies, imaginative orchestration, well-paced drama, and exciting rhythmic momentum that would become staples in his later works. It is short, free, and cast in a single continuous movement, a conscious determination "not to write long, highly organized symphonies of Elgarian splendours"... The second, a beautiful, Tchaikovskian cantabile melody, is the heart of the symphony. It is further explored in the lyrical, slow central section; following a spirited vivace finale, it returns at the symphony's close. The striking Symphony 2 in E (1933, rev. 1982) is the peak of his early symphonies. It departs from its lean, formally free, and streamlined predecessor and hints at the large-scale psychological drama of his later symphonies with more formal structure, a wider emotional range, and a more chromatic melodic and harmonic language. The atmosphere of I is mischievous and dance like, rife with Mahlerian horn-calls and surprising modulations. II is a set of variations on a haunting, pervasively chromatic theme with delicate interplay from clarinets and a sinewy solo violin. A brief scherzo (III) follows with an elusive, vaguely threatening march, countered by a Trio parodying stiff military marches. The brooding finale (IV) is dominated by lyrical and stately themes countered by craggy interruptions in the brass, as well as an eerie, polytonal return of the Trio theme in the piccolo. For a moment, it seems that the beautiful, lyrical theme wins out with a sweeping flourish— before the craggy theme drags it down to a subdued, shadowy close. No. 3 in F (1933) returns to the smaller proportions and continuous structure of No. 1, though with far greater economy and control. Except for a beautiful slow theme at its center, he almost completely eschews long-breathed tunes for short, distinct motives. Though his lyrical nature is still predominant, this symphony contains some of the most intense music to come from his pen.

For now, the recorded sound and performances on these Lyrita reissues hold up well. Both sets of symphonies are valuable and incredibly well priced at around \$25 each—they should top the wishlist of any lover of orchestral music." **FAR, *American Record Guide***

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"George Lloyd was modest and never wanted to be more than he was; he refused to write a biography about him during his lifetime. He would hardly have expected that his work would now be able to take a moderate but firm place in the music business. The fact that it can be heard more often in concert and at home has been laid with the initiative of the George Lloyd Society and Lyrita Nimbus Arts.

In the first three symphonies, core keys ('in A', 'in E' and 'in F') are clearly identified; only the second of these three is in four movements, the other two are – like Arnold Bax's symphonies (which Lloyd rejected), which can also come to mind in terms of timbre – three-movement – but unlike Bax's work, the three movements are subordinated to a one-movement overall concept – in retrospect, Lloyd admitted his difficulty at the time in maintaining longer slow movements with sufficient tension. Lloyd opens his symphonies with a variation movement with an undisguised reference to Tchaikovsky, and 'reminiscence hunters' may also discover echoes of Prokofiev, Sibelius, Dvořák, Elgar or Mahler in other symphonies. The second symphony did not receive its first complete performance until 1986 at the BBC Manchester, a few days before the present studio recording; here Lloyd knows how to make even a slow movement appealing... In addition, the four CDs contain the charming overture to 'John Socman' and the six-movement descriptive suite 'Charade' (1968), with which Lloyd made fun of 'oddities of the 1960s' – the movements have headings such as 'Student Power', 'L.S.D.', 'March-In' (instead of Sit-In, Love-In, etc.), 'Flying Saucers', 'Pop Song' and 'Party Politics' (this last movement, with which he mocked the English party system, liked Lloyd especially). The suite is symphonically demanding, but could otherwise be assigned to the genre of 'light music', the English upscale light

music." **Dr Jurgen Schaarwachter, *Klassik.com***

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"The orchestration is bright and clear. It is worth mentioning the "*Vivace, tempo primo*", which consists of a free fugato of the opening theme of the symphony. Subtitled *Scenes from the sixties*, *Charade* dates from 1969. Lloyd himself conducted its premiere with the BBC Philharmonic at the Royal Northern College of Music on 27 October 1992. The two themes are bloated, truncated and cheerfully distorted, with the orchestration more colorful and with a cheerfully irreverent style.

The recording closes with *Symphony No. 6*. Like its first three, it is short-lived. It is the lightest symphony, which shows Mozart characteristics, which contrast with his denser and larger-scale symphonies, both in duration and orchestration.

Lyrta once again shows us her ability to surprise the listener with true musical milestones." **Joseph Bosch, *Sonogram Magazine***