



# Journal of the **RVW** Society

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## In this issue...

### Into the Anniversary Year . . .

• Folk, pop and RVW  
page 7

• Roy Douglas  
page 10

• Anniversary events  
roundup  
page 12

*and more . . .*

## Michael Kennedy becomes our President

The sad death of Ursula Vaughan Williams in October last year left a gap in the lives of all who knew her and ended an era in the history of Ralph Vaughan Williams. In a moving ceremony on April 21st 2008, Ursula's ashes were interred alongside Ralph's, together again in death.

If her friends miss Ursula, so does the RVW Society, as she was proud to be our first President and supported us over almost fourteen years of her life. We are fortunate indeed that one of our Vice Presidents is Michael Kennedy and he has graciously accepted our invitation to succeed Ursula as our second President. No one is more fitting than Michael for this honorary role. His book, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, will forever remain unsurpassed in the depth and breadth of its insights into the works of RVW. Michael has said how pleased he is to accept this role and we are delighted to have him.

### Stephen Connock is Vice-President

As one of the co-founders of the RVW Society in 1994, and as our Chairman ever since, the Trustees also decided, at their meeting on 10 May, to appoint Stephen Connock as one of our two Vice Presidents, alongside Roy Douglas. Stephen told the Journal "The RVW Society has been such a large part of my life since 1994, I am honoured to continue to support the Trustees and our members as an Honorary Vice President."

Both these appointments are effective immediately. Announcement about the new chairman will be made at the AGM on 5th October 2008

### 2008 Commemorations

Activities as part of the Commemorative Year have exceeded all our expectations. For example, *Riders to the Sea* is being produced on three different occasions, *Pilgrim's Journey* is being sung at least twice and *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* is turning up in London. Even the Proms, after over forty years of haranguing them to do more, have honoured Vaughan Williams' memory splendidly with five symphonies being programmed and a major commemoration on August 26th.

With all the symphonies being performed by the Philharmonia in London, under Richard Hickox, choral works being sung throughout the country and our International Day of Vaughan Williams on October 12th securing remarkable support from churches across the land, we firmly believe that these activities will mark a sea-change in appreciation of the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams. Long may this continue.

### Albion Records' Contribution

Albion Records is contributing to the commemorations in 2008 by the release of a very special archive disc, including Vaughan Williams conducting his *Serenade to Music* and a rare performance of *The Pilgrim's Journey* from an American performance in 1962. We are including with this CD a free bonus disc including Vaughan Williams talking about Parry and Stanford. Full details are on page 11.

All in all, 2008 is proving to be a remarkable year.

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# From the Editor



The October 2008 edition of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society Journal will be dedicated to the memory of the composer's widow, Ursula, who died on October 23 2007 at the age of ninety-six. A number of pieces have arrived from people who knew her, and I am hoping for many more. Now that she is gone people may feel free to comment on aspects of Vaughan Williams' life which, out of respect for her, had been kept hidden. There are those who feel that one can never fully understand an artist's work without reference to how he lived his life. While Benjamin Britten was alive his homosexuality was referred to by oblique references only, but after his death it became a subject of debate. Has our understanding of his music been affected by this? In their very different ways both films about Vaughan Williams to appear in this anniversary year have dealt with the composer as a person rather more than has been the case in the past. This is inevitable and the Journal cannot ignore it. In October, let us remember Ursula in a worthy manner. She lived and was active in the musical and literary world for fifty years after the composer died. These years were not wasted and we will do well, in these pages, to evoke them.

Lady Barbirolli, the oboist Evelyn Rothwell, died in January in her ninety-eighth year. Her recording of Vaughan Williams' Oboe Concerto is a favourite of mine, and she and her husband are strongly associated in our minds with the composer. I was privileged to meet her, just once, when I was preparing the edition of the Journal devoted to "Glorious John". "Just as well you've come to see me now," she said. "Much longer and I'd have probably been gaga." I was hesitating in front of the door when the postman came along. "Is it Lady B you want?" he said. "Ask her to show you her garden. It's lovely!" It was.

Some time towards the end of 1969 I was at the University of York waiting to be interviewed for a place there. Not yet eighteen years old and definitely nervous, I made one of several trips to the lavatory and found myself standing next to a kindly old gent, a bit dishevelled, whom I took to be a librarian or something along

those lines. "Here for interview are you? Who have you got?" he wanted to know. "Professor Mellers." "Oh nothing to worry about there, he's a dear old thing." Shortly afterwards in I went and found myself face to face with the same "old gent". I played him my Bach *Sarabande* and discussed my compositions. He particularly wanted to talk about the music I enjoyed and it was easy to make conversation with him. As we go to press I hear that he is dead, at ninety-four, a mere stripling. He was an academic of a rather unorthodox kind as well as the author of many fine books. One of them, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion* was republished by Albion Music but is now sadly out of print.

The Journal has been at the centre of a debate over the last three years on the subject of Vaughan Williams and religion. A central question was why would a non-believer choose to set to music so many sacred texts. The time now seems to be ripe to move on and acknowledge the fact that any study of the vocal music of Vaughan Williams is also a study of the greatest names of literature in English. (Not necessarily English literature: "I've never got over Whitman, thank goodness.") I hope that adopting this as the theme of the next Journal but one will stimulate a broad response – only two articles have come in on that mysterious masterpiece *Flos Campi*. In one work alone we find words by Milton, Hardy, Herbert and Drummond. The Journal has already concentrated on some of the writers Vaughan Williams most admired but no harm will come of revisiting them. To your anthologies, then, and in the meantime here is a little wisdom from Wilfred Mellers, taken from the book mentioned above. Of the late Blake cycle for voice and oboe he writes "Vaughan Williams does not end his cycle with this song [*The Divine Image*] though it would seem to have healed the breach between innocence and experience. His probably unconscious reason may be that his vision of Albion, like Blake's, was of its nature open-ended, having no final consummation, which is impossible except in death, and perhaps not even then."

William Hedley

# The Song of Songs: an introduction

by Cecil Bloom

The *Song of Songs* (*Shir ha-shirim* in Hebrew) is one of the books of the Hebrew Bible and this work, essentially a love poem, is the basis, in the words of Wilfrid Mellers, of Vaughan Williams' "most voluptuous work". As Ursula Vaughan Williams has written, he used the viola to explore episodes from this book. The work was premiered by Lionel Tertis, the most eminent viola player of the day, and since Tertis was Jewish one wonders to what extent he may have been involved in the choice of this subject.



King Solomon (15th-century African parchment)

The *Song of Songs* is an important constituent of the Hebrew Bible that consists of some thirty-nine books. It is one of the shortest, consisting of a mere one hundred and seventeen verses divided between eight chapters, which compares, for example, with the *Book of Isaiah* with its sixty-six chapters and well over a thousand verses. A key rabbinical scholar, Rabbi Akiba, said of the other books of the Bible that they were holy but this one was "the holy of holies" and that the whole world attained its supreme value only on the day at which its text was given to the Jewish people. But he did add as a warning "He who for the sake of entertainment sings the song as though it were a profane song will have no place in the next world." Was Solomon, son of King David and Bathsheba, its author? The opening verse, which reads "The song of songs, which is Solomon's" suggests that he was. He was, after all, credited with the composition of a thousand songs and many proverbs.

It has been said that Solomon composed it as a youth "for it is the way of the world that when a man is young he composes songs of love". One theory is that it was composed on the occasion of Solomon's marriage to a foreign princess, but the current view is that it was written at a much later date. Another theory is that Solomon's name was attached to this work on the basis that

having an eminent name as author would give it greater status. Indeed, some of the language and style of the poem suggests it was written some seven to eight hundred years or so later than the time of Solomon, who lived in the tenth century B.C.

The poem is a sublime example of poetical lyricism, a graceful and tender composition that deals with the love of a man for a woman but which also points to the evils of the day. The beautiful Shulamit, who tends her family's vineyards, ardently loves a shepherd, and through this love she retains her purity and innocence. She is taken by Solomon's servants to be part of his harem but she feels a stranger in the royal court with all its blaze of magnificence. The other women in Solomon's palace try to divert her affection for her shepherd to her royal admirer but without success. She resists the allurements of the court and remains true to her lover: she rejects the King and, when Solomon realises this, he allows her to leave his harem and return to her genuine lover. The story pays tribute to the beauty and dignity of pure love and fidelity and contains all the emotions of a person in love who also encounters disappointments, promise and fulfilment, jealousy and mockery. The depravity of much of life, and the obscenity and voluptuousness of town life are condemned in no small measure.

