

## William Boyce – 8 Symphonies (1990)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Symphonies (8), Op. 2: no 1 in B flat major* 2. *Symphonies (8), Op. 2: no 2 in A major* 3. *Symphonies (8), Op. 2: no 3 in C major* 4. *Symphonies (8), Op. 2: no 4 in F major* 5. *Symphonies (8), Op. 2: no 5 in D major* 6. *Symphonies (8), Op. 2: no 6 in F major* 7. *Symphonies (8), Op. 2: no 7 in B flat major* 8. *Symphonies (8), Op. 2: no 8 in D minor*

*The English Concert / Trevor Pinnock*

William Boyce's eight symphonies are not only the most well known and most recorded of all his works, but are also probably amongst the most famous, most played and most loved of any English Baroque musical work.

They were first published by John Walsh (Handel's publisher) in 1760 but each one was in fact composed over the previous 21 years as either an ode to a vocal or stage work or as an overture. At the time of publication Boyce was 49 and had begun to gradually withdraw from public musical life – probably because of his increasing deafness. These pieces were no doubt chosen for publication as a single set to represent his finest and most famous orchestral works. Newspapers at this time show a strong growth in musical societies and public orchestral concerts and Boyce's symphonies were presumably published to meet the correspondingly high demand for this type of work.

This description is not entirely accurate as bassoons and double basses (playing from the same part as the 'cellos) are also needed as well as timpani in the fifth symphony.

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The terms Overture and Symphony were synonymous at this time and were generally described as being either in the French or Italian style. The French style 'overture' began with a slow movement containing dotted rhythms leading to a fugue. Dance movements followed this. The Italian style 'sinfonia' or symphony was in three movements, slow-fast-slow. Boyce arranged his symphonies such that numbers 1-5 are in the Italian Style and 6-8 are in the French style. For the whole of his life Boyce continued to compose music in both styles in spite of the fact that the French style 'overture' was quickly going out of fashion.

When musical tastes changed in the latter half of the eighteenth century and audiences looked towards the new 'classical' style of Abel, J.C. Bach, Mozart and Haydn, the symphonies of Boyce were gradually dropped from the orchestral repertoire. The composer Constant Lambert (1905-1951) put them back on the musical map when he rediscovered them in the 1920s – leading to the first modern edition in 1928. Lambert made use of Boyce's music in his own ballet 'The Prospect Before Us' which was produced by the Sadler's Wells ballet company in 1940.

The symphonies are recognised today as being absolute gems of the period; bright, full of good tunes, well crafted and delightfully unassuming.

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