

## Two Australian Symphonies in One Movement: Horace Perkins's *Elegiac Symphony* and Felix Gethen's *Symphony in E♭*

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The revival of symphonic composition in Britain, the United States, France and the Soviet Union during the 1930s and 1940s was echoed during the early 1950s by a remarkable surge in symphonic writing by Australian composers.<sup>1</sup> These symphonies represented a response to the development of symphony orchestras in every state capital city of Australia under the auspices of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC).<sup>2</sup> Another powerful catalyst was the 1951 Commonwealth Jubilee Composers' Competition, for which entrants were required to compose a symphony of up to forty minutes duration. Open to composers of all countries of the Commonwealth, the competition attracted eighty-nine entries, of which thirty-six were by Australian residents.<sup>3</sup> Four of the eleven symphonies selected for the final round of adjudication were Australian, and two, by Robert Hughes and Clive Douglas, were judged as second and special prizewinners respectively.

Although many of the thirty-six Australian entrants of the competition cannot be traced, I have studied over forty extant symphonies composed in Australia dating from between 1948 and 1960.<sup>4</sup> These works include symphonies by John Antill, Edgar Bainton, Clive Douglas, Felix Gethen, Raymond Hanson, Alfred Hill, Mirrie Hill, Robert Hughes, Erich John, Dorian Le Gallienne, David Morgan, James Penberthy, Horace Perkins, Margaret Sutherland, Felix Werder

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<sup>1</sup> These works are chronicled in Rhoderick McNeill, *The Australian Symphony from Federation to 1960* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014). I have documented over forty symphonies from the 1950s alone.

<sup>2</sup> See Martin Buzacott, *The Rite of Spring: 75 Years of ABC Music-making* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2007); Phillip Sametz, *Play On! 60 years of Music-making with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra* (Sydney: ABC Books, 1992); Charles Buttrose, *Playing for Australia* (Sydney: ABC Books, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> For papers relating to the Competition and its organisation, see National Archives of Australia, Sydney, Jubilee Composers' Competition [Commonwealth Jubilee Celebrations, Box 5], Item barcode 3317758, accession no. SP497/1 (unpublished papers, 1950–1952). See also Rhoderick McNeill, 'A Symphony for Australia,' *Quadrant* 54:1–2 (Jan.–Feb. 2010): 86–91.

<sup>4</sup> McNeill, *Australian Symphony*.

and Malcolm Williamson. There is no stylistic uniformity to this diverse group of composers, and the wide range of idioms employed spans the gamut from late nineteenth-century romanticism (Hill), through impressionism (Bainton), neo-classicism (Sutherland and Morgan), and the progressive, at times ambiguous tonality of Sutherland, Douglas and Hanson, to the atonal and serial symphonies of Werder.<sup>5</sup> Of these symphonies, five were cast in a single, continuous movement, and they make up an interesting subset of the larger group of Australian symphonies.

Symphonies in one movement are essentially a development of the early twentieth century, even though there are clear precedents in piano works like the Schubert Fantasia in C 'Wanderer' (1822) and the Liszt Sonata in B minor (1853) that interpolate slow movement and scherzo sections into an overarching fast-movement sonata structure. Some of the symphonic poems of Liszt and Richard Strauss (for example *Don Juan*, *Ein Heldenleben* and *Sinfonia Domestica*) carried these structural experiments into orchestral music. Of works bearing the title 'Symphony' the first that blended fast movement sonata-form features with scherzo and slow movement sections in an integrated way was Schoenberg's *Kammersymphonie* op. 9 of 1906, but its idiosyncratic chamber music scoring for fifteen players does not lend itself to the standard orchestral concert. Perhaps the first notable repertoire symphony in one movement was Sibelius's Symphony no. 7 (1924). Rather than a sonata-based structure, the Sibelius Symphony no. 7 evolves organically through its various sections and changes of tempo, a model that likewise undergirds the Symphony no. 3 in one movement by American Roy Harris (1939). The other noteworthy single-movement symphony of the period is the Symphony no. 1 by Samuel Barber (1936).

Amongst Australian symphonies, the first to use a continuous, multi-sectional single movement was the Symphony no. 2 in D minor by Edgar Bainton, which was premiered in Sydney in 1941 and its miniature score published in 1943. Given Bainton's prominence as the Director of the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music from 1934 to 1946 and as a regular conductor of the Sydney orchestra prior to the Goossens period, this symphony is likely to have been influential. During the 1950s, one-movement symphonies were composed by Raymond Hanson (Symphony, op. 28, 1951), Horace Perkins (*Elegiac Symphony*, 1952), Clive Douglas (Symphony no. 2, 'Namatjira,' 1952–1956) and Felix Gethen (Symphony in E $\flat$ , 1952–1958). Detailed treatments of the Bainton, Douglas and Hanson symphonies, works of considerable significance, can be found in my book *The Australian Symphony from Federation to 1960*. This article examines the Perkins and Gethen symphonies, which, although works of lesser importance, are nevertheless ambitious and interesting examples of managing a continuously unfolding single movement.

These composers are linked in a number of ways although their symphonies are very different in style and scale. Perkins and Gethen were both composers and musicians employed by the ABC and its orchestras in their home states of South Australia and Tasmania respectively. Their careers were also both interrupted by significant periods of military service during the Second World War. Further, the Perkins and Gethen symphonies both highlight the use of borrowed themes: the Perkins for programmatic intent, the Gethen as part of an abstract, absolute music score. The use of borrowed themes is reasonably uncommon in Australian

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<sup>5</sup> The outer movements of Symphony no. 1, 'Elevamini,' by Williamson also include serial procedures, alongside extended tonality.

symphonies of the period. Other examples include Douglas expropriating two themes of Aboriginal origin in two sections of his Symphony no. 2, 'Namatjira,'<sup>6</sup> and David Morgan borrowing themes from Heinrich Schütz in his Symphony no. 3 (1956) and from plainchant and hymn sources in his Symphony no. 5 (1958–1964). As we shall see, Perkins made a practice of borrowings in all three of his symphonies.

Perkins's *Elegiac Symphony* first appeared in a cluster of performances with the South Australian Symphony Orchestra in Adelaide in November 1952 and was repeated at a Youth Concert in Adelaide in 1958. Gethen's Symphony in E<sup>b</sup> was performed only once, by the Victorian Symphony Orchestra conducted by Clive Douglas, in an ABC studio broadcast in December 1957, and was never given a concert performance. Both symphonies have been neglected and silent for over fifty-five years.

Dr Horace Perkins (1901–1986), born in Gawler, South Australia, came to music studies late, after working in a number of careers including as a sheep shearer and wool classer in Winton, Queensland. Between 1923 and 1927, Perkins studied music at the Elder Conservatorium in Adelaide and obtained his Bachelor of Music degree in 1927. During the 1930s he was Music Master at Scotch College, Adelaide, but also composed orchestral works and commenced his Doctor of Music studies at the University of Adelaide. In December 1940 Perkins enlisted in the 2/10th Battalion of the 2nd AIF, serving first as a private in the Middle East in 1941, then as an intelligence sergeant in New Guinea.<sup>7</sup> He completed his DMus composition tasks while on military service, and was awarded his doctorate in 1943.<sup>8</sup> After the war, he was appointed Controller of Music for the ABC South Australia, a position he held until his retirement in 1966.<sup>9</sup> His close professional relationship to the South Australian Symphony Orchestra and its conductor Henry Krips facilitated many performances of Perkins's works in Adelaide, but following his retirement his works were rarely heard. He composed three symphonies, the *Elegiac Symphony* (1952), the *Romantic Symphony* (1960) and the *Pickwick Symphony* (1963), alongside other large works for chorus and orchestra, and concertos for violin and piano. Nevertheless, Perkins is largely forgotten today, and is not mentioned at all in any of the major dictionaries of Australian or international music. Fortunately, the bulk of his output in the form of music manuscripts, papers and an invaluable set of cassette tapes made from ABC recordings is preserved in the Special Collections of the Barr Smith Library at the University of Adelaide.

Perkins's *Elegiac Symphony* is probably the only completed Australian symphony that is based on direct experience of warfare by an active combatant. A parallel may be drawn with fellow combatant James Penberthy's *Cantata on Hiroshima Panels* (1959), but that is not a symphony and probably not autobiographical. Two incomplete symphonies on the 'Anzac' theme include an 'Anzac Symphony' that Roy Agnew was planning at the time of his death

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<sup>6</sup> Located in sections 2 and 8 of the symphony. The second was highlighted in Clive Douglas, 'Folk-song and the Brown Man—A Means to an Australian Expression in Symphonic Music,' *The Canon*, 10.3 (July 1956): 81–5.

<sup>7</sup> 'World War 2 Nominal Roll,' [www.ww2roll.gov.au/Veteran.aspx?serviceId=A&veteranId=674095](http://www.ww2roll.gov.au/Veteran.aspx?serviceId=A&veteranId=674095). It is interesting to note that Perkins enlisted with the birth year of 1905. See also Ted Smith, 'South Australian Profile no. 130, Music—With a Dash of Humor,' *News*, 13 Nov. 1954, 4.

<sup>8</sup> His doctoral composition folio was examined in England by Sir Percy Buck and Gordon Jacob.

<sup>9</sup> The biographical information is derived from the preface to Michael Beare, *Horace James Perkins: Thematic Catalogue of his Works*, ([M. Beare]: Adelaide: 1988). A copy of this book is located with the Perkins manuscripts at the University of Adelaide, MSS 0027.

in 1944,<sup>10</sup> and a work bearing the title 'Anzac Symphony' commenced by Brisbane composer Erich John in the early 1950s.<sup>11</sup>

Perkins's first ideas about the piece stemmed from his involvement in the Battle of Buna, New Guinea, in late 1942. Australian War Memorial records for his battalion outline appalling casualties for this action: 'Between 23 December and 2 January the 2/10th lost 113 men killed and 205 wounded in often ill-conceived attacks against Japanese bunkers around the old airstrip.'<sup>12</sup> Perkins was clearly deeply affected, and the work is subtitled 'In memory of a battalion.' He notes on the inside cover of the autograph full score:

It was on the Buna airstrip on Christmas Day that the ideas came to the composer to write a tribute to those who had died on the battlefield, and to the homes from whence they came. Perhaps, if there had been time, someone would have played the Last Post while the burial parties were working. It is a memory now, and the Last Post has been played many times for these men since those days ... but always the call is followed by Reveille. These two calls appear in the Symphony; the first as a sign of the passing glory of the world—the second, a symbol of something greater.

Despite this, Perkins averred that there was no further programme to the work. It is possible that further stimulus to compose was afforded by the 1951 Commonwealth Jubilee Composers' Competition.<sup>13</sup> The symphony was, however, completed in June 1952, a year later than the deadline for the competition, and the first performances were given by the South Australian Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Henry Krips on 6, 7 and 8 November 1952.<sup>14</sup> The autograph ink score of the work consists of 146 pages of 24-stave music paper, totalling 1177 bars of music.<sup>15</sup> According to the composer's note in the score, the estimated duration of the work is between thirty-eight and forty-one minutes. The scoring is for conventional symphony orchestra: triple woodwind, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (two players) and strings.

Perkins conflated the essentials of four movements into one extended, continuous movement, on a scale much larger than any of the other Australian one-movement symphonies. His structure seems to be derived from Liszt's Sonata in B minor and perhaps Richard Strauss's tone poems *Ein Heldenleben* and *Sinfonia Domestica*. His preface to the autograph full score presents his ambitious formal scheme:

The Symphony is composed as one single movement with the interpolation of a Scherzo in the development as a third subject. But the changing moods of the work seem to divide it into four sections connected and interrelated with one another. The binary form on which the composition is built exemplifies two subjects; the first urgent, strong and martial, the second human and personal. The two subjects are announced early

<sup>10</sup> Isabel Moresby, *Australia Makes Music* (Melbourne: Longmans, 1948), 132.

<sup>11</sup> Erich John was active in Brisbane from at least 1915 until the 1970s. His works include three completed symphonies and several other incomplete symphonies. The manuscript is part of the John Collection at the John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

<sup>12</sup> '2/10th Battalion,' *Australian War Memorial*, [www.awm.gov.au/units/unit\\_11261.asp](http://www.awm.gov.au/units/unit_11261.asp).

<sup>13</sup> Robert Hughes thought that Perkins submitted an entry. Robert Hughes, interview with the author, 9 Feb. 2004, Hallett Cove, Adelaide.

<sup>14</sup> 'SA Man's symphony,' *Mail* [Adelaide] 1 Nov. 1952, 7.

<sup>15</sup> MSS 0027, No. 15, Perkins, H.J. (Horace James), 1901–1986, Compositions and papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide.

in the exposition 'agitato'—the first with the trumpet, woodwind, drums and strings, the second in the form of a student's 'song' with clarinet solo.

The development of the ideas is interrupted by the Scherzo ('Scherzo moderato'), perhaps reminiscent of a Shakespeare comedy. The return to the development is heralded by the trumpet call of 'The Retreat,' the traditional order to cease hostilities at evening, which leads to a restatement of the first subject, marked 'Tempo primo (quasi adagio ma molto giusto).' This section collects other themes: a dirge, and reminiscences of traditional tunes, leading inexorably forward to the Second Tattoo (The Last Post). Then follows the restatement of the second theme, which has led just as surely to the Reveille ('The Rouse'). The Symphony concludes with seven variations ('Piu moto') on the second subject.

A possible summary of the form of the work is given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Formal framework of Horace Perkins, *Elegiac Symphony*

Exposition	Subject 1 and 2	87 bars
Development: Part 1	Subject 1 and 2	162 bars
Scherzo/March with trio	Subject 3	113 bars
Development: Part 2	Retreat tattoo & Subject 1	52 bars
Recapitulation and Dirge (slow movement)	Subject 1	568 bars
Free fantasia	'Last Post' & borrowed themes: 'Reveille'	
Finale (theme & 7 variations)	Subject 2	195 bars

The opening exposition (bb. 1–87) consists of two principal subject groups. The music opens in a turbulent mood, with dissonant, linear part writing and prominent trumpet calls that lead into the main theme of the symphony, a hymn-like C-minor melody, presented on unison cor anglais, clarinet, bassoon and horn (Ex. 1). Perkins described this theme as 'urgent, strong and martial.'<sup>16</sup>

**Example 1.** Perkins, *Elegiac Symphony*, first section, bb. 20–24



A florid piccolo cadenza, perhaps a portent of the tragedy to come, forms a transition to the second subject group, in which there are two main themes. The first theme, Perkins's 'student song,' (which he identified as the second subject in his preface to the score) is a poignant solo clarinet idea of eight bars length accompanied by mostly diatonic string harmony (Ex. 2). It is then repeated a semitone lower by the strings. The second theme is a bolder melody for solo trumpet. Bass drum and side drum rolls end the exposition, which is clearly delineated in the score with double bars.

<sup>16</sup> From Perkins's preface in the autograph full score of the work. MSS 0027, University of Adelaide.

**Example 2.** Perkins, *Elegiac Symphony*, first section, bb. 59-67

cl.  
p semplice  
strings  
pp  
63  
mp

The theme from Example 1 opens the first part of the development (bb. 88–249). This section evokes ‘battle’ music, complete with fanfares that blaze out from trumpets and upper winds. Respite comes with a complete string statement of the consolatory second subject (Ex. 2), in E major, followed by the trumpet solo. As it fades, a solo, unaccompanied violin presents an extensive and dolorous cadenza which serves as a bridge to the following section.

A brash military march in E $\flat$  major—its tone not unlike Malcolm Arnold’s film music for *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957)—forms the basis of the scherzo and trio (bb. 250–362) that is now interpolated into the sonata proceedings. The march presents a portrait of ‘larrikin,’ high-spirited and dry-humoured diggers that contrasts with the sentimental C-major flügelhorn solo in the trio, which is then repeated by strings. Perkins then repeats both march and trio. Although described by Perkins in his notes as a ‘third subject,’ these themes are exclusive to the march episode and do not recur later in the symphony.

Part two of the development (bb. 363–414) is launched by the first of the borrowed themes, a full quotation of the retreat tattoo,<sup>17</sup> presented on solo trumpet. The theme shown in Example 1 is developed again, followed by a gradual decrescendo, back in the home key of C minor, which prepares for the next section.

The longest portion of the entire work (bb. 415–982) represents both the traditional slow movement and the restatement of the first subject. The dirge theme (see Ex. 3) is new.

**Example 3.** Perkins, *Elegiac Symphony*, slow section and ‘dirge’ theme, bb. 415–22

**L'istesso tempo**  
c.a. cl. hn. tr.

3

<sup>17</sup> No. 33, *Infantry Bugle Sounds* (London: Potter & Co., 1915). A music book found amongst the Perkins papers.



Two speeds combine: the slow dirge in long notes, and the faster pace of the opening ideas of the symphony. This part of the work probably illustrates the burial parties at Buna that Perkins recalls in his notes for the work. The funeral march comes to dominate completely, building to two climaxes of triumphant splendour before a powerful and fully-harmonised treatment of Example 1 appears in E $\flat$  major/C minor. At bar 543, Perkins cuts thirty-eight bars of score, which develops first-subject material more fully.<sup>18</sup> The cut takes us back immediately to the dirge theme (Ex. 3) in C minor. This time there are 'sarcastic intrusions' (according to Krips's note on the score) from solo clarinet and muted trumpet, perhaps enemy jeers at the Australian burial party. These interjections gather strength as the dirge continues. The two disparate elements—one chaotic, the other processional—fight for domination, and each has a turn at prominence. Then the theme from Example 3 is heard in long, slow notes against a wild gigue. The gigue does not succeed in overcoming the dirge despite a new ingredient of chaos being added with crude trombone interjections in parallel major and minor seconds and the dirge prevails with a tremendous climax for the full orchestra.

From this emerges a strange fantasia in which Perkins quotes several traditional tunes of varying styles, calling to mind Charles Ives's quotation of traditional American hymns and popular tunes.<sup>19</sup> There are bugle calls<sup>20</sup> and campfire songs. Another reminiscence of the dirge follows on cellos, leading to fevered remembrances of 'Girls and Boys Come out to Play.' Superimposed against repeated statements of the nursery rhyme by piccolo, strings and percussion, the solo bugle plays a complete statement of the 'Last Post' from behind the stage. Its effect is ethereal and haunted. Another quotation follows: the tune 'Rock a Bye Baby.' Suddenly a complete statement of 'Reveille,' played on trumpet, closes the long slow movement and fantasy section, a sonic picture, perhaps, of the dead soldiers' homes, their young children and other aspects of military life away from the battlefield.

The final section of the work (bb. 983–1177) follows. Beginning in C major, a fanfare based on the first phrase of the 'student song' (given in Ex. 2) is presented on the four horns. The strings then present a solemn hymn-like idea of sixteen bars (Ex. 4), based on the opening motive of the second subject.

Seven variations follow, moving between rapt reflection, neo-baroque counterpoint and a somewhat bombastic apotheosis. The final variation moves inexorably towards a climactic finish—the tone has become heroic, C major prevails—and there are more echoes of bugle calls. A somewhat cursory cadence spoils the grand effect of the finish.

Maintaining continuity in one forty-minute movement was a major challenge for Perkins and, not surprisingly, the work received mixed reviews. J.H. Winstanley hailed the premiere as a 'triumph' and 'outstanding.'<sup>21</sup> The Adelaide *Advertiser* reviewer, Enid Robertson, described the work as uneven and loose in structure—'an extended fantasia'—but was impressed by

<sup>18</sup> Perhaps Perkins sanctioned the cut during rehearsals as it is noted in all the individual orchestral parts as well, and the music is omitted in the very early recording of the work, so the music was probably never used.

<sup>19</sup> There is no record of Perkins's awareness of Ives and his music. Perkins's use of nursery rhymes and other borrowed material also emerges in the scherzo section of his *Romantic Symphony* (1960) in four movements, and folk tunes and a quote from the Mendelssohn 'Wedding March' emerge in the finale of the *Pickwick Symphony* (1964).

<sup>20</sup> No. 6, 'Buglers and Drummers,' *Infantry Bugle Sounds* (London: Potter & Co., 1915).

<sup>21</sup> J.H. Winstanley, 'Triumph for SA Composer,' *Mail*, 8 Nov. 1952, 45.

**Example 4.** Perkins, *Elegiac Symphony*, final section, bb. 987–1002

the 'Last Post' section. She praised the work's 'warm, human appeal.'<sup>22</sup> Following the last performance of the symphony in July 1958, John Horner of the *Advertiser* wrote:

the symphony is described as having no particular programme. The friends of Dr Perkins would have no difficulty in recognizing it as a musical projection of the composer's memories and feelings about Australians at war. As such it rings true. In spite of being long and sprawling and a regular medley of musical quotations towards the end, it grew in interest as it dragged on and its truth-to-life became more apparent.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, there is much that is moving about this symphony, but it is not well-served by the only remaining recording of the work, a series of noisy-surfaced 78-rpm disks of the uneven and at times untidy first performance which has been transferred to cassette. The changes of side leave short gaps in the music thus disturbing continuity. A tighter and cleaner modern digital recording is needed to preserve this individual and idiosyncratic symphony, which, as one of the few musical memorials written by a serving combatant, is an important document.

Felix Gethen (1916–2002) came to Australia from Britain in 1951 and lived in Australia for most of the rest of his life. Prior to World War II, Gethen studied at the Guildhall and the Royal Academy of Music and became especially familiar with the style of Vaughan Williams. Although he declared himself a devotee of the 'pastoral' idiom he was also very impressed with Walton's *Symphony no.1*. Like Perkins, Gethen served in World War II from 1940 but, after being captured in the North African campaign in 1942, was imprisoned during the last two years of the war in Italy and Germany. After the war he stayed in Germany until 1950 and had some of his music performed there.<sup>24</sup> In Australia he worked as a music arranger for the ABC in Hobart for twenty years before taking on other roles for the ABC based in Sydney and London. He was one of the co-ordinators of the Hobart Composers' Conference of 1963.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Enid Robertson, 'Performance of New Work at Concert,' *Advertiser* [Adelaide], 7 Nov. 1952, 5.

<sup>23</sup> John Horner, 'War Memories in Australian Music,' *Advertiser*, July 1958. This clipping was found in the Perkins Collection, MSS 0027, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide.

<sup>24</sup> The biographical details were derived from an interview between Felix Gethen and Charles Southwood, ABC FM, 6 June 1995.

<sup>25</sup> Graeme Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe: The Making of an Australian Composer* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007), 287.



Gethen's Symphony in E $\flat$  was composed in Hobart between September 1952 and March 1955, and revised sometime after the first and only performance, a studio recording made in late 1957 by the Victorian Symphony Orchestra under Clive Douglas, which was broadcast from Melbourne on 9 December 1957. It was the first symphony composed in Tasmania but has never been performed in concert there or anywhere else. The size of the work—scored for double woodwind with bass clarinet, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (two players), harp and strings, a larger ensemble than was possible in Hobart, where Gethen was based—was perhaps a further impediment to the work's subsequent production. The *ABC Weekly* previewed this broadcast and noted that the symphony 'represents the fulfilment of the composer's ambition to complete a symphony before reaching his fortieth birthday.'<sup>26</sup>

The following year, Joseph Post, as Acting Director of Music for the ABC, advised Gethen that the work would not be taken up by the Commission for further performances 'in its present form' because of the derivative nature of much of the music and its formal weaknesses.<sup>27</sup> Post's verdict was based on hearing the recording of the performance. Although he found 'much of interest' in the work and judged it to have 'considerable merit,' particularly the final section, Post recommended that the work either be compressed into a more compact form with the finale intact or redesigned into a suite or two pieces. Based on a comparison of the autograph score and the recording, it is evident that Gethen enlarged the scherzo section of the work from ninety-nine bars (in the original version and recording) with an additional twelve pages (138 bars) of score that adds some two minutes to the overall duration of the work. The revised duration of the work is thus approximately twenty-four to twenty-five minutes and the symphony has a better shape, with more fast music in the scherzo section. Sadly, this revised version has never been performed but, in a letter of 1959 to Michael Best, Gethen declared the symphony his best work.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike the Perkins *Elegiac Symphony*, the Gethen one-movement symphony avoids sonata form as a governing principle. In a preface to his autograph score, the composer identifies ten main themes, the majority of which are short and motivic. Only the two borrowed themes are complete melodies consisting of several phrases. They are the Lutheran chorale melody 'Nun ruhen aller Wälder,'<sup>29</sup> familiar through its various harmonisations in J.S. Bach's *St Matthew Passion* (Gethen's Theme 7), and the Welsh folk-tune 'The Bells of Aberdovey' (Theme 9). This was not the first time he had borrowed themes: Gethen made use of another Welsh tune in his *Tragic Overture* of 1952.<sup>30</sup> The *ABC Weekly* article on the symphony noted: 'according to the composer, this introduction of folk material is incidental to the work and has no direct significance' and that 'the symphony has no programme but should be listened to as absolute music.'<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Clipping from 'Music Lover's Diary,' *ABC Weekly*, Dec. 1957, pasted into the inside cover of the composer's manuscript of the Symphony in E $\flat$ . I have been unable to trace the exact date and page number of this publication. The score and a recording were lent to the author in early 2006, courtesy of Mrs Beth Gethen. These materials are now located in the Felix Gethen Collection in the National Library of Australia.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Post, letter to Felix Gethen, 12 May 1958, found in the composer's score.

<sup>28</sup> Michael T. Best, 'Australian Composers and their Music,' Honours thesis, University of Adelaide, 1959, appendix of composers' letters.

<sup>29</sup> Adapted from the early sixteenth-century melody 'Innsbruck, ich muss dich lassen' by Heinrich Isaac.

<sup>30</sup> Walter Stiasny, 'Choir, State Orchestra in Youth Concert,' *Mercury* [Hobart], 4 Apr. 1952, 9.

<sup>31</sup> Clipping from 'Music Lover's Diary,' *ABC Weekly*.

The ten principal themes feature within a continuous flow of music that falls into twelve paragraphs, each marked by a tempo and/or metre change that could be used as ‘track identifiers’ on a CD. These musical paragraphs could also be consolidated into four major sections, and linked to traditional movement labels. The structure of Gethen’s symphony, showing how the web of ten themes threads through the work, is shown in Table 2. The chorale features prominently—it is heard in its entirety three times and the first phrase is subject to frequent motivic development—and it seems likely that both themes had a particular meaning for the composer.

**Table 2.** Formal framework of Felix Gethen’s Symphony in E $\flat$

Principal Sections	Sub Sections	Speed	Themes used and their order	Bars
Alternation of slow introduction and fast movement	Section 1	<i>Lento</i>	1, 2	1-15
	Section 2	<i>Poco Allegro</i>	3	16-32
	Section 3	Tempo 1	1	33-38
	Section 4	Twice tempo of section 3	3, 2, 1, 4, 2, 4, 1, 2, 1	39-104
	Section 5	<i>Poco meno mosso—Maestoso</i>	1, 5, 3, 1	105-141
Slow movement	Section 6	<i>Tranquillo</i>	6, 2 presentations of 7 (Chorale), 4	142-187
Scherzo	Section 7	<i>Tempo di Valse</i>	2, 4, head of 7	188-261
	Section 8	Scherzo	1, 2, head of 7, 2	262-485
Finale	Section 9 (reprise of Section 5)	Tempo 1 then accelerando	1, 2, 5, 1, head of 7, 1, 8	486-550
	Section 10	<i>Allegretto ma animato</i>	9 (‘Bells’), 8, 9, 8, 9, 10, 5	551-639
	Section 11	<i>Allegretto</i>	Fugal dev. of 9, 10	640-694
	Section 12	<i>Tempo di Chorale</i>	7 (complete)	695-711

In the opening major section of the symphony, Gethen presents an alternating slow introduction and faster melodic material over a repeated chord accompaniment. The wistful Lydian mode opening motive (Ex. 5), with its echoes of Butterworth’s orchestral rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad* and Sibelius-like parallel thirds, and its answering baleful fanfare figure on trombones form the basis of the slow recurring refrain (Ex. 6).

**Example 5.** Gethen, Symphony in E $\flat$ , bb. 2–5, theme 1

The musical score for Example 5 shows the beginning of the symphony. It is in E-flat major and 4/4 time, marked *Lento*. The horn section (hns.) plays a wistful Lydian mode opening motive with parallel thirds, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The violin (vl.) plays a faster melodic line with a fanfare figure, marked *ff. mp*. The tempo is *tranquillo*.

**Example 6.** Gethen's Symphony in E $\flat$ , bb. 8–11, theme 2

trb.  
mf

3

vlc. db.

The last theme of this section (Theme 5) has a more dynamic and urgent feel and develops into a climax of some tension (Ex. 7).

**Example 7.** Gethen, Symphony in E $\flat$ , bb. 110–113, theme 5

vln 1 & 2 in 8ves

f

Theme 6, the least used of the themes, forms an introduction to the slow section and sets the serene mood for two complete statements of the chorale: first on horn, then on cor anglais. The simple, diatonic harmonisation of the chorale is Gethen's own.

As mentioned previously, the bulk of the scherzo was probably composed after the broadcast performance. The scherzo section gathers momentum first through a waltz paragraph then into the fast scherzo proper. Gethen develops the first phrase of the chorale in long notes against the fast quaver, one-in-the-bar scherzo figures and Theme 2. The scherzo disperses in a chain of imitative entries of the chorale motif that cease with a progression of slower, grim chords. This is followed by a slow recapitulation of the first and fifth sections of the work, which also serves as a slow introduction for the finale. The finale, which Post regarded as the best part of the work, centres upon Themes 8 to 10 but especially the Welsh folk tune. There is also a splendid section featuring the final theme of the ten, a soaring sequential idea over a horn quintuplet ostinato, which is then inverted in double counterpoint (Ex. 8). This sentence appears twice in the finale.

**Example 8.** Gethen, Symphony in E $\flat$ , bb. 624–627, theme 10

str. in 8ves

hns a 4

ff

5

626

5

A fugato based on the head of the folk tune takes over before the music transforms into a busy web of ostinato figures, which provides a backdrop for the final, triumphant full statement of the chorale in the brass. A final plagal cadence over a tonic E $\flat$  pedal makes a beatific closure.

The work is mostly tonal and diatonic, and much milder than Perkins's more disturbed symphony. The influence of Sibelius is evident in the first section and within the slow harmonic rhythms and pedal-points of the scherzo. Gethen's scoring is colourful and effective throughout and overall the symphony demonstrates a practical craftsmanship that is superior to Perkins. However, the wealth of themes and the frequent change of metre and tempo somewhat undermine the overall sense of continuity of the work. The complete borrowed themes in Sections 6 and 9 stand out in sharp relief from the rest of the symphonic material, even though Gethen develops the borrowed themes as the symphony proceeds. This would suggest that Post's assessment of the work was not without some justification. Nevertheless, the final peroration of the chorale against string and wind ostinato figures is splendidly achieved.

Both Perkins's and Gethen's symphonies present very different structural models of a one-movement symphony: one epic in scale, the other more compact. It is interesting that chorale-like ideas crown the final sections of both symphonies. Despite some issues of logical continuity, both works, given accurate and sympathetic modern, digital recordings, could have considerable appeal to concert audiences and devotees of rare symphonic music. They show that despite their recent neglect by scholars and audiences, Perkins and Gethen were composers of ambition, considerable skill and craftsmanship who were capable of large-scale work. As both symphonies are unpublished and only survive in manuscript scores, new editions of the full scores and parts would facilitate performance. As with many neglected Australian symphonic works of the 1950s, it is time to revisit these symphonies by Perkins and Gethen and restore these composers' reputations as important figures within the concert music of their epoch in Adelaide and Hobart respectively.