More commentaries have been written on *Song of Songs* regarding its origin and its meaning than on any other book of the Bible. A number of commentators look upon it as being allegorical in the manner that the relationship between God and the Israel nation is pictured. The great medieval philosopher Moses Maimonides cited many of the poem's verses as providing homiletical meaning, that is, as a sermon on the understanding of personal relationships. On the other hand, the early Christian scholars believed it to deal with the relationship between God and the Church or the individual soul. The moral of the work is that, besides being the strongest emotion in the human heart, love can also be the holiest. The book pictures love as a reward enjoyed only by pure and simple folk and not by sophisticated ones.

Vaughan Williams was not the first composer to use the *Song of Songs* in his work. The first significant setting of the poem was by Palestrina completed in 1584 and William Boyce's *Serenata* is an eighteenth-century setting. J. S. Bach's famous cantata *Wachet auf* uses words from the text and more recently Virgil Thomson (1924), Arthur Honegger (1926) and Lukas Foss (1946) have made settings of the poem. Oratorios have also been composed, among them works by Jean Martinon and Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco.

Pop songs have also been based on *Song of Songs*, and the work has naturally attracted the attention of writers. Victor Hugo wrote an important poem included in his posthumous collection *Cantique de Bethphage* and Heinrich Heine's poem *Salomo* is based on it. A number of dramas are based on the poem. In art, too, there are representations of *Song of Songs*.

# *Flos Campi* the Enigma

by Eric Seddon

The deeper one peers into the life and works of Ralph Vaughan Williams the more enigmatic they both become. Rarely in the post-romantic world has there been a major composer so reticent about sharing his inspirations, his beliefs, or even his inner life. Before his day it had already become common practice for major composers to be, in a sense, literary men as well. Perhaps the most exaggerated example of this can be found in Richard Wagner, whose writings seem an apotheosis for the nineteenth-century German Romantic movement. In his typically paradigm-defining manner, Wagner wrote volume after volume detailing his artistic ideology, that his works might be framed within a specific context. This in turn set an example for many of the composers who followed. Tracing the history of European art music since the Romantic period, we find the necessity of a dual discipline emerging – what can be called the composer as critic, or even the composer as the primitive musicologist of his own work. By the mid-twentieth century it had become both commonplace and expected that a prominent composer should publish manifestoes on art in the form of concert notes, articles, or even books. Some used their literary gift as a means of promoting the musical theories behind their works, others as a means of defending themselves against newspaper critics, others still as an almost parallel art form. A fascinating library of works was thus developed over the decades, including books that are interesting almost entirely in their own right, only tangentially related to the music they took as their original *raison d'être*. The writings of Erik Satie, Charles Ives's *Essays before a Sonata*, Constant Lambert's *Music Ho!* and John Cage's *Silence* are but a few examples of the many books that fascinate even on non-musical levels. Gone were the days when major composers were considered mere servants to aristocratic culture. Indeed, the modern world somewhat surprisingly expected composers to be more than mere musicians: it demanded political theorists, sociologists, even seers – very clearly men of the written word as well as the musical score.

It should be noted that this was a relatively recent development before the day of Vaughan Williams. In the century before his birth we cannot even imagine the notion of Mozart writing an extended philosophical text detailing with the implications of *The Magic Flute*, or propagating a treatise on *The Marriage of Figaro* which subsequently might have driven him into political exile. Before this, the idea of Bach writing a multiple volume *summa* on the spiritual and political importance of cantatas and passion settings is unthinkable. Still farther back, the notion that anyone in Tudor England would have considered the theological opinions of William Byrd, in any substantial and serious way, is at least mildly ridiculous.

Vaughan Williams, for his own part, might have found the era in which he came of age to be at least mildly ridiculous as well. Perhaps he found writing about his own work too narcissistic, perhaps he found it too intrusive. He did what was expected of a major composer, publishing program notes, criticisms, lectures and books – but a close reading of them certainly makes one wonder whether he didn't disdain the discipline or see it as somewhat irrelevant to the business of music-making. His

program notes, especially for the more emotionally challenging and darker works, are filled with self-deprecation, quips, and almost a contempt for the exercise at hand. In this way, he seems to have deliberately worked at odds with the normal function of twentieth-century program notes: whereas composers like Ives, Cage, Messiaen and others gave notes to clarify their intent, providing the listener with a context for the hearing of a work, those by Vaughan Williams tend to cloud the meaning, cloaking the intent behind a bluff, mock-disinterested demeanor. Of his writings, it may be said that the most philosophical and revealing are those dealing with folk-song. There he seriously puts forth a case for great music as being necessarily local in origin. But this, it must be stressed, is related to music in general; of his own works, when he is not self-deprecating, he is rather remarkably quiet. Had he composed under the political conditions of Stalinist Russia, musicologists might have assumed this reticence to have been out of political tact or obvious fear of the gulag, so strange is it. Yet though Vaughan Williams lived in free society, still there is a similar smokescreen between the genesis and meaning of his pieces and their audience. The flippancy of his program notes to the tumultuous *Sixth Symphony* is matched only by his silence regarding so many of his profound pieces with text. No reasoning is offered for the selections from Whitman for the *Sea Symphony*, nor are we given a glimpse of his rationale for the libretti of *Dona Nobis Pacem* or *Hodie*. What prompted him to write these pieces when he did? Why did he select the texts and arrange them in these particular configurations? We are left to speculate on these puzzles, with the knowledge that more often than not, the composer himself chastised many of the critical attempts to elucidate them. In the study of Vaughan Williams' art we are therefore perpetually accompanied by a twofold enigma: first, what is the deeper meaning of the piece before us? And second, why was the composer so reticent about our knowing his inspiration for it? The first might be answered convincingly, if subjectively, while the second is perhaps beyond our reach at present, and maybe permanently.

We are left with the dilemma that Vaughan Williams' approach to what might be called the literary dimension of his career was atypical, enigmatic, and perhaps even counterproductive to a deeper understanding of works in a purely musicological sense. This can be generally said to extend over the majority of the more significant works in his canon. But among these works is one veiled and unusual, yet also important enough to the rest of his output that it might be called a central enigma. That piece is *Flos Campi*, a suite for viola, orchestra, and wordless chorus, first performed in at the Queen's Hall on October 10th 1925 by the Queen's Hall Orchestra under Sir Henry Wood, with Lionel Tertis taking the solo viola part. The history of this piece, and the symbolism hinted at in it, seem to me significant to those who would investigate the complete works of Ralph Vaughan Williams. This brief essay is an attempt to place the symbolic importance of the piece in the light of his complete works.

Like so many of Vaughan Williams' works referencing biblical texts, *Flos Campi* is a mixture of various religious strands that weave throughout English history. I hope that the many previous

articles of mine have put to rest the notion that Vaughan Williams' involvement with scriptural texts was merely an act of veneration for the prose of the Authorized Version. If there is any remaining doubt, however, the very text and title of *Flos Campi* should eradicate it. Here the Authorized Version makes an appearance in the score, but only as a translation of the primary source text, which is, somewhat surprisingly for a non-Catholic Englishman of Vaughan Williams' age, taken from the Song of Songs in the Latin Vulgate (called the "Song of Solomon" in the KJV). This is a very odd and a perhaps cryptic choice of texts. The Vulgate was St. Jerome's translation of the scriptures, standard for the Western Church for over a thousand years and monumentally influential upon European history – it was Gutenberg's printing of the Vulgate in 1456, for example, that in so many ways spurred modern history.<sup>1</sup>

Yet by Vaughan Williams' day several centuries of Protestant rule had long supplanted the once historically authoritative air of St. Jerome's work with the equally venerated King James or Authorized Version. Yet in the score of *Flos Campi*, the Vulgate takes precedence while the Authorized Version is quoted only as an aid to translation. Why Vaughan Williams chose to do this is puzzling and is something the present article cannot fully answer. At the very least, however, it removes the piece from the realm of the merely nationalistic – the Vulgate being international in its influence, and to certain segments the English population of Vaughan Williams' age, even foreign.

Annoyed with the initial critical response and misinterpretations of the work (which was paradoxically a self-generated situation he might easily have spared himself, had he been more forthcoming about his artistic intent), Vaughan Williams at last decided to publish some terse notes to the piece, criticizing those who had missed his meaning, yet offering no real firm direction for interpretation. Thus he writes for a performance in 1927:

*When this work was first produced two years ago, the composer discovered that most people were not well enough acquainted with the Vulgate (or perhaps even its English equivalent) to enable them to complete for themselves the quotations from the 'Canticum Canticorum', indications of which are the mottoes at the head of each movement of the Suite.*<sup>2</sup>

The "English equivalent" of which he speaks is a bit confusing. Most scholars would probably agree that the closest English-language equivalent to the Vulgate is the Douay-Rheims Bible, published by exiled Roman Catholics between 1582 and 1610.<sup>3</sup>

Yet this is probably not what Vaughan Williams refers to here; more likely he is equating the Vulgate and the Authorized Version, under the suggestion that the latter had assumed the public and cultural mantle of the former in the English-speaking world. Still, like so many of the composer's statements, it remains at least a bit unclear.

Vaughan Williams goes on bluntly to refute both the idea that *Flos Campi* is about "buttercups and daisies" or that it has any "ecclesiastical basis." He then reiterates the quotations in both Latin and English while interspersing several very basic musical comments, mentioning the opening theme, some orchestration, a "march", a "persistent rhythm on the percussion." None of this brief analysis, however, gives any hint as to a more substantial interpretation of the program. The piece is not "buttercups and

daisies", nor is it "ecclesiastical", but what is it and what does it mean? Vaughan Williams does not and perhaps will not say: we are left with the words, the notes, and the context within his life and career; nothing else.

As for context, in many ways *Flos Campi* can be seen, somewhat remarkably, as part of a symbolic centerpiece to Vaughan Williams' many pieces containing Christian mystical symbolism. Earlier articles of mine have gone into some analysis of this, most specifically regarding the Eucharistic symbolism of the *Five Mystical Songs* and *Dona Nobis Pacem*, and the symbolism found in *Sancta Civitas*. In some ways, *Flos Campi* is their symbolic meeting point. Where *Sancta Civitas* outlines the apocalypse as a precursor to the *Wedding Feast of the Lamb*, in a broad civic or corporate sense, *Flos Campi* deals with marital ecstasy in the more personal sense – both in yearning preparation and in erotic fulfillment.<sup>4</sup>

And as I have detailed in an article on *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Vaughan Williams uses the theme indicating mystical union in *Flos Campi* as symbolic of the Delectable Mountains in Bunyan.<sup>5</sup>

Taken chronologically we see Vaughan Williams building upon his symbolism and contrasting the personal with the corporate, masculine subjects with feminine – *Five Mystical Songs* (1911) followed by the *Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* (1922)<sup>6</sup>; then *Flos Campi* and *Sancta Civitas*, both significantly in the same year of 1925; *Magnificat* (1932), *Dona Nobis Pacem* (1936), and finally, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1951). It is easy, therefore, to see the chronological centrality of *Flos* in the midst of all of these heavily theological and mystical texts.

It is important to remember that Vaughan Williams understood the allegorical meaning of the *Song of Songs*, as demonstrated by a letter to Mrs. Joyce Hooper from October 31st 1951, wherein he wrote:

*As regards my other point, human love has always been taken as a symbol of man's relation to divine things. The Song of Solomon has been treated in all of the Churches as a symbol of the relationship of God to man. And what about Isaiah and his "beloved's Vineyard"? And is not the Church in the Book of Revelations always symbolized as the bride?*

Thus the path is legitimately opened to read *Flos Campi* as an expression of mystical theology – the piece was perhaps even meant by Vaughan Williams to be experienced in precisely this way. Taken with two other scriptural works of the same period, we have a remarkable outline: *Flos Campi* may be taken as the relation between God and Man (in an intensely personal, though universal sense); *Sancta Civitas* may likewise be seen as expressing the relation between God and Humanity as a whole (in a corporate sense), while in Vaughan Williams' emphasis of an erotic element in the score of the *Magnificat*, Mary is presented as both mother of God and bride of Christ (a very Catholic understanding of Mary as a symbol of the whole Church). The ultimate "meaning" of femininity, of masculinity, and of humanity and society, wrapped in and penetrated by the presence of God's love in the midst of tumultuous human history all seem to have been presented by Vaughan Williams in the same era. A thread runs through them, unifying the three pieces into a Triptych of sorts. It would be fascinating to hear them performed on the same program.

It is worth pointing out that *Flos*, though influential upon his later works, seems to have puzzled almost everyone. As Vaughan Williams himself implied in his later program note to the piece, the meaning was initially missed altogether. On a musical level, too, even the closest of friends were baffled. Gustav Holst confessed that he could not penetrate the piece or fully enter into it. And as James Day has kindly pointed out to me in an email, even the instrumentation seems to be calculated to keep the piece a secret, so unlikely is it that such orchestration might be regularly assembled in concert for a piece of comparatively short duration.

An analysis of the piece itself, how the music goes about expressing the words in quotation above the movements, is beyond the scope of this brief essay. Context among other works, we have seen, can be understood in a theological sense, as the reading of the mystical symbolism seems to offer a profound means of understanding the works. But as always with Vaughan Williams, original intention and inspiration are terribly difficult to glean. His well-documented reticence, the obscure and incomplete data of his religious beliefs, and the veil of time have clouded what we can realistically discuss. Furthermore, there is at least the potential that *Flos Campi* may have been written for other purposes than its apparent theological symbolism.

Currently, there are rumors circulating among scholars of a more sordid variety, touching upon this and other Vaughan Williams works – of potentially cryptic and scandalous personal meanings. Perhaps the rumors are true, and those who knew the composer will not have published everything they yet intend to; perhaps our image of the composer is not exactly the reality of the man who was. The potential that some new information, sordid or otherwise, might yet dramatically change our interpretation of these pieces certainly exists, and it is wise to qualify our readings of these pieces as precisely that: they are readings of the symbolism of the works taken as a whole, and not intended necessarily to define Vaughan Williams' intent. But it seems reasonable to propose that his reticence might have been for this very purpose: perhaps he wanted the meanings of his pieces to extend beyond the specific condition under which they were composed. And perhaps he knew, or hoped, that they would in some way touch people in a more universal sense.

With this in mind it will be fascinating to watch as our understanding of *Flos Campi* deepens. Although it is such a short, odd piece, it fits into an impressive symbolic center to so much of the composer's work. I wrote at the beginning of this brief essay that the further one studies Vaughan Williams' life and works, the more enigmatic both of them become. I suspect that *Flos Campi* is in some ways part of the central enigma of his life and career: a secret door with a great deal more behind it than we know. Perhaps this door is destined to remain closed – and perhaps this is as it should be. But regardless of this potential, and heedless of

rumors spread whether true or false, the cumulative symbolic effect of the triptych of *Flos Campi*, *Sancta Civitas*, and *Magnificat* is unique indeed in the history of music, and ought to be acknowledged as a great achievement. Taken together, they speak beyond the circumstances of one individual, to a profoundly beautiful expression of something touching upon the mystery of our existence.

## Notes

- 1 As George Steiner put it: “With Jerome’s readings of Hebrew and their implicit theory of translation, we stand, in a sense, at the doors of modernity.” From his Introduction to the KJV, Everyman edition, xv.
- 2 Michael Kennedy. *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, Oxford, 1982, p106
- 3 Steiner, op. cit., xvii
- 4 I have been taken to task, in private, by more than one theologian for my use of the word “erotic” in such instances. There seems to be an ongoing debate over the proper understandings of the Greek categories of love and their relative compatibility (or lack thereof) with Christian theology in both Catholic and Protestant circles – and often the issue is discussed without full agreement between rival theological understandings. If it helps such theologians to take my use of the word “erotic” for simply “sexual”, I have no objection, but will continue to use the latter term for a number of reasons: first, it is the term that has been used regarding VW’s work for multiple generations now, and second, in light of a great deal of scholarship relating to poetry, scripture, and the arts, it seems both too much of a quibble to constantly redefine terms and too confusing to change it. That Pope Benedict XVI’s first encyclical (*Deus Caritas Est*, 2005) uses the term “erotic love” in a virtuous sense would seem to me at least to indicate that a fear of the term as incompatible with Christianity is intellectually obsolete. But I leave it to qualified theologians to debate their own discipline – my only hope here is for simplicity and clarity.
- 5 See “Turn Up My Metaphor and Do Not Fail” from the March 2007 Issue of the RVW Journal.
- 6 The *Shepherds* does not contain the thematic link with *Flos* that VW was later to add to the full version of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, but the mystical/erotic symbolism is still to be found in the arrow plunged into Pilgrim’s heart before his crossing of the River of Death.

**Crossword Solutions:**  
**ACROSS:** 1. Transcendent, 6. Nancy, 8. Palmer, 9. Stuff, 12. Urge, 13. Lake, 15. Dirge,  
 19. Arnold, 20. Denio, 22. Lord Hate-Good  
**DOWN:** 1. Tony, 2. Arne, 3. CD, 4. Doleful, 5. Turnkey, 7. Yes, 8. Plus, 10. All Hail,  
 11. Bedford, 14. Trod, 16. End, 17. Unto, 18. Ford, 21. Ut

# Pop Goes the Music?

## An Exploration of the Distinction between Folk and Pop Music as seen in the Writings of Ralph Vaughan Williams

by Scott Aniol

A common error exists frequently in contemporary discussions of the use of folk idioms as a compositional element in art music. Many authors today equate folk music with popular forms such as jazz, rock and blues. In fact, the terms “folk” and “popular” have unfortunately come to be synonymous in conventional speech. For instance, George Gershwin (1898-1937) referred to his opera *Porgy and Bess* as an “American folk opera,” although it includes distinctly pop forms such as blues and jazz.

However, an honest examination of the historical development of music will note that folk music and “popular” music in the more specific sense are, in fact, different in many significant ways. Certainly folk music is popular, but it is not the same as “pop” music in the way the term is used today to describe the commercial music of radio, film, and television. For sake of clarity in this paper, I will use the term “pop” to denote such music, while “popular” will be used to express the broader dictionary definition of something that is “widely liked or appreciated.” Perhaps one of the most helpful and instructive methods one could employ to discover the significant differences between folk music and pop forms is to query the writings of composers who have used folk idioms in their music. In the English-speaking world, no one is better known for such practices than British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958). Indeed, as Alain Frogley notes, “Mention the name Ralph Vaughan Williams and into most people’s minds come immediately three words: English, pastoral, and folksong.” (*Vaughan Williams Studies, CUP, 1996.*)

The goal of this paper will be to examine the writings of Vaughan Williams and his predecessor, Cecil Sharp (1859-1924), and illustrate their understanding of the distinctions between art, folk and pop music. I will show that this distinction is evidenced in how they define each of the terms and in their motivations for cataloguing and utilizing folk tunes in their art music.

### Brief Historical Background

An interest in English folk songs emerged in England towards the end of the nineteenth century. By 1898 the Folk Song Society was founded, and rising composer Ralph Vaughan Williams joined the Society in 1904. The Society had been perfectly comfortable simply discussing folk music in the abstract until an influential folk tune advocate named Cecil Sharp challenged them to actually collect folk tunes and promote their use in the art music of the day. Vaughan Williams was strongly influenced by Sharp’s admonition and very soon joined him in his cataloguing and advocacy of the folk tunes of English heritage. It is upon this foundation that Vaughan Williams’ career as a composer began, and his connection with English folk music soon became ingrained in the consciousness of musical and national society. As Simon Heffer notes in his book on the composer “The effects would be spectacularly far-reaching: folk-songs would not merely shape Vaughan Williams as a composer, they would, through him, shape a whole school of English music that would for years be indissolubly associated with the Royal College [of Music] and

what would come to be called the ‘English musical establishment’. In an attempt to understand Vaughan Williams’ thoughts regarding folk music and specifically its difference from pop music, I will draw largely from one of his writings that deals specifically with this topic, *National Music*. Additionally, since Cecil Sharp had such a strong influence upon Vaughan Williams and his love for the English folk tune, I will also use his important work from 1907, *English Folk-Song; Some Conclusions*, in an attempt to uncover both Vaughan Williams’ and Sharp’s understandings and motivations behind their loyalty to folk music.

### Definitions

A primary goal of Vaughan Williams was, of course, to compose art music. His many hours finding and indexing folk tunes resulted in the use of many of those melodies in his own compositions. As such, a distinction between art and folk music in his understanding is self-evident. Cecil Sharp, however, makes this distinction more explicitly. In Sharp’s understanding, art music “is the work of the individual, and [an expression of] his own personal ideals and aspirations; it is composed in, comparatively speaking, a short period of time, and, by being committed to paper, it is for ever fixed in one unalterable form.” Sharp saw, then, four primary distinguishing characteristics of art music: art music is (1) individual, (2) personal, (3) quickly composed, and (4) unalterable (see Table below).

Art Music	Folk Music	Pop Music
Individual	Racial	Mass Produced
Personal	Communal	Commercial
Quickly Composed	Continually Developing (1) intuitive (2) oral (3) applied (4) melodic	Mass-produced (1) manufactured (2) printed (3) entertainment (4) harmonic
Unalterable	Variable	Transient

Conversely, Sharp saw folk music as (1) racial, (2) communal, (3) continually developing, and (4) variable: “Folk music, on the other hand, is the product of a race, and reflects feelings and tastes that are communal rather than personal; it is always in solution; its creation is never completed; while, at every moment of its history, it exists not in one form but in many.” Since Sharp and Vaughan Williams were most interested in the revival of the English folk song, their writings further elaborate and explain these principles.

The “racial” aspect in music is evident, for Sharp, in the fact that every race has its own unique forms. He notes that “in every land we do find music of a distinctive and often of a very beautiful quality.” He further identifies the particular sub-group within a race in which this music is perpetuated as being the “unlettered classes,” and therefore clearly distinguishes folk music from the “educated or art music of the same nation.” Both Sharp and Vaughan Williams are careful to recognize the “unlettered,

unsophisticated, and untraveled people” of a nation as the source of folk music. This localized aspect of folk culture had its strengths. A lack of formal education or travel prevented such cultures from being influenced by stereotypes, allowed them to be “self-dependent for [their] inspiration,” and freed their “artistic utterance” to be “entirely spontaneous and unself-conscious” – all virtues in Vaughan Williams’s opinion. So though folk music is uniquely racial, it is also closely tied to a specific section of the race.

Sharp and Vaughan Williams also highlight the communal nature of folk music. In fact, Sharp notes that within a folk culture, those musical forms that are too individualistic will not last; only “those tune variations which appeal to the community will be perpetuated.” Vaughan Williams notes some further implications that derive from the communal nature of folk music: “(1) It is purely intuitive, not calculated. (2) It is purely oral, therefore...it must be limited by the span of what both the singer and hearer can keep in their minds at one stretch. (3) It is applied music... (4) [It] is purely melodic.” These implications were, for Vaughan Williams, both strengths and limitations. For instance the “intuitive,” unpremeditated nature of folk music precluded any propaganda or commercial motivation. Instead, folk music was a sincere expression of communal emotion. On the other hand, the length limitations of folk music due to its oral nature prevented significant depth in the forms. However, this could also be seen as a strength since these simple expressions were accessible and appealing to all. In this sense, folk music is legitimately “popular.” Vaughan Williams also seemed to find virtue in the strictly applied nature of folk art where “the idea of art for art’s sake has happily no place in the primitive consciousness.” The purely melodic aspect of folk music provides another significant contrast with art music. Vaughan Williams notes that the major and minor modes of Classical European forms are foreign to folk music. He recognizes that “the major and minor modes hardly ever appear in truly melodic music” as seen in the folk tunes that he catalogued. According to Vaughan Williams, most folk tunes make use of the Dorian, Mixolydian, and Ionian modes. This communal nature of folk music leads, then, to its never-ending development. For both Sharp and Vaughan Williams, this evolutionary aspect is a definite strength of the music since it creates a “natural selection and survival of the fittest.” Only those tunes that “accurately express the taste and feeling of the community” will survive; “what is purely personal will be gradually but surely eliminated.” This is not to say that no bad folk song exists. The continually changing state of folk music may also make it possible for a tune to get “into the hands of an incompetent singer who has spoilt it.” However, over time this bad tune will certainly pass away. This for Vaughan Williams is a characteristic superior to that of art music since “the written note, however bad it is, remains to cumber our national libraries.”

Unfortunately, according to Sharp and Vaughan Williams, folk music as an art is largely dead, and this provides the first evidence of a distinction between folk and pop music in their thought. With a chain of events including the Industrial Revolution and the creation of mass media came the emergence of a new form of culture that found its home in commercialism – pop culture. Pop culture by its very nature destroyed folk culture since mass media soon found its way into every corner of modernized society and influenced the before-uninfluenced. Sharp marks the end of folk art around 1840. This is not to say that folk music itself is dead. Rather, according to Vaughan Williams it is the “art of the folk-singer” that no longer exists, and “we cannot, and would not

if we could, sing folk-songs in the same way and in the same circumstances in which they used to be sung.” Vaughan Williams clearly bemoans this fact in his praise of this music “which is unpremeditated and therefore of necessity sincere, music which has stood the test of time, music which must be representative of our race as no other music can.” Sharp recognizes the confusion between the use of the terms “folk” and “popular” in the English language as one of semantics:

*The word itself [“folk song”] is a German compound, which of recent years has found a home in this country. Unhappily it is used in two senses. Scientific writers restrict its meaning to the song created by the unlettered classes. Others, however, use it to denote not only the peasant songs, but all popular songs as well, irrespective of origin, i.e., in the wider and looser sense in which it is sometimes used in Germany. This is to destroy the value of a very useful expression, and to rob scientists of a word of great value. The expansion was, moreover, unnecessary. For the English language already possessed in the phrase “popular song,” a description which covered the wider field. There was, therefore, no need to do violence to the restricted and strictly scientific meaning of “folk song” by stretching it beyond its natural signification. On the other hand there was a very good reason for coining a new term, or for importing a foreign one, to signify a peasant-made song, because our language contained no word with that precise meaning.*

*Those, therefore, who claim the right to use the term folk song in the loose sense of popular song, are placing upon it a meaning never given to it by the scientific writers of Germany, the country of its origin. (English Folk Song, pp 2-3)*

There is no doubt that Sharp, and by extension Vaughan Williams, saw a definite difference between folk music and pop music and that they found folk music to be superior to pop. It seems that the confusion between the terms lies primarily in the word “popular.” Neither folk nor pop music are by necessity popular – it is not the defining characteristic of either – yet both often are popular. Additionally, not only is the popularity of a tune not an indication of its positive value, but also, according to Sharp, is it not an indication of its negative value: “The important thing to remember...is that bad tunes are popular, not because of their badness, but because of their attractiveness. The classes who sing bad tunes sing them simply because they never hear good ones that appeal to them with equal force.” Sharp and Vaughan Williams found in folk music, as I will show shortly, tunes that were both good and popular.

### **Motivations**

The motivations behind Vaughan Williams’ use of folk idioms in his music also clearly demonstrates the distinction between folk and pop music in his thinking. Clearly his interest in folk music was connected to his desire for a distinctly English national music. Indeed, as the title of his work on folk music (*National Music*) illustrates, Vaughan Williams was motivated by nationalism, and although there are certain pop forms that are most closely associated with individual nations (jazz in America, for instance), it is the folk music of a country that best displays its national character. And as Alain Frogley notes (in *Vaughan Williams Studies*) “Almost invariably, Vaughan Williams’s music has been deemed to reflect essential features of the English national character, of English landscape, and of the English language.”

The motivation that perhaps best reveals Vaughan Williams’

understanding of the distinction between folk and pop music is his desire to use folk music to improve the musical sensibilities of the masses. In folk music Vaughan Williams saw musical forms that were ennobling and good while at the same time popular.

Both Sharp and Vaughan Williams clearly evidenced their opinions that folk and pop music were different in their rejection of pop music as they collected tunes throughout England. As Julian Onderdonk notes, “[Vaughan Williams] pursued the great majority of his collecting in isolated rural areas and rejected songs betraying the influence of urban popular [“pop”] music.” (*Vaughan Williams Studies*, page 120) They considered the pop music of their day to consist of “poverty-stricken tunes” that exerted a “harmful influence upon the character” and that were “banal” and “vulgar.” They desperately desired to improve the musical tastes of the people, and they considered folk music the perfect tool in their endeavors. Sharp advocated the use of folk tunes in education, wherein he hoped to “effect an improvement in the musical taste of the people, and to refine and strengthen the national character.” Likewise, when asked to edit *The English Hymnal*, Vaughan Williams “found an opportunity to improve musical standards at large in an area where many people were exposed to functional music who might never attend a concert or an opera performance in their lives.” The following two quotes by Sharp and Vaughan Williams are perhaps idealistic in their hopes, but nevertheless reveal their motives behind using folk tunes and their understanding of the distinction from pop music:

*For good music purifies, just as bad music vulgarizes; indeed, the effect of music upon the minds of children is so subtle and so far-reaching that it is impossible to exaggerate the harmful influence upon character which the singing of coarse and vulgar tunes may have. Up till now, the street song has had an open field; the music taught in the schools has been hopelessly beaten in the fight for supremacy. But the mind that has been fed upon the pure melody of the folk will instinctively detect the poverty-stricken tunes of the music-hall, and refuse to be captivated and deluded by their superficial attractiveness. Good taste is, perhaps, largely a matter of environment; but it is also the result of careful and early training. (Sharp, *English Folk Song*)*

*In the English-speaking countries where artistic impulses are so apt to be inarticulate and even stifled, there are thousands of men and women naturally musically inclined whose only musical nourishment has been the banality of the ballad concert or the vulgarity of the music-hall. Neither of these really satisfied their artistic intuitions, but it never occurred to them to listen to what they called “classical” music, or if they did it was with a prejudiced view determined beforehand that they would not understand it. To such people the folk-song came as a revelation. Here was music absolutely within their grasp, emotionally and structurally much more simple than their accustomed “drawing room” music, and yet it satisfied their spiritual natures and left no unpleasant aftertaste behind it. Here indeed was music for the home such as we had not seen since the days of Thomas Morley when no supper party was complete without music when the cloth was cleared away.*

*Is not folk-song the bond of union where all our musical tastes can meet? We are too apt to divide our music into popular and classical, the highbrow and the lowbrow. One day perhaps we shall find an ideal music which will be neither popular nor classical, highbrow or lowbrow, but an art in which all can take part. . . . We must see to it that our art has true vitality and in it*

*the seeds of even greater vitality. And where can we look for a surer proof that our art is living than in that music which has for generations voiced the spiritual longings of our race? (Vaughan Williams, *National Music*)*

Though perhaps a bit naive, Sharp and Vaughan Williams both demonstrate a clear differentiation between folk and pop music in their motivations.

### Conclusion

Recognition of a difference between folk and pop music may perhaps seem inconsequential, but for a composer like Ralph Vaughan Williams the distinction was at the heart of his life’s work. For Vaughan Williams and his mentor, Cecil Sharp, the commercial nature of music often rendered it banal and vulgar – it was music created specifically to feed the ever-changing appetite of the masses. Vaughan Williams recognized his responsibility as a composer to contribute to the greater good of society. He quickly realized, however, that strictly art music was slipping further out of the grasp of general society. He needed a musical form that was both ennobling and popular, and he found that form in folk music. Perhaps contemporary composers should learn from Vaughan Williams’ example, at least in his clarity of terminology, and at most in his aim to wean the people from vulgar music and draw them with appealing yet uplifting musical offerings. Vaughan Williams portrayed a great optimism in the collective character of a people uninfluenced by politics, entertainment, or pop culture. Indeed, as he wrote so masterfully:

*Can we not truly say of these [English folk-songs] as Gilbert Murray says of that great national literature of the Bible and Homer, “They have behind them not the imagination of one great poet, but the accumulated emotion, one may almost say, of the many successive generations who have read and learned and themselves afresh re-created the old majesty and loveliness. . . . There is in them, as it were, the spiritual life-blood of a people.”*

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# Roy Douglas: A Century



Roy Douglas, Vaughan Williams and the score of *Sinfonia Antartica*

A multitude of tasks surrounds the preparation of the score of a major musical work. Many composers now compose at the computer, but when music was always sketched and written out by hand one can only imagine how taxing this job could be. Vaughan Williams was so absorbed in the process of composition that he would forget, or not bother with, details like clefs and key signatures. And he wrote in ink, so second thoughts were indicated by crossings out and notes added, not always perfectly placed. And to add to the problem, his musical handwriting, even at its best, was notoriously difficult to decipher.

This was the task facing Roy Douglas, Vaughan Williams' musical assistant from 1944 until the composer's death. Roy Douglas celebrated his 100th birthday on December 12. His book *Working with RVW* was published by Oxford University Press in 1972 but is now out of print. In the book he describes – with disarming modesty – his major role in Vaughan Williams' professional life, as well as providing important information about the composer's working methods. Here are a few short extracts from the book:

I have always found it difficult to choose the exact word to describe my position in relation to the composer: copyist is very inadequate; editor too pretentious; collaborator inaccurate; amanuensis is nearer. At one time I coined the phrase "musical midhusband", as my job was to assist the composer in bringing his creations into the world of music.

"Did you go the Royal College of Music or the Academy?" This question made me feel even more embarrassed, for at that time I was very self-conscious about the fact that...I had received no academic training. So I answered shamefacedly: "Neither; I'm afraid I'm one of those dreadful people, a

self-taught musician." His unexpected response to this was: "Thank God for that. I get very tired of these young men from the College who think they know everything."

Dear Douglas, I have been foolish enough to write another symphony [the 6th]. Could you undertake to vet and then copy the score? If in the course of this you have any improvements to suggest I would receive them with becoming gratitude. (A letter from Vaughan Williams, February 1947)

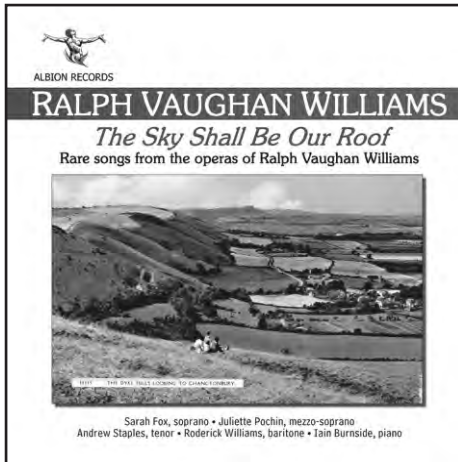
He had a pet little joke which he liked to bring out concerning me. During a rehearsal of a new work, he often went on to the stage to confer with the conductor; on these occasions he used to take me with him and introduce me to the orchestra by saying: "This is Mr. Roy Douglas who writes my music for me." The players always greeted this with appreciative chuckles..."

The Ninth Symphony...has a special significance for me, because it is the only work by Vaughan Williams of which I can claim to have composed one note! In the second movement VW made a small cut just after figure 21 between what are now the second and third bars; in the first of these bars the solo cello has six quavers, the last of these originally descending to a low B flat; after the cut had been made, this meant an awkward leap up to the treble clef in the next bar. I suggested altering this B flat to the G flat above to make a smoother join; VW agreed, and that G flat thus became my sole contribution towards "writing his music for him".

The RVW Society salutes Roy Douglas in his 101th year.

# Albion CD Gets *Record of the Month*

The RVW Society's first CD under the Albion Records label was included in the *Gramophone* Editor's Choice for March 2008. This was excellent news and has led to an increase in sales for the CD, called *The Sky Shall be our Roof*.



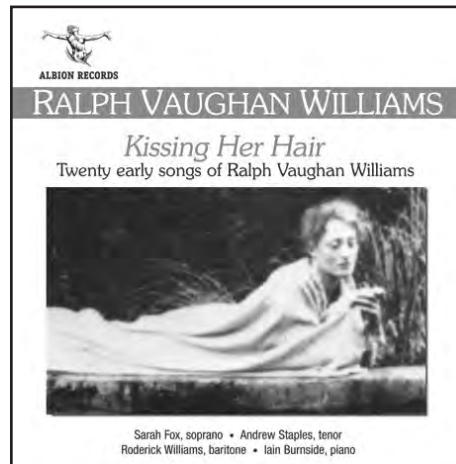
Here is a selection of reviews for our first CD:

"A quite lovely debut release from a new label. Albion Records is the recording arm of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society and, 50 years after his death, an abiding love for his music is evident here in every bar." (James Inverne, *Gramophone*, March 2008)

"Beautifully produced and attractively presented, this likeable anthology deserves to do well..." (Andrew Achenbach, *Gramophone*, March 2008)

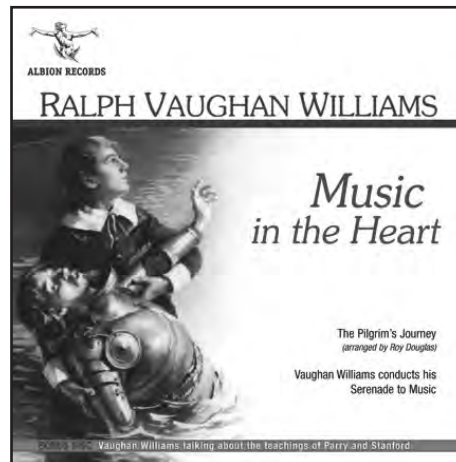
"Here's a fine launch for Albion, the label established by the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society to showcase his less familiar music..." (Michael Scott Rohan, *BBC Music Magazine*, December 2007)

## *Kissing Her Hair*



Our second CD (ALB CD 002) contains world premiere recordings, including *Rondel* and *To daffodils*. Michael Kennedy reviewed the disc for the *Sunday Telegraph* and said: "The romanticism of the young composer finds potent expression in rarer items such as *Claribel* and *The Sky above the roof*, as well as the evergreen *Linden Lea* (sung in the Dorset dialect.) Iain Burnside's accompaniments are ideal."

## *Music in the Heart*



Our third CD is called *Music in the Heart* (ALB CD 009). It has two CDs for the price of one, with the following tracks:

### First CD

*Serenade to Music*, conducted by Vaughan Williams from the Royal Concert at the Royal Festival Hall in London on 22 November 1951.

*The Pilgrim's Journey*, arranged by Roy Douglas, from *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

### Free Bonus CD

Vaughan Williams talking about the teachings of Parry and Stanford, from a 1955 radio broadcast.

A brief excerpt from the Funeral Service of 19 September 1958.

Members have been asking us to release this material so we hope you buy the discs!

All Albion releases are priced at £10.00, plus p& p, and are available from Cynthia Cooper at [cjc@cooper94.plus.com](mailto:cjc@cooper94.plus.com) or by telephone 01728 454820.

Postage:

For 1 CD = £1.80

For 2 CDs = £2.30

For 3 CDs = £2.80

Cheques to be made payable to the RVW Society.

Stephen Connock

## ALBION NEEDS YOUR HELP

Our first two CDs benefited enormously from the direct support of our members. We are now planning our first orchestral CD to include Folk Songs of the Four Seasons.

This is one of the few large-scale Vaughan Williams works never to have been recorded. It will cost around £25,000 and we are looking for our members to contribute directly to about half of this cost.

As before we are hoping for a £100 sponsorship from as many members as possible for this recording. In return members will receive:

- A complimentary copy of the CD
- Invitation to a launch event in London where there will be an opportunity to meet the conductor and others associated with the recording
- Your name in the booklet notes as we thank each of our benefactors

Please contact either Stephen Connock on [albionslc@aol.com](mailto:albionslc@aol.com) or Cynthia Cooper on [cjc@cooper94.plus.com](mailto:cjc@cooper94.plus.com) (tel: 01728 454820) for further information or expression of interest.

WITH THANKS

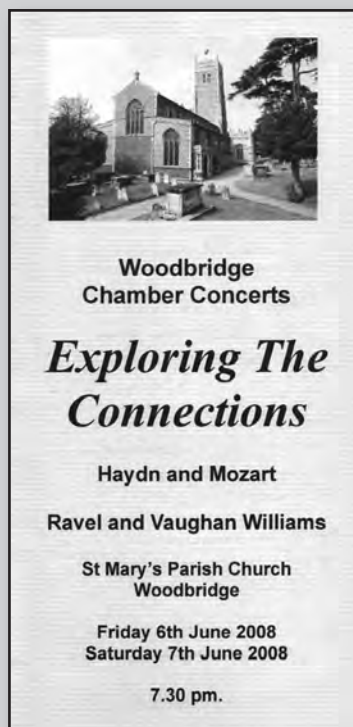
# Remarkable Activities for the 2008 Commemoration

Performances in 2008 of rare Vaughan Williams, as well as his more popular works, have exceeded all our expectations. It seems that opera companies, choral societies and orchestras have embraced the commemorations wholeheartedly. We have already had two new films about the composer – Tony Palmer’s *O thou Transcendent* and John Bridcut’s *The Passions of Vaughan Williams*. There have been many radio tributes, with more to come. The release of Hugh Cobbe’s book of the letters is another milestone and Albion Records is making its contribution with the issue of a special two-CD archive set. This features Vaughan Williams conducting his *Serenade to Music*, as well as the *Pilgrim’s Journey*, arranged by Roy Douglas. This latter work is a fitting inclusion in our Albion disc ALB CD 009 as it also commemorates the 100th birthday of Roy Douglas last December. Further details are on our website [www.rvwsociety.com](http://www.rvwsociety.com) and the following is a selection of major events with which the RVW Society has been involved:



## Philharmonia Orchestra Conducted by Richard Hickox Royal Festival Hall, London

22 May	Symphonies 7 and 1
31 May	Symphonies 8 and 2
2 November	Symphonies 9, 6 and 5
6 November	Symphonies 3, 4 and <i>Dona Nobis Pacem</i>



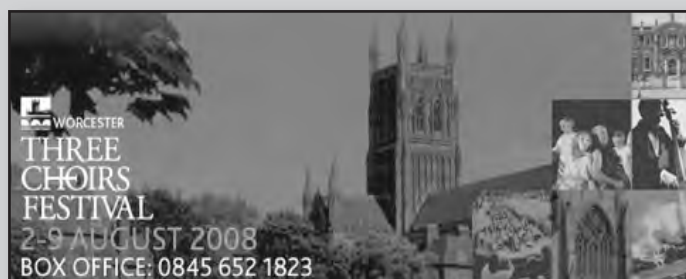
## RVW Festival, Woodhouse

14/15 June  
Four concerts of songs and chamber music



## English Music Festival, Dorchester Abbey

24 May	<i>Te Deum</i>
25 May	<i>Fantasia on a theme of Thomas Tallis</i>
26 May	String Quartets 1 and 2
26 May	Songs



## Three Choirs Festival

5 August  
RVW Event at Pershore Abbey, *Five Mystical Songs, Fantasia on a theme of Thomas Tallis*

7 August  
Worcester, 7.45pm Presentation by RVW Society of the International Award to Sir David Willcocks. 10.00pm: Reception

# Valiant Voices

An invitation to each church in the worldwide Anglican Communion to celebrate the life of Ralph Vaughan Williams, who died 50 years ago, by singing one of his beautiful and noble hymns on 12th October 2008.



This joyful celebration of the power of music to uplift and nourish our spirit is blessed by Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury.

## Inside this leaflet:

- A message from the Archbishop of Canterbury  
*page 2*
- Ralph Vaughan Williams – a life in music  
*page 3*
- The Hymns of RVW  
*page 4*
- In partnership with the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society  
*page 5*
- How you can join in – touching hands across the world  
*page 6*

*God be with you till we meet again*

## 12 October

Valiant Voices: 20,000 leaflets distributed promoting this International Day of Vaughan Williams. Events are being planned across the country. Visit [www.valiantvoices.com](http://www.valiantvoices.com)

## English National Opera

27/28/30 November *Riders to the Sea* (with Prologue)



ENO marks the 50th anniversary of the death of one of England's best-loved composers, Ralph Vaughan Williams, with a major new production conducted by British music specialist Richard Hickox and directed by the acclaimed actress Fiona Shaw.

Closely based on J.M. Synge's 1907 play of the same name, Vaughan Williams' *Riders to the Sea* is set in the Aran Islands and is his most moving and compelling opera. Elemental and hauntingly lyrical, the music communicates all the raw directness of a primitive myth. The opera's visual concept will be jointly devised by Irish multi-media artist Dorothy Cross and set designer Tom Pye.

In association with the Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust

Supported by the English Opera Group

3 performances. Running time: 1hrs 10mins (with prologue)

Pre-performance talk by Tony Palmer: Nov 28 at 6.00pm, London Coliseum, £4

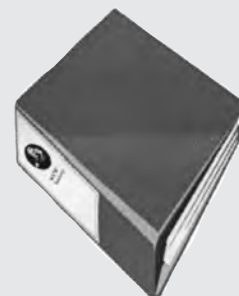
Maurya Patricia Bardon; Bartley Leigh Melrose.

Conductor Richard Hickox; Director Fiona Shaw; Designers Dorothy Cross and Tom Pye

## RVW SOCIETY JOURNAL BINDER OFFER

We are pleased to inform members that a new Binder has been commissioned. The new binders are in black, with elasticated cords to hold 12 issues (four years' worth) of the Journal. The Journal title is in gold on the spine. The price is £12.50 each inc p&p in UK, as before.

Please send your order to: Binder Offer, The RVW Society, c/o 24 Birdcroft Road, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL8 6EQ, UK.



<b>5 July</b>	Salisbury Festival	<i>Pilgrim's Journey, Serenade to Music, Tallis Fantasia</i>
<b>24 July</b>	Proms, Royal Albert Hall, London	VW Symphony No. 4
<b>29 July</b>	Proms	VW Symphony No. 8
<b>8 August</b>	Proms	VW Symphony No. 6
<b>12 August</b>	Proms	<i>Piano Concerto</i>
<b>17 August</b>	Proms	<i>Flos Campi</i>
<b>26 August</b>	Proms	VW Symphony No. 9 and <i>Job</i> . Special event
<b>10 September</b>	Proms	VW Symphony No. 7
<b>3 October</b>	Royal College of Music, London	Ursula's Memorial Concert – Music and Poetry
<b>12 October</b>	St Paul's, Westminster Abbey and Gloucester Cathedral	International Day of Vaughan Williams. <i>Valiant Voices</i>
<b>7 November</b>	London Song Festival, St John Smith Square	RVW complete songs for solo voice and piano.
<b>8 November</b>	New Sussex Opera, Sevenoaks	<i>The Poisoned Kiss</i>
<b>9 November</b>	New Sussex Opera, Eastbourne	<i>The Poisoned Kiss</i>
<b>12 November</b>	New Sussex Opera, Lewes	<i>The Poisoned Kiss</i>
<b>15 November</b>	Conference in New York	A number of key RVW speakers
<b>22/23 November</b>	British Library	Symposium <i>Let Beauty Awake</i>
<b>27 28 29 November</b>	ENO, Colesium London	<i>Riders to the Sea</i>
<b>30 November</b>	City of London Choir, Barbican, London	<i>Hodie</i>

### **The Poisoned Kiss**

A new production by New Sussex Opera. Kent Sinfonia conducted by Nicholas Jenkins, director Michael Moxham, designer Jeremy Daker. **The Stag, Sevenoaks, Saturday 8 November, 7.30 pm - The Floral Hall, Winter Garden, Eastbourne, Sunday 9 November 3 pm - Lewes Town Hall, Wednesday November 12, 7.30 pm.** Casting details will be published as soon as available on the Society's website and at [www.newsussexopera.com](http://www.newsussexopera.com). Booking opens in August. Details available as above. There will be only three performances, one in each of three medium sized venues, so early booking is advisable. In its thirtieth anniversary year, New Sussex Opera is delighted to be presenting a new production of this enchanting opera. As far as we know these will be the only performances anywhere in the world in this fiftieth anniversary year. Anyone who is not familiar with its ravishing and romantic music has a treat in store. NSO is very grateful to the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society and to the Chairman for supporting this production.

# Ralph Vaughan Williams Festival - RVW50 - July 2008

St Martin's Church, Dorking, together with the William Cole Church Music Trust, are holding a Vaughan Williams festival to mark the 50th anniversary of the composer's death. Dorking is, of course, neither the place where Vaughan Williams was born nor where he died, but he did spend a good part of his life there, and he is inseparably connected with the cultural life of the town.

The festival will be held over the four days from Thursday July 3rd to Sunday July 6th. Apart from a showing of the film *49th Parallel* (with Vaughan Williams' score) at the Dorking Halls Premier Cinema on Sunday afternoon, the events take place in St Martin's Church, Dorking.

There are lunchtime recitals at 1pm on Thursday and Friday and a "Coffee Concert" by the Dorking Choral Society at 11am on Saturday (*all admission free, with retiring collection.*)

There are also evening events at 8pm on Thursday and Friday and 7pm on Saturday. Tickets for these will be available from the Dorking Halls box office. In common with many concerts given in churches (*where there is no bar to retire to in the interval*) a glass of wine is included in the ticket price.

On Sunday, the 10am Patronal Festival Eucharist will feature music by Vaughan Williams, including the anthem *Let all the World*, and at 6pm there will be a Festival Songs of Praise which will include interviews with people who knew Vaughan Williams, his *Te Deum in G*, many of his hymns and others from the English Hymnal plus a commentary on the hymn tunes by Martin Ellis.

*The fullest regularly updated information can be found online at [www.rvw50.org](http://www.rvw50.org).*

## Notification of our Fourteenth AGM on Sunday October 5th 2008 at 2.30 pm

This is to alert all members to our next AGM which will be held at the Royal College of Music, Prince Consort Road, London SW7 2BS, at 2.30 pm on Sunday October 5th 2008. In this commemorative year we have opted for a special concert at the College, after the AGM, involving Roderick Williams (baritone) and Iain Burnside (piano). They will perform some of the songs from our Albion CDs. The programme is as follows:

To daffodils  
Rondel  
Linden Lea  
Songs from The Pilgrim's Progress  
Songs of Travel

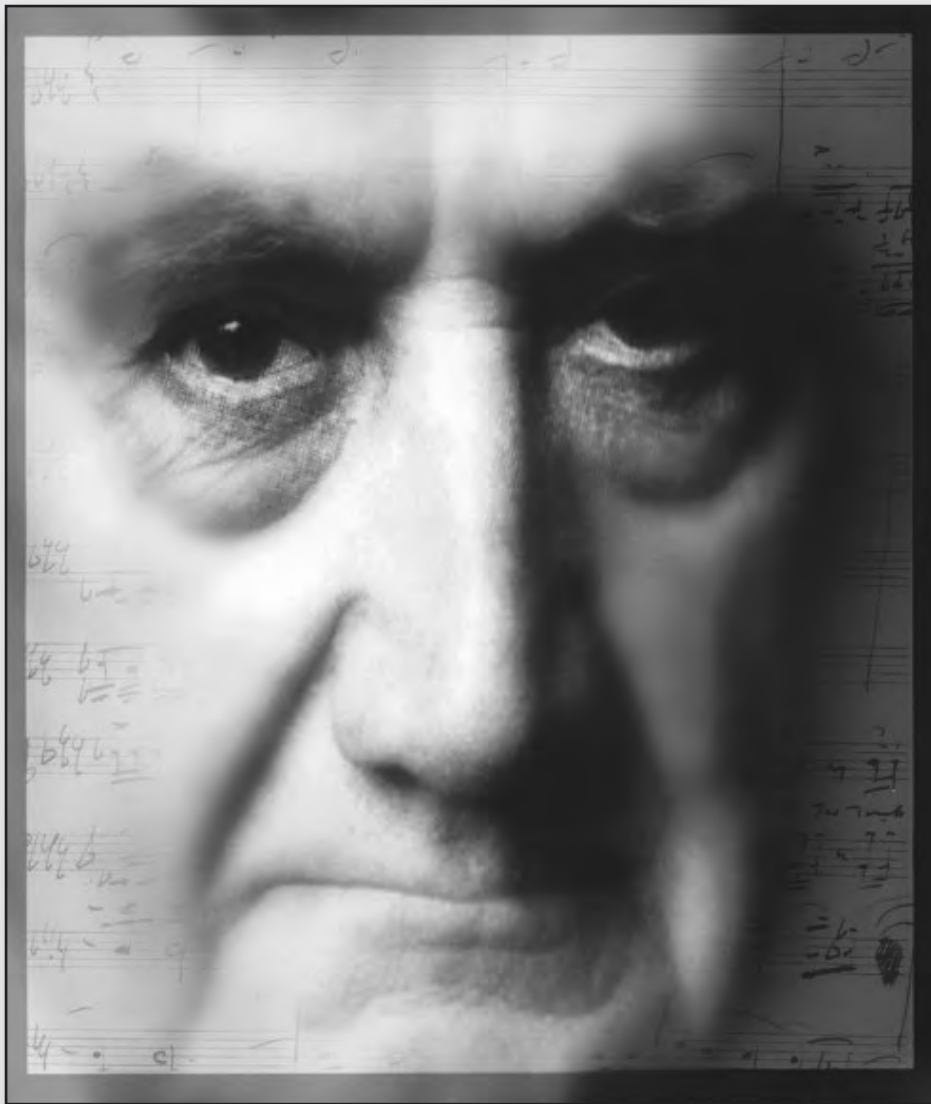
There will be a small charge of £10 towards the cost of the concert and this is payable on the day. All members are urged to attend this important AGM in this Commemorative Year.

**All AGM papers, including the Annual Report and Accounts,  
are enclosed with this June Journal**

**THE MAYFIELD SINGERS** is an amateur choir from Orkney. Its conductor is RVW Society member Neil Price. A CD has recently appeared, well filled with choral settings of poems by Robert Burns. There is only one Vaughan Williams piece, his beautiful arrangement of *Ca' the Yowes to the Knowes*, but there are many other arrangements of traditional songs as well as a number of original compositions from composers such as Nicholas Maw, James MacMillan and other, perhaps lesser-known, names.

Neil writes "You can rest assured that RVW's name is kept alive and kicking in this remote outpost – we have sung many of his unaccompanied choral pieces and hope to do the whole of the *Mass* in the near future. It may be a surprise to know that Peter Maxwell Davies is also a devotee! It is great for Orkney that he finds his inspiration here and is firmly resident."

Further information about the choir and the CD can be found at [www.mayfield-singers.org](http://www.mayfield-singers.org).



Homage to the Visionary  
Ralph Vaughan Williams,  
fifty years after the  
composer's death, 2008.

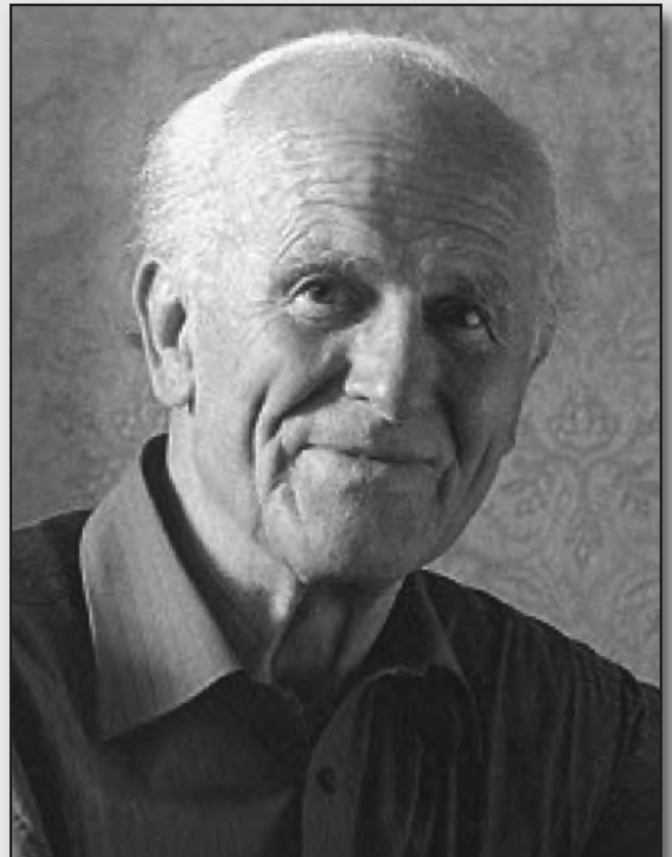
This limited-edition colour  
poster is A3 size and it is  
being offered at a special  
RVW Society members'  
price of £15 including  
postage by Jonathan  
Clifford-Smith of Marsgreen  
Studio, 87 Hoo Marina,  
Rochester. Kent, ME3 9TG  
(tel 01634-251129); e-mail  
LimitedEditions@easy.com

## *Congratulations to* Sir David Willcocks

In this 50th anniversary year of the death of Ralph Vaughan Williams, the RVW Society is proud to celebrate the lifetime achievement of Sir David Willcocks by presenting him with the Society's coveted *Medal of Honour* at the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester Cathedral on August 7th 2008.

Members are urged to attend this concert which features a performance of *A Sea Symphony*. There will also be a party afterwards in the marquee in honour of Sir David Willcocks. Tickets are available from the Three Choirs Festival Box Office, tel. 0845 652 1823.

*Charity number 1017175*



# Letters

*We are always pleased to receive contributions for this page*

## ***O Thou Transcendent***

I hope I will be permitted to present further comments on Tony Palmer's film, having now had time to study it at leisure on DVD. I'm afraid that watching it again has sent me into Victor Meldrew mode.

I have recently discovered from a friend's home video that my Voiceprint DVD acquired as a result of the flyer inserted in the RVWS Journal differs from the original broadcast and possibly from later, corrected, DVDs in that the erroneous picture of Sir George Grove referred to below has been replaced by the correct one of Charles Villiers Stanford. I say "correct", but if one looks at it carefully it becomes obvious that it is a mirror image! Another example about the general laxity in the film's editing.

I can only conclude that the Voiceprint DVD was produced before the TV showing, and later DVDs were corrected. I have been unable to find any other changes. However, my comments below arise from viewing the Voiceprint version.

I am really surprised at the degree of approval in the columns of the February Journal. Indeed, to my mind Rikky Rooksby is the only person to have considered the film critically, and summed up its faults, not least the fact that in seeking to dispel the "cowpat" image, Palmer has gone disastrously and unjustifiably overboard in the opposite direction. Among other things, to use *Sinfonia Antartica* as evidence for the composer's alleged sense of hopelessness in old age is manifestly ludicrous. It was a brilliant description of Scott's last journey, for goodness' sake!

Apart from defects in the overall concept, another worrying aspect was the many errors in the film, indicative of sloppiness in editing. Why was the *London Symphony* not illustrated by images of Edwardian London, rather than those of Mitchell & Kenyon's northern England, including the Oldham Corporation fire engine? What about the nasty splice in the recording of that same symphony? Why did we get a picture of Sir George Grove to illustrate RVW's studying with Stanford? Why was *Job* illustrated by what seemed to be a film of *Checkmate* by Bliss? Why was Sir David Willcocks' sole contribution a comment on the size of RVW's feet? (I shudder to think why this was put in.) Why was the *Eighth Symphony* illustrated by shots of Sargent and Larry Adler? What was the point of the family friend's unnecessary and totally unjustified denigration of the village and church of Down Ampney? Why have Barbara Dickson sing (and murder) *The sky above the roof*? Art song is definitely not her forte.

Oh yes, and many of the captions were incorrect. I could go on.

As to the BBC's rejecting the film, is this true? As long ago as October 2006 we were told at the AGM that both Tony Palmer and the BBC were proposing films to mark the 50th anniversary, and that Palmer looked like he was going to

upstage the BBC by getting his version out first. Indeed I understood that the intention was that Channel 5 was to broadcast it in five weekly episodes starting in November 2007. I suspect that Channel 5 balked at putting out a "cultural" programme over five evenings – it's not really their style, let's face it. Possibly it was then offered to the BBC who rejected it because they had their own plans (or even recognised its faults, although I doubt this). It thus ended up in a graveyard slot on New Year's Day morning.

With reference to my previous letter, and with the benefit of the DVD, I realise that it was not Charles Potipher's voice (doctored or not) emerging from the phonograph, