

Alan Bush's *Byron Symphony* and Anti-imperialism in 1950s Britain *

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Alan Bush (1900–1995) was a British composer whose substantial compositional output included symphonies, operas and many chamber works. He was also a Marxist and lifelong member of the British Communist Party.¹ In 1960 Bush completed his *Byron Symphony*, the third of his four symphonies. Despite receiving high praise from composers and critics such as Ronald Stevenson, Artes Orga and Malcolm MacDonald, the work remains little known.²

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¹ For information on Bush's life and works, see Stewart Craggs, *Alan Bush: A Source Book* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2007); Rachel O'Higgins, *The Correspondence of Alan Bush and John Ireland, 1927–1961* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2006); Nancy Bush, *Alan Bush: Music, Politics and Life* (London: Thames Publishing, 2000); Lewis Foreman, 'Spanning the Century,' *Alan Bush*, Nancy Bush, 98–145; Ronald Stevenson, ed., *Alan Bush – An 80th Birthday Symposium* (Kidderminster: Bravura, 1981); Alan Bush, *In My Eighth Decade and Other Essays* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1980).

² Ronald Stevenson, 'Alan Bush: Committed Composer,' *Music Review* 25.4 (1964): 323–42, at 342; Artes Orga, 'Alan Bush, Musician and Marxist,' *Music and Musicians* (August 1969): 21; Malcolm MacDonald, 'The Music to One Pair of Ears,' *Alan Bush*, ed. Stevenson, 28.

It has never been commercially recorded and no extended scholarly study exists to date.³ Yet investigation of the symphony tells us much not only about Bush's aesthetic and philosophical approach to composition, but also about the impact of left-wing ideas on British art music in the mid-twentieth century. This article explores the symphony against the framework of Bush's communist ideology and, in particular, the anti-imperialism that was prevalent amongst British leftists in the 1950s.

The *Byron Symphony* is a programmatic work inspired by the life of the nineteenth-century English poet Lord Byron (1788–1824). It calls for large orchestral forces, with a mixed choir and baritone soloist. Despite the English subject matter of the work, there were fairly obvious indications that the symphony was a product of Bush's communist internationalism. For a start, it resulted from a commission, in 1958, by the *Deutscher Demokratischer Rundfunk* ('Radio DDR') of the German Democratic Republic. On 20 March 1962 the work was premiered at the Kongresse-Halle of Leipzig. Conducted by Herbert Kegel and performed by the Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra, the event was a prestigious one. The British premiere took place three months later at the Friends Meeting House in London, when Leslie Head conducted the semi-amateur Kensington Symphony Orchestra and five massed choirs (under four different conductors). Not surprisingly, critics commented on the poor quality of the performance.⁴ The contrast between the two premieres could not have been greater.

Bush conceived of Byron, the symphony's subject, as a figure occupying both the national and international stage. In the second movement, Byron is presented as a 'progressive' humanist within Britain (the program showed his support for the English working-class). On the other hand, in the choral finale he is presented as a fighter against imperialism beyond Britain. The finale is based on a poem about Byron's support for Greek resistance against the Ottoman Empire by the Greek national poet Dionysos Solomos. Issues relating to the English radical tradition, imperialism, and Greek national liberation are thus highlighted. While the national/international focus suggests a close association with Soviet aesthetics, by 1960 internationalism had gained a broader leftist base and was not necessarily associated with Stalin. The music has a similar national/international aspect. The finale, setting the original Greek text, draws on the melody and rhythm of a Greek folk dance, and yet, writing to musicologist Gerald Abraham in 1964, Bush stressed the 'Englishness' of the work. He observed that in it he had attempted to 'develop the idiom of the English national school to the highest point which consistency permits and of which I am imaginatively capable.'⁵ Although Bush's commitment to developing a national style was influenced by his Marxist beliefs, due to limitations of space the present article will not consider this aspect of the symphony.

³ The most substantial critical contributions, apart from Stevenson (see above), are by Boris Kotliarov, *Alan Bush* (Moskva: Sovetskii Kompozitor, 1981) 61–66; Foreman, 'Spanning the Century,' 129–33; Bernard Keefe, 'A View from the Rostrum,' *Alan Bush*, ed. Stevenson, 19–20; and Julie Waters, 'Alan Bush, the Byron Symphony and the German Democratic Republic: A Cold War Musical Collaboration,' *Musicology Australia* 33.2 (Dec. 2011): 201–11. Kotliarov's discussion is in the Russian language and draws on Bush's analytical notes on the work.

⁴ For example, see Robert Angles, 'Commonplace Byron,' *Music and Musicians* 10 (July 1962): 45; K.F.D. 'Kensington Symphony Orchestra, Friends Meeting House, June 6th,' *Musical Opinion* 1019 (Aug. 1962): 648.

⁵ Alan Bush, letter to Gerald Abraham, BBC, 29 Feb. 1964, Alan Bush Music Trust archive at Histon, Cambridge (hereafter 'Histon').

Over recent decades there has been increasing scholarly interest in the subject of imperialism, colonialism and post-colonialism. More specifically, anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism were a focus for much British left-wing activism, especially in the 1950s, and Stephen Howe and others have investigated the policies and practices of various left-wing movements in this area.⁶ While British left-wing composers were generally sympathetic to the cause, little scholarly work has been published on their musical response.⁷ In particular, Bush's response to imperialism and colonialism has received scant attention.⁸ This article argues that the *Byron Symphony*—in terms of conception, program, text, form and musical style—is significantly shaped by Bush's communist ideology: by his radical nationalism and especially his anti-imperialism.

Radical Nationalism, Anti-imperialism and the British Left

Radical nationalism was an element of British Communist Party policy from the mid-1930s, when the Party became active in historical pageants and popular parades that portrayed revolutionary figures and events from English history.⁹ According to Mike Wallis:

Historical pageants enacting a celebratory historical narrative offered themselves as one part of that affirmatory culture. Their scale allowed the Party to suggest that it was indeed mobilising the masses, demonstrating communist muscle at the same time as inviting the participation of non-communists ... They were an opportunity to popularise the Party's claim that 'Communism is English,' the natural heartbeat of the common people.¹⁰

This strategy involved the notion that cultural icons should be appropriated in the battle against capitalism. Writers such as Chaucer, Shakespeare and Robert Burns were conscripted, and it was argued that their heritage should be protected. The Party's appropriation of Englishness was reinforced in the 1950s through a series of cultural conferences whose titles included 'The American Threat to British Culture' (April 1951), 'Britain's Cultural Heritage' (May 1952), and 'Socialist Realism and the British Tradition' (1953). These conferences focused on the British cultural heritage and the idea that it was threatened by American imperialism and American popular culture.¹¹ This anti-Americanism followed from the concept of 'two camps' proposed by Soviet ideologue Andrei Zhdanov in 1947,

⁶ See Stephen Howe, *Anti-colonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). For a detailed account of the British Communist Party's policy and practice on colonialism up to 1951, see Jean Jones, *The Anti-colonial Politics and Policies of the Communist Party of Great Britain: 1920–1951*, PhD thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 1997.

⁷ For a broad investigation of the relationship between British music and Empire between 1876 and 1953, see Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876–1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

⁸ Joanna Bullivant recently presented a paper titled 'Communist Anti-colonialism: Empire and Nationalism in Alan Bush's *The Sugar Reapers*,' at the 'Red Strains: Music and Communism outside the Communist Bloc after 1945' conference, British Academy, London, 13–15 Jan. 2011.

⁹ Stephen Parsons, *Communism in the Professions*, PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1990, 142.

¹⁰ Mike Wallis, 'Heirs to the Pageant: Mass Spectacle and the Popular Front,' *A Weapon in the Struggle: the Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain*, ed. Andy Croft (London: Pluto Press, 1998) 50.

¹¹ This paragraph draws on the discussion of these conferences in John Callaghan, *Cold War Crisis and Conflict: The CPGB 1951–68* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2003) 87–90.

and the 'Battle of Ideas' that British communists were instructed to wage against all forms of imperialism.¹²

Meanwhile, the post-World War II era witnessed decolonisation, the last phase of British imperialism. In 1947 India was granted independence; this was followed by independence for other British colonies including Burma and Ceylon (1948), Cyprus and Nigeria (1960), Kenya, Malaya and Singapore (1963), Northern Rhodesia and British Guiana (1966).¹³ This policy shift was captured in Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's famous 'winds of change' speech of 1960. The pace of change was especially dramatic between 1954 and 1964.¹⁴ However, the leaders of some colonial nationalist movements had leftist sympathies and this on occasion led to British intervention. For instance, in 1953 Britain sent its troops in to British Guiana and deposed the elected chief minister, Dr Cheddi Jagan, who was considered unsuitable because of his Marxist sympathies.¹⁵

According to historian Raphael Samuel, British communists 'thought of colonialism as an atrocity.'¹⁶ In the combative words of communist leader Harry Pollitt, speaking at the 1954 Congress of the British Communist Party:

Do what they will in Africa, Malaya, the West Indies, the imperialists cannot subdue the mighty movement for ... national liberation ... [Our colonial brothers and sisters] are fighting back in an unconquerable spirit that has no parallel in world history, and they will ultimately succeed in winning their liberation from British imperialism.¹⁷

British communists supported national independence movements because they regarded the early post-war British policy of intervention in colonial matters as designed to protect imperial interests. The 1950s saw increasing British left-wing support for national liberation movements, particularly after the 1956 crisis in communism and the Soviet occupation of Hungary. Indeed, Eric Hobsbaum claims that decolonisation became a shaping force in leftist politics at this time. In his view, it was the 'end of empires' that brought about a 'change in the political or ideological mood after 1956.' After 1956 and the demise of communism, Hobsbaum suggests, political movements such as anti-imperialism gained a much broader base: 'Party labels were no longer decisive for those who supported the new political campaigns—anti-nuclear, anti-imperial, anti-racist, or whatever.'¹⁸

¹² Early in the Cold War, from the Soviet perspective, the world became divided into two camps—the 'imperialist' camp based around the United States and the 'anti-imperialist' camp led by the Soviet Union. The ideology of the imperialist camp had to be combatted by the 'Battle of Ideas.' For a brief discussion, see Noreen Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain: 1941–51* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997) 152–53 and 171–72.

¹³ For a discussion of the British Empire and decolonisation, see Bill Schwarz, 'The End of Empire,' *A Companion to Contemporary Britain, 1939–2000*, ed. Paul Addison and Harriet Jones (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) 482–98. For discussion of the broader field of colonialism and decolonisation, see Dietmar Rothermund, *The Routledge Companion to Decolonization* (London/New York: Routledge, 2006).

¹⁴ Howe, *Anti-colonialism*, 268. Macmillan's speech was given to the Parliament of South Africa on 3 Feb. 1960.

¹⁵ For discussion of the situation in British Guiana, see Rothermund, *Companion to Decolonization*, 202–05.

¹⁶ Raphael Samuel, *The Lost World of British Communism* (London: Verso, 2006) 48.

¹⁷ Harry Pollitt, cited in Samuel, *Lost World*, 49.

¹⁸ Eric Hobsbaum, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-century Life* (London: Abacus, 2006) 228, 230.

Bush, Radical Nationalism and Anti-imperialism

As a Marxist and communist, Bush's opposition to all forms of imperialism went hand in hand with his radical nationalism. He was particularly hostile to the United States, which he accused of cultural imperialism (or what he called 'cultural coca-colonisation'). In an article in the *Communist Review*, he argued that America was swamping British indigenous culture and he called on the British to stand firm in defence of their cultural heritage.¹⁹ Bush's writings in the 1950s show that he supported the construction of a radical English tradition based on English history:

For Britain this new culture must be in great part British culture. Developed from our British heritage it should have in the main for its content the life of the British people in past periods and today. The history of the British people is extraordinarily rich in heroic and revolutionary events.²⁰

Heroic events mentioned by Bush included the 1381 Peasants Revolt, British participation in an International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, and Major Frank Thompson's death helping Bulgarian partisans during World War II. All these events at some stage informed the subject matter of Bush's compositions. In addition, he looked to the past to construct a 'progressive' English musical heritage consisting of composers such as Dunstable, Byrd, Morley, and Purcell. According to him, these composers were characterised by 'belief in their fellow men, and hatred for tyranny and oppression.'²¹

Through his writings and activities Bush turned his attention towards national liberation movements in Malaya, British Guiana, South Africa and elsewhere, supporting movements such as the British Guyana Freedom Association, Friends of Democracy in Greece, and the British Peace Committee.²² Despite being pessimistic about the political position in Britain, he saw a lesson to be learned from the colonial struggle. Writing to a correspondent in December 1959, he observed:

At the moment the political atmosphere in Britain is one of rather doltish complacency. It is very difficult to arouse people to fight for socialism; many think it quite a good thing, but not enough realise how truly joyful life could be, if the corruption and exploitation of capitalism were swept away. The people in the colonial regions are teaching the British working-class much ... but the political consciousness has aroused very little, and indeed dimmed since 1945.²³

Bush attempted to connect his music to the contemporary political and social situation, even invoking earlier works retrospectively to support his political concerns. For instance, Randall Swingler's text in the choral finale of Bush's Piano Concerto (1938) had urged the workers to take action against their exploitation. One stanza of the text referred to the owners crying "'Faster, faster!'" to the mills that grind men's labour into profit.' Writing in 1954 to music critic

¹⁹ Alan Bush, 'The Tasks of Cultural Workers,' *Communist Review* (Feb. 1951): 54.

²⁰ Bush, 'Tasks of Cultural Workers,' 52.

²¹ Alan Bush, 'Music in the British Co-operative Movement,' *Bulletin of the Co-operative Educational Secretaries' Association* (July 1952): 4.

²² For documentary sources on Bush's attitude towards the position in British Guiana, Greece and South Africa respectively, see BL MS 672, BL MS 670 and BL MS 672. All references to 'BL MS' in this article are to materials held in the Alan Bush Collection of Papers and Correspondence, British Library.

²³ Alan Bush, letter to Tov. Joe Eiduss, 29 Dec. 1959, BL MS494.

Colin Mason, Bush drew a parallel with British colonialism in Malaya, where according to him the rubber plantation owners shouted "'Fiercer, fiercer!'" to their bloodhounds,' in order to drive the workers harder.²⁴

In addition, Bush's opposition to colonialism was reflected in the subject matter or musical themes of a number of his works. For instance, his third opera, *The Sugar Reapers* (1962), concerns the fight of the Guyanese people for independence from the British. Set in 1953, the year Britain sent in troops to the colony, Bush gave the opera a contemporary setting with British colonialism cast as the villain. In this sense it is a companion piece to the 'Byron,' which has an historical setting and a British anti-colonial hero. Bush's toccata for piano, *Corentyne Kwe-Kwe* (1972), is another work influenced by Bush's interest in British Guiana. Based on a Guyanese folksong of African origin, the work was dedicated to the men and women of Guyana who, in Bush's words, 'faced a British warship and stood their ground.'²⁵ These works demonstrate a trend that became apparent in Bush's compositional output particularly from the end of the 1950s. Along with his avowed commitment to developing an English national style, there was also a tendency to draw on the music of other countries, including non-Western countries.²⁶

Bush's radical politics often put him at odds with official British government policy, as he found to his cost in 1957. In June that year he travelled to British Guiana to gather musical material for *The Sugar Reapers*. As his wife Nancy pointed out, Bush had not chosen his timing well. The colony was about to have an election and it was a delicate moment for a well-known Marxist to be visiting. In any event, the Governor of the colony banned him from entry. Although no reason was given for the ban, the obvious explanation was that there was concern over Bush's political connections.²⁷ When the question was raised in the House of Commons on 27 June 1957, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, John Profumo, also refused to give an explanation. Defending the Governor's stance, he stated that 'Mr. Bush was deemed to be an undesirable visitor' under the Immigration Ordinance.²⁸ Two years later Bush was finally permitted to enter the colony. The visit coincided with his composition of the *Byron Symphony*. In view of his personal encounter with colonialism in British Guiana, it is not surprising that anti-imperialism became a central preoccupation of the symphony and significantly shaped his conceptual approach.

Conceptual Framework, Program and Overview of the *Byron Symphony*

Bush believed that music should express the feelings of those attempting to create a more equal society:

²⁴ Alan Bush, letter to Colin Mason, 4 Apr. 1953, Histon.

²⁵ This dedication appears on the manuscript copy of *Corentyne* (which remains unpublished, although it has been commercially recorded).

²⁶ Other works exemplifying this tendency include *Three African Sketches* (1960), *Three Raga Melodies* (1961), *Scherzo for Wind Orchestra with Percussion* (1969) and *Africa*, Symphonic Movement for Piano and Orchestra (1972).

²⁷ For a full account of this affair, see Nancy Bush, *Alan Bush*, 79–82. Nancy Bush claims that the ban had to be politically motivated.

²⁸ See entry in Hansard, 'Mr. Alan Bush (Entry Permit),' House of Commons debates, 27 June 1957, vol. 572, cc398–9, 398, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1957/jun/27/mr-alan-bush-entry-permit>, accessed 15 July 2011.

For me, as a musician and as a man, marxism is a guide to action. It challenges me to express through musical art the feelings of men and women, above all in their struggles to create a condition of social organisation in which science and art will be the possession of all and in which they will themselves be no longer exploiters nor objects of exploitation.²⁹

Bush's own interest in Greek politics went back to the 1940s when he and fellow communist Christian Darnton had endorsed the communist-led Greek resistance by arranging songs in support of the Greek National Liberation Front, or EAM.³⁰ His interest in Byron also preceded the commissioning of the symphony. Indeed, his first significant encounter with the idea of Byron may have taken place in the GDR. In 1955, while in Weimar working on a production of his opera *Men of Blackmoor*, Bush read through all the works of Dionysos Solomos (1798–1857).³¹ Solomos was an ardent admirer of Byron and his support for Greek independence from the Turks.³² Between 1957 and 1958 Bush read nearly all of Byron's works, again in Weimar while engaged with *Men of Blackmoor*.³³ He was especially attracted to Byron because of the latter's belief in human liberty and support for Greek freedom. His concern was not with Byron the poet, but with Byron the political activist, 'the practical organiser of the first international brigade [in Greece] for freedom, since Spartacus in 71 BC led a multi-racial army of slaves against the slave-owners of Imperial Rome.'³⁴

In choosing Byron Bush was able to satisfy multiple agenda—internationalist, socialist and nationalist. First, through his actions supporting the Greek cause at Missolonghi, Byron had universal recognition as a symbol of Liberty. Second, because of his political activism he could be seen as a positive hero. The symphony's ideological 'content' was thus in line with socialist realism, the prevailing artistic doctrine of the Soviet Union and the GDR. Bush had publicly come out in support of this doctrine after the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party released the 'Zhdanov Decree' in 1948.³⁵ By the late-1950s Soviet policy had become a little more relaxed in relation to socialist realism, but the principles of socialist content and national character remained. Third, Byron was a great English poet and thus satisfied mainstream nationalist pride. Bush drew on the authority of English critic Matthew Arnold, whom he quoted describing Byron as 'the greatest natural force, the greatest elementary power in our literature since Shakespeare.'³⁶ And finally, Byron fitted with the British Communist Party's

²⁹ Alan Bush, *In My Eighth Decade*, 20–21.

³⁰ See Andrew Plant, *The Life and Music of Philip Christian Darnton*, PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2002, 295. Bush's arrangement of the EAM Song (music by Rotas) appeared in *Songs for Greece* (WMA, 1949).

³¹ Alan Bush, 'Commentary: Symphony No. 3, The Byron Symphony,' <http://www.alanbushtrust.org.uk/music/commentaries/commentary74.asp?room=Music>, accessed 28 April 2011. This commentary is taken from notes written by Bush, possibly for the 1962 London premiere of the symphony.

³² For a concise biographical account of Solomos, see F.H. Marshall, 'Review of Dionysius Solomos by Romilly Jenkins,' *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 26 (1942): 113.

³³ Alan Bush, 'The Byron Symphony,' http://alanbushtrust.org.uk/writing/article_abush5.asp?search=true&room=Writing, accessed 1 May 2010. This article is a shortened version of the radio talk Bush gave for the BBC performance of the symphony on 11 March 1973.

³⁴ Bush, 'Byron Symphony.'

³⁵ For an account of Bush's response to the Decree (which reinforced the importance of socialist realism in music), see Bush, 'Soviet Music,' *Anglo-Soviet Journal* 10.1 (1949): 32–34.

³⁶ Alan Bush, 'Interval Talk on the Byron Symphony' for BBC Radio, 11 Mar. 1973, Histon.

policy of radical nationalism discussed earlier in this article. Although Bush's music had begun to draw on national elements from the 1940s, it was in the 1950s that he wrote about, and looked increasingly for, stirring English subjects to inspire his music.³⁷

Bush's program for the symphony was spelled out in notes he prepared for the premiere performances. However, he made it clear that he did not intend the work to be programmatic in the usual sense of being pictorial:

although each of the four movements of the Symphony is directly inspired by aspects of Byron's personality which manifested themselves in connection with events of real life, the Symphony is not pictorial, but is intended to embody his feelings as he faced those events. There are details which are included in order to evoke a particular atmosphere more precisely ... but such details are secondary to the basic expressive intention of the work.³⁸

The nature of the program is suggested by the title of each movement: a place name associated with aspects of Byron's character or political activism. The first two movements, entitled 'Newstead Abbey' and 'Westminster,' portray Byron in Britain. 'Newstead Abbey,' named after Byron's childhood home, is intended to evoke Byron's passionate nature and 'feelings of disillusion' with 'the world of fashion and high society in London'; in 'Westminster' Bush attempts to convey musically Byron's maiden speech to the House of Lords, in which he had attacked legislation proposing the imposition of the death penalty for frame-breaking.³⁹ The last two movements, entitled 'Il Piazza Savioli' and 'Missolonghi,' portray Byron's activities as an Englishman fighting against various forms of imperialism in Europe. In the third movement, for example, Byron is presented helping Italian revolutionaries fight against Austrian imperialism, while the fourth movement, as previously mentioned, highlights Greek nationalism.

Despite the existence of a program, Bush's compositional approach was characterised by a concern with the formal architecture of the work. He adopted the traditional four-movement symphonic structure: the first movement is in a modified sonata form, the second in the form of a theme and variations, and the third employs modified ternary form.⁴⁰ However, the finale is cast as a choral movement with a mixed choir and baritone soloist. Many years earlier Bush had developed a compositional method (which he termed 'strict thematicism') based on the idea that every detail of a work should be derived from some feature or motive of the theme or themes of the work.⁴¹ In this symphony, each movement opens with an introduction in which small motivic cells prefigure motivic material to follow, a characteristic of much of Bush's music. The most important melodic unit in the symphony

³⁷ See Bush, 'Tasks of Cultural Workers,' 52.

³⁸ Bush, 'The Byron Symphony.' Program details in this paragraph refer to this document.

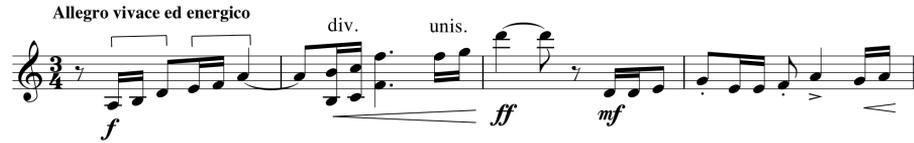
³⁹ Frame-breaking was connected to Luddism, a protest movement that emerged around 1811 in Nottinghamshire. Luddites were British textile workers whose jobs were threatened by the introduction of new machines capable of being operated cheaply by unskilled workers. In protest, the Luddites went about destroying the new machinery (frame-breaking).

⁴⁰ See Bush, 'Commentary: Symphony No. 3.'

⁴¹ Bush discussed this method in 'The Crisis of Modern Music,' *Keynote* 1.4 (1946): 4-7, esp. 6. However, by the time he wrote the *Byron Symphony* Bush had relaxed his application of the method and no longer derived the inner voice parts strictly according to the method.

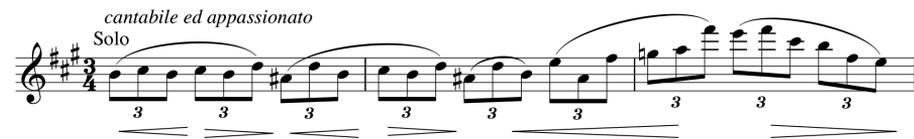
is a rising three-note figure (the 'Byron motif,' shown in Ex. 1) that launches the principal Byron subject of the first movement.⁴²

Example 1. *Byron Symphony*, first movement, exposition, principal Byron subject (Byron motif shown by square brackets), strings, 1 after fig. 3



An important subsidiary theme (the 'Byron love theme,' given in Ex. 2), also serves as material for development in subsequent movements:

Example 2. *Byron Symphony*, first movement, exposition, Byron love theme, second subject group, violin 1, 5 after fig. 11



Overall, there is a high degree of thematic organisation and cyclic procedures play an important role in the symphony.

The large orchestra includes harp and additional bass instruments: bass clarinet, double bassoon, bass trombone and bass tuba. In keeping with Bush's commitment to English national style the idiom is essentially modal, although the 'minor' modes (Phrygian, Aeolian and Dorian) dominate.⁴³ The fact that each movement begins at a similar (relatively slow) tempo tends to create an impression of sameness of mood. This may have led one critic to suggest that the symphony lacked variety and 'memorable moments,' big tunes and 'dramatic gestures.'⁴⁴ However, other critics dispute the claim of monotony. MacDonald, for instance, claims that the work is 'a genuine musical argument, organic and fully worked-out, original in structure, and epic in sweep of ideas,' and that the 'Byron' themes function in an 'intensely dramatic' manner.⁴⁵ In fact, syncopated rhythms and metric changes provide flexibility (especially in the second movement) and a range of emotional states are presented in the symphony. Dissonance is used largely for dramatic effect.

⁴² The *Byron Symphony* is unpublished. A draft score in pencil, with a vocal score of the fourth movement in ink, is located in the British Library, MS Mus. 341 (ff. 148). The score on which this article bases its discussion is a copy of the manuscript obtained from Histon. Bush also left a record of his analytical approach to the symphony on which this article draws. See 'Alan Bush, The Byron Symphony, Op. 53,' Histon.

⁴³ In an interview with John Amis, Bush described English style as the style based upon melodies that arose from their links to the English language. See John Amis, 'This Week Ahead,' Interview with Alan Bush, 15 Aug. 1970, LP 34158, Sound Archive, British Library. Bush's development of national style owed more to his use of modality than to English folksong, although the modes were an important element of English folksong.

⁴⁴ Arthur Jacobs, 'Alan Bush's Symphony,' *Financial Times*, 7 June 1962.

⁴⁵ MacDonald, 'Music to One Pair of Ears,' 28.

'Missolonghi': Text, Form and Musical Language of the Fourth Movement

The finale, 'Missolonghi,' is the movement in which Bush's political sympathies received their most powerful expression, providing the strongest evidence of his anti-imperialism. The finale sets to music a poem—'Ode on the Death of Lord Byron'—by Dionysos Solomos. The poem was written in 1824. It dramatises Byron's death that year in the course of helping the Greeks resist Turkish imperialism at Missolonghi. At about twenty-two minutes, the finale is by far the longest movement in the symphony, the first three movements being approximately thirteen, nine and eleven minutes respectively. The length of the finale and nature of the text underline the fact that Bush wished the weight of the symphony to fall on the issue of national liberation. As the movement directs the interpretative approach taken in this article, detailed discussion of the symphony will begin with the finale rather than earlier movements.

Bush took great care with the vocal elements in 'Missolonghi,' and chose to set the original Greek text. He first asked Professor Romilly Jenkins, an expert in Greek literature, to provide him with an English translation of the poem, from which he selected sixteen stanzas to set to music. He then asked another translator to provide him with a literal English translation of the sixteen stanzas.⁴⁶ As he wrote to a friend, he had taken 'most careful steps to see that every word is properly set [in Greek], both in meaning and intonation.'⁴⁷ It appears that he also hoped the symphony might at some stage be performed in Greece.⁴⁸ The first two stanzas, set for chorus, establish the emotional climate of mourning and celebration. They appear below in the English version that Nancy Bush prepared for the London premiere:

Freedom, draw near in silence.
Pause a moment, pause and sheathe your sword.
Weep for one who long has served you,
Weep for Byron who is dead.

As they bear him, there shall follow
Men of courage like his own.
Noble hearts shall beat above him
Praise him, honour his deathless name.

For the sake of intelligibility, the word setting is syllabic and the texture homophonic (see Ex. 3). Critics, among them Colin Mason and Felix Aprahamian, have admired Bush's choral writing, although Example 3 does not reflect the complexity of much of the writing in the finale.⁴⁹ As the first two stanzas are repeated at the end of the movement, they effectively act as a framing device. It is apt that the finale reinforces the overall cyclic structure of the symphony in this way.

⁴⁶ Alan Bush, letter to Pieris Zarmas, 5 Oct. 1958, Histon.

⁴⁷ Alan Bush, letter to 'Gwen,' 27 Dec. 1959, BL MS494.

⁴⁸ Bush took steps to contact Mikos Theodorakis about this in 1962. His idea was never realised. Alan Bush, letter to League of Democracy in Greece, 27 Apr. 1962, BL MS670.

⁴⁹ See Mason, 'New Alan Bush Symphony,' *Manchester Guardian*, 7 June 1962; Felix Aprahamian, 'A New Bush Symphony,' *Sunday Times*, 10 June 1962.

Example 3. *Byron Symphony*, fourth movement, beginning of Byron elegy, 4 after fig. 98. The text in the score is in Greek, with the English translation above.

[a tempo un poco piu moderato ma non largo]

Free - dom, draw near in Si - lence. — Pause a

Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass

molto f
molto f
molto f
molto f

The central preoccupation of the finale is clear—the struggle for national liberation from foreign domination—though the text here is not as overtly political as was Randall Swingler's text in the finale to Bush's Piano Concerto (also a choral movement with baritone soloist). According to the sung narrative in 'Missolonghi,' Greece is portrayed as a woman who calls her people to battle, with Byron following her. Greece is wounded and Byron dies, attempting to warn her of danger. His death is couched in erotic imagery: enchantment is said to 'enter' him; references are made to 'ecstasy,' 'ardent passion,' 'sudden fire,' and his being brought 'ever nearer to the burning heart of war.' The historical reality—that Byron died not in battle but after an illness—is ignored. Further, although Bush chose Byron as a progressive hero in line with his Marxist sympathies, the stanzas he chose could also be read as expressions of Solomos's romantic nationalism. Indeed, Solomos is famous for showing that the 'popular' Greek language could provide the vocabulary for serious lyric poetry.⁵⁰ By taking his text from Solomos, Bush thus tapped into this aspect of Greek cultural nationalism.

How does the form and musical language of the finale connect to Bush's anti-imperialist beliefs? Before answering this question one needs first to analyse the form of the finale and the function of the Greek elements. As indicated in Table 1, the movement may be very broadly characterised as a type of arch form (A B C D E C¹ B¹ A¹), with introduction (X).

In the introduction to the finale there are references to both the principal Byron subject and subsidiary themes from the first movement. However, Bush then introduces an important new theme: according to his 'Commentary, Symphony No. 3,' it was based on a Greek folk dance and was developed to represent battle music. The two main expressions of this Greek tune (see Ex. 4) both employ the interval of a rising fourth.⁵¹

This Greek theme is initially in a distinctive 7/8 meter and its irregular rhythm dominates the movement from this point onwards. Bush corresponded with various people (including the Greek Cultural Attaché and Greek Ambassador) in an attempt to locate suitable folk material

⁵⁰ Marshall, 'Review of Dionyus Solomos,' 113.

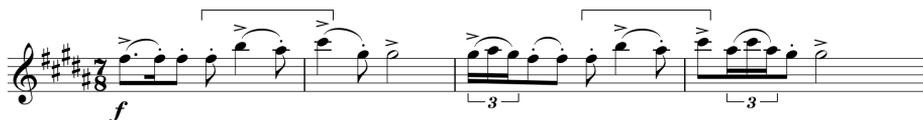
⁵¹ Brackets in both musical examples are not in the score. They have been inserted for the purposes of later comparison with the tune of the *Internationale*.

Table 1. Form of the *Byron Symphony*, fourth movement. Reference is to score held in the Histon archive. Orchestra accompanies the vocal forces.

Form	Main Sections	Stanzas of Text	Instrumental or Vocal	Score (Figure + or - bars)
X	Byron themes (plus call to battle) Greek dance theme		Orchestra	Fig. 90 - 7 Fig. 96 - 2
A	Byron elegy	S1 S2	Chorus Chorus	Fig. 98 + 2 Fig. 99 + 1
B	Lamentations	S3 S4	Orchestra Baritone/Chorus Baritone	Fig. 100 Fig. 101 - 3 Fig. 102 + 3
C	Greek battle material Greek material Greek dance theme	S5	Orchestra Baritone/Chorus Orchestra Orchestra	Fig. 103 + 3 Fig. 108 - 2 Fig. 109 + 1 Fig. 110 + 1
D	Greece awakes	S6 S7	Chorus Chorus Orchestra	Fig. 112 Fig. 114 - 1 Fig. 114 + 4
E	Call to battle Battle & dramatic climax	S8-S12	Orchestra Chorus/Baritone	Fig. 116 + 4 Fig. 118 + 6
C ¹	Greek dance theme		Orchestra	Fig. 125 + 1
B ¹	Lamentations	S13 S14	Orchestra Baritone/Chorus Baritone/Chorus	Fig. 130 + 4 Fig. 132 + 4 Fig. 133 + 4
A ¹	Byron elegy	S15 S16	Chorus Chorus	Fig. 136 - 4 Fig. 136 + 3

for the Greek theme.⁵² After the introduction, the chorus enters with a two-stanza section that I term the Byron elegy ('A' section). The 'B' section develops material having a similar elegiac character, beginning with an orchestral section Bush marks in the score as 'lamentations.' After these sections, which comprise the first four stanzas of the poem, the orchestra leads into the

Example 4a. *Byron Symphony*, fourth movement, Greek folk dance theme, violin 1, 1 after fig. 110



Example 4b. *Byron Symphony*, fourth movement, Greek folk dance theme, flute, 2 before fig. 96



⁵² See Alan Bush, letter to Cultural Attaché, 12 Sep. 1958; Ambassade Royale de Grece, letter to Alan Bush, 16 Sep. 1958, Histon. In July 1959 Bush returned two books of Greek folksong (*80 Melodies of Greece*, and *50 Songs of Greece*) to Westminster Library. Alan Bush, letter to Librarian, City of Westminster Public Libraries, 10 July 1959, Histon. I have been unable to locate these books or to identify the Greek tune used by Bush.

'C' section, and stanza 5. This section is dominated by the battle music developed from the Greek folk dance. The 'D' section (stanzas 6 and 7), melismatic and sinuous, represents Greece personified as a woman who wakes and clothes herself for battle. The 'E' section follows (stanzas 8 to 12), dramatising the battle and dramatic climax. The final three sections (C¹, B1 and A¹)—with modified versions of the Greek dance material, lamentations and Byron elegy respectively—complete the arch form.

I propose that the Greek dance material is integral to the finale and not simply an example of exoticism. Bush believed that by drawing on the indigenous music of a country one symbolically became associated with the political struggle of the people of that country.⁵³ For instance, he observed that he used African melodies (vague as the term appears) in *Africa* (1972), his symphonic movement for piano and orchestra, because he wished to identify with the African struggle for freedom. In a similar manner he used Bulgarian tunes in the third movement of his Violin Concerto (1948) because he wished to ally himself with the aspirations of a modern socialist state.⁵⁴ Thus his use of Greek folk music, like the Greek text, allowed him to demonstrate support for the Greek nationalist cause. Moreover, he may have manipulated the Greek dance tune to give it revolutionary associations. Example 5 shows the opening theme of the *Internationale* (the communist anthem). As a comparison with Example 4a shows, the first four notes of the Greek tune reproduce the outline of the opening phrase of the *Internationale* (see Ex. 5). The other expression of the Greek melody, shown in Example 4b, descends by step after an initial rising fourth, drawing on the second line of the *Internationale*. The recurring call to arms in the movement also replicates the melodic outline of the *Internationale* (see Ex. 6), although the diminished fifth (G# to D, or A# to E in transposition) in the outer interval obscures the reference.

Example 5. *Internationale*, opening bars



Example 6. *Byron Symphony*, fourth movement, call to battle, trumpet, 2 after fig. 91



While such a distortion may seem paradoxical, Bush deliberately included an even more distorted reference to the *Internationale* in the finale of his first symphony, the *Symphony in C*. This strategy—quoting from a tune associated with revolutionary words—is consistent with a socialist realist aesthetic. As Soviet musicologist V. Vanslov wrote, musical quotation may have a representational significance, and a musical image may influence the thoughts and emotions of a listener.⁵⁵ On the aesthetic level, by introducing the Greek tune Bush was

⁵³ See discussion in Artes Orga, 'The Concertos,' *Alan Bush*, ed. Stevenson, 59.

⁵⁴ Orga, 'Concertos,' 62 and 59.

⁵⁵ V. Vanslov, 'The Reflection of Reality in Music,' 9–11, Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR, Music Section, 1950, typescript article, Histon. Evidence from the Histon archive, and Bush's correspondence, suggests that Bush was familiar with this essay.

able to provide more accessible and appealing music to balance the overall seriousness of the movement. The Greek material also provided him with opportunities to exploit difficult nonsymmetrical rhythms and polyphonic textures. Indeed, this movement has been acclaimed for its rhythmic complexity.⁵⁶

A Reading of the *Byron Symphony*: Form and Ideology

I argue that Bush reinforced his ideological message by his manipulation of form and musical style in the symphony as a whole. In the examination of form beginning in the next paragraph, the ideological content will, initially, be secondary to a more abstract discussion of the music, but the connections between the two will gradually become apparent. As suggested earlier, the program of the symphony is essentially psychological, in contrast with Bush's first symphony, the *Symphony in C* (1940), whose program is sociological and his second, the *Nottingham Symphony* (1949), which is based on events from local history. The emphasis in the *Byron Symphony* is very much on Byron the individual and his response to political events in Britain and on the continent. Yet Byron is also presented as representative of the English radical tradition. The symphony may thus be read at the formal level as a metaphor for an idealised left-wing British response to imperialism. According to this reading, Bush constructed a musical narrative whereby Byron became one with the Greek cause in the finale, thus transcending the individualism of the first three movements.

The second movement, 'Westminster,' is especially intriguing because of its form, described by Bush as a theme and three variations.⁵⁷ However, the relationship of the theme to the third variation is tenuous, to say the least. In fact, the variation is clearly related to the principal Byron subject of the first movement.⁵⁸ This is evident from a comparison of Ex. 1 and Ex. 9. On a structural level, as Stevenson points out, the principal Byron subject is only indirectly developed in the first movement and not recapitulated until the coda;⁵⁹ in a sense the development is deferred until the second movement. But why did Bush decide to do this?

In a program note Bush called 'Westminster' the 'scherzo' of the symphony.⁶⁰ Yet the movement in some ways belies this description, as will be shown shortly. Could Bush then perhaps have been using the term in the Italian sense of a 'joke'? If he conceived of the movement as a sort of musical puzzle, was this because he wished the listener to pay particular attention to his approach to form and his manipulation of the themes in the symphony? Typically, the scherzo in a sonata or symphony is in a fast tempo, in triple meter, often humorous, and characterised by ternary form. In contrast, 'Westminster' is in simple quadruple meter, marked *tempo di marcia ceremoniale* (at the speed of a ceremonial march), and in a non-ternary form. Yet the movement opens with an introduction that presages the quirky character of the theme and exhibits many features on which the theme draws: repeated notes, mordent figure and triplet staccato figuration (see Ex. 7). The Byron motif appears in the upper horn line. The effect is to subvert any expectation of solemnity or grandeur set up by the movement's title and tempo indication.

⁵⁶ K.F.D, 'Kensington Symphony Orchestra,' 648.

⁵⁷ See Bush, 'Commentary: Symphony No. 3.'

⁵⁸ Stevenson, 'Committed Composer,' 340.

⁵⁹ Stevenson, 'Committed Composer,' 340.

⁶⁰ Bush, 'The Byron Symphony.'

Example 7. *Byron Symphony*, second movement, introduction, horns/trumpets, 5 before fig. 45

The theme, characterised by dotted rhythm, syncopation and disjunct motion, is a parody of a march. Given Bush's program, its function appears to be to mock what he saw as the pomposity and hypocrisy of the House of Lords (see Ex. 8).

Example 8. *Byron Symphony*, second movement, theme, oboe, 5 after fig. 46

This effect is reinforced by the staccato punctuation, rickety but leisurely rhythm, and harmony, which become more raucous and strident as the theme progresses. In the accompanying instrumentation (not shown in example) double bassoon and bass clarinet are used to comic effect. The first two variations are consistent with Bush's program. For example, the first variation (2 before fig. 50) contains little of melodic interest, being loosely based on the melody and accompanying lines from the theme. The variation is mere filigree: fragmented staccato triplets (analysed as seconds and thirds) set up a *motto perpetuo* that passes between various instruments, and a descending scale figure is prominent. The tone is clearly satirical, the character disruptive and chaotic by turns, mocking what Bush called the 'undercurrents of petty intrigue' in the House of Lords.⁶¹ The second variation (1 after fig. 53) contrasts strongly

⁶¹ Bush, 'The Byron Symphony.' Quotations from Bush in this paragraph are taken from this document.

with the first variation, being slower, heavier and denser in texture, and making much use of brass and bass winds. The effect is to lampoon the pomposity of the Lords and evoke what Bush called their ‘policy of cruelty and oppression’ towards the workers.

As mentioned earlier, the thematic material from the first movement plays a significant programmatic and musical role with the entry of the third variation, representing Byron’s oration: compare Example 9, below, with Example 1.

Example 9. *Byron Symphony*, second movement, third variation (Byron oration), strings, 3 before fig. 57

cantabile ed espressivo

The musical score for strings in the third variation of the Byron Symphony is presented in five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo/mood is marked 'cantabile ed espressivo'. The score shows a melodic line for the strings, with dynamics ranging from piano (p) to mezzo-forte (mf). The Double Bass part starts with a piano (p) dynamic and then moves to mezzo-forte (mf).

This variation, with its gravitas and length, provides its own implicit comment on the preceding variations. In fact, Bernard Keffe argues that Bush achieved a ‘striking innovation’ in ‘Westminster’ by recreating musically through orchestral means alone ‘the fire, scorn, and rhetorical sweep of Byron’s famous speech to his peers.’⁶² Bush studied carefully the powerful rhetoric of Byron’s maiden speech to the House of Lords. The following extract from the speech is taken from a talk Bush gave to accompany the BBC radio premiere of the symphony. The extract gives a sense of the speech rhythms that Bush sought to convey in musical terms:

Setting aside the palpable injustice and the certain inefficiency of the Bill, are there not capital punishments sufficient in your statutes? Is there not blood enough upon your penal code that more must be poured forth to ascend to Heaven and testify against you? Are these the remedies for a hungry and desperate populace? Will the starving wretch who has braved your bayonets be appalled by your gibbets?⁶³

Bush decided to represent the speech by a ‘kind of rhetorical cantilena for all the strings in unison, except the double-basses.’⁶⁴ The bowing was very difficult, and while composing the symphony he asked cellist Wilfred Simenaher for help in working out a bowing that would suit the cellists. There are many leaps, and the melody frequently moves up or down a seventh. In fact, this is reminiscent of Bush’s melodic approach in *Men of Blackmoor*, which was influenced by the gapped modes of Northumbrian folk song.⁶⁵ Although this renders

⁶² Keffe, ‘View from the Rostrum,’ 19–20.

⁶³ Bush, ‘Interval Talk on the Byron Symphony.’

⁶⁴ Alan Bush, letter to Wilfred Simenaher, 25 Feb. 1960, BL MS495.

⁶⁵ See discussion of Bush’s use of gapped modes (modes lacking one or two notes) in Stevenson, ‘Committed Composer,’ 331.

the melody fairly disjunct, it is Romantic in its long line and rhythmic flexibility, if not in its harmonic language. The result is the lengthiest lyrical section in the symphony, an intensely personal utterance underlined by the harp chords that provide an accompaniment. Its duration prompted Norman Kay of the *Observer* to claim that it was 'given a length out of all proportion to its musical value.'⁶⁶ However, most English critics at the London premiere tended to take a favourable view, with writers such as Colin Mason and Arthur Boyers singling out the oration for praise.⁶⁷ Indeed, Keefe argues that Bush created 'a *tour-de-force* in technique and dramatic expression,' a 'sort of prose style' in which the dialogue was 'a battle of words—between Byron and the angry benches of diehards around him.'⁶⁸

As shown above, the principal Byron theme from the first movement, in being developed so intensively in the second movement, played a significant programmatic and musical role. The themes from the first movement are also prominent in the *Andante tranquillo* third movement. The introduction to the third movement, shown in Example 10, draws on the Byron motif (refer Ex. 1), and the principal subject (see Ex. 11) and middle fugato section (Ex. 12) of the third movement are both derived from the first movement's Byron love theme (refer Ex. 2).⁶⁹

Example 10. *Byron Symphony*, third movement, introduction, Byron motif, violins 1 & 2, opening bars



Example 11. *Byron Symphony*, third movement, principal subject developed from love theme (first movement), oboes, 4 before fig. 69

Example 12. *Byron Symphony*, third movement, fugato, derived from love theme (first movement), cello, 3 before fig. 80

⁶⁶ Norman Kay, 'Bush's Byron,' *Observer*, 10 June 1962.

⁶⁷ Arthur Boyers, 'Alan Bush's "Byron Symphony",' *Musical Events* (Aug. 1962): 14; Colin Mason, 'New Alan Bush Symphony,' *Manchester Guardian*, 7 June 1962.

⁶⁸ Keefe, 'View from the Rostrum,' 20.

⁶⁹ See 'Commentary, Symphony No. 3.'

Again, the treatment of these themes has a programmatic role, the music initially evoking an alternating nocturnal and pastoral sensuality, and the fugato suggesting, in Bush's words, 'the conspiratorial struggle for Italian freedom' in which Byron took part.⁷⁰ MacDonald sees this slow movement as 'full of suppressed energy,' manifest especially in the 'scurrying fugato.'⁷¹ It may thus be concluded that the thematic material (associated with Byron) from the first movement plays a central role in the first three movements.

The Byron themes from the first movement are also important in the introduction to the finale, as indicated earlier in this article. Moreover, the first part of the development section from the first movement is substantially reproduced (and transposed) in the introduction to the finale (from 2 before fig. 92 to 5 before fig. 94).⁷² The purpose of this later reference, according to Stevenson, was to remind the listener of Byron's youthful vigour (initially expressed in the first movement) as he responded in the finale to 'hearing the Greek trumpets from afar.'⁷³ However, with the entry of the Greek dance the thematic material from the first movement assumes a different function, subsequently playing a secondary role in the finale. From this point on the finale is coloured by the Greek rhythms; the focus shifts to the vocal sections and to new melodic material associated with Byron, especially the Byron elegy (refer Ex.3) and 'lamentations' (see Ex. 13).

The elegy and lamentations are characterised by falling intervals, mainly seconds and thirds, expressive of grief. This contrasts with the thematic material from the first movement, emerging naturally as a response to and inversion of, the rising seconds and thirds of the Byron motif. Bush used the Byron motif in the strings to punctuate the beginning or end of important sections, or to heighten the dramatic tension, such as before the entry of the Greek dance theme in the introduction (4 after fig. 95), before and after the chorus enters for the Byron elegy (1 after fig. 98), and before the entry of the solo baritone (1 after fig. 118) in the central 'E' section. He also incorporated the motif into the texture of the Greek dance material as shown, for example, in the first bar of Example 14.⁷⁴

How may one account for this use of the thematic material? Bush made clear in his various program notes that he was interested in portraying the united struggle of Byron and the Greeks.⁷⁵ It is proposed that Bush sought to reinforce his anti-imperialist message at the structural level. By combining the principal Byron theme with the Greek theme in various ways, he was able to convey in musical terms the idea of unity between English anti-imperialism and Greek national liberation. He did this by constructing a musical narrative that showed Byron's interests merging with those of the Greek national movement, rather than dominating it (as in the case of imperialism or colonialism).

A Critique of British Imperialism

A reviewer in *Music & Life*, a publication of the British Communist Party Music Group, recognised the ideological implications of the Greek element. As the reviewer wrote, the dance

⁷⁰ See Bush, 'Commentary: Symphony No. 3.'

⁷¹ MacDonald, 'Music to One Pair of Ears,' 27.

⁷² Stevenson, 'Committed Composer,' 341.

⁷³ Stevenson, 'Committed Composer,' 341.

⁷⁴ Stevenson, 'Committed Composer,' 341.

⁷⁵ For example, see Bush, 'Commentary: Symphony No. 3.'

Example 13. *Byron Symphony*, fourth movement, lamentations, strings, fig. 100

The musical score for Example 13 consists of two systems of string parts. The first system, titled "lamentations", features five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. Each string part begins with a dynamic marking of *f* (forte) and includes a "Div." (divisi) instruction. The music is marked with a "crescendo" and includes fermatas. The second system continues with Violin I and II playing *ff* (fortissimo) with a "crescendo" marking, while the other strings play *f* (forte). The system concludes with a "dim." (diminuendo) marking and a "unis." (unison) instruction for the Violoncello and Double Bass.

Example 14. *Byron Symphony*, fourth movement, Byron motif (marked by square brackets) leading towards and taken into texture of Greek dance theme, strings, fig. 110

The musical score for Example 14 features five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The score is marked "[piu animato]" at the beginning. The Violin I and II parts start with a dynamic marking of *mf* (mezzo-forte) and include a "crescendo" marking. The Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass parts begin with a dynamic marking of *f* (forte). The score includes "unis." (unison) markings for the Violoncello and Double Bass, and "div." (divisi) markings for the Violoncello and Double Bass. Square brackets highlight the "Byron motif" in the Violin I and II parts, which leads into a Greek dance theme.

tune was 'not merely a dance tune but forms the basis of a whole development both historically and musically; Greek independence triumphs, Byron is vindicated.'⁷⁶ This interpretation is consistent with Bush's Marxist aesthetic that music should inspire people to reflect on the radical potential in English cultural history. In September 1962 the Music Group conducted an informal listening and discussion session on the symphony, confirming that Bush wanted people to think about the relationship between music and ideology. After Bush played through a tape of the symphony the audience commented, questioned and in some cases criticised the symphony and text. One member took Bush to task for the choral finale, stating that he wished to interpret the work in his 'own imagination' and not have 'a specific interpretation provided by words.' To this Bush replied: 'But I do not wish you to have your own thoughts. The work embodies the composer's thoughts which he wishes you to consider.'⁷⁷ Although this may appear to be a dictatorial statement, it was in line with Bush's aesthetics. In his view, music was a reflection of external reality or inner consciousness and expressed the composer's reaction to this phenomenon. The effect of a work of art was to interest the listener 'in the subject of the work, and to mould his feeling in the direction of the artist's own feelings in regard to the particular matter which is being reflected.'⁷⁸

Bush's long-standing interest in nationalist struggle in the Balkans had been earlier demonstrated in his cantata, *The Ballad of Freedom's Soldier*. Composed in 1953 for baritone, tenor, chorus and orchestra, the cantata told the story of English soldier, Major Frank Thompson. Thompson had died in action in 1944 while supporting the Bulgarian partisans' resistance against German occupation. As Lewis Foreman has noted, its 'subject matter and treatment' not only had noticeable similarities with the finale of the 'Byron,' but the work demonstrated the strong interest of the British left in the struggle of the partisans.⁷⁹

By taking Byron as his subject Bush was able to provide an indirect critique of post-war British colonialism and an alternative image of British global involvement. In discussing the symphony's program for a BBC radio broadcast of the symphony in 1973, he drew a direct parallel between Byron joining an international brigade at Missolonghi and the participation of British leftists a century later in an international brigade during the 1937 Spanish Civil War.⁸⁰ Bush's words remind us of his strong sense of history (he gave the first ever set of lectures in music history at the Royal Academy of Music). They also remind us that the British Battalion's fight against fascism has been described as the British Communist Party's 'finest hour.'⁸¹ By portraying Byron's involvement at Missolonghi, Bush indirectly referenced the continuing support of twentieth-century British communists for the Greek nationalist cause. Bush had supported the communist-led Greek resistance during the war. Later he supported the Greek communists through the League for Democracy in Greece, of which he was a member from

⁷⁶ A.C., 'Alan Bush's Byron Symphony Opus 53,' *Music & Life* 17.3 (1962): 8.

⁷⁷ 'A Discussion on the Byron Symphony,' *Music & Life* 18.4 (1962): 11. The account went on to report an 'interruption' stating: 'Vocal music is a form of brain-washing,' leading Bush to protest 'against the use of an expression having such sinister connotations.'

⁷⁸ Bush, 'What Does Music Express?' *Marxism Today* (July 1963): 208.

⁷⁹ Foreman, 'Spanning the Century,' 129.

⁸⁰ Bush, 'Interval Talk on the Byron Symphony.'

⁸¹ Francis Beckett, *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party* (London: Merlin Press, 1998) 138.

1951 until the late 1980s.⁸² Established in 1945, the League aimed to change British policy on Greece (Britain opposed the Greek communists). The League became a 'proscribed organisation' in 1950. Amongst other things, it supplied information to the British public, agitated for a general amnesty for Greek political prisoners, and worked for the restoration of trade unions and civil liberties in Greece.⁸³ In 1959, while composing the 'Byron,' Bush and his wife sent a telegramme to the Greek Prime Minister protesting the imprisonment of Manolis Glezos, a former resistance fighter.⁸⁴

Conclusion

Anti-imperialism and radical nationalism were two important strands of British Communist Party ideology during the 1950s. This article has explored Bush's *Byron Symphony* in that context, showing how anti-imperialism in particular shaped his conceptual approach to the symphony and influenced its form and musical style. Like Bush's operas *Wat Tyler* and *Joe Hill*, the 'Byron' ends with the death of a heroic figure. Notwithstanding this, the final impression in the symphony is one of celebration as well as mourning. Bush's socialist agenda demanded no less. He was clearly attracted to the figure of Byron because he strongly identified with the union of art and action represented by the poet. Moreover, by focusing on Byron, an iconic figure to whom multiple meanings could be attached—nationalist, internationalist and socialist realist—Bush was able to express his own sense of alienation from English life. At the same time he could align himself with the larger world of European culture that recognised in Byron a heroic figure. Equally, Bush was able to assert his Englishness while providing an oblique critique of British imperialism.

⁸² Bush's musical assistance included advising on the transcription of Greek songs into tonic sol-fa, and helping with musical evenings. Further information is contained in BL MS670.

⁸³ For further information on the League, see Diana Pym and Marion Sarafis, 'The League for Democracy in Greece and its Archives,' *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 11 (1984): 73–84, <http://hdl.handle.net/10066/5346>, accessed 5 April 2011.

⁸⁴ Alan Bush and Nancy Bush, telegram to Prime Minister Karamanlis, 21 Jan. 1959, BL MS670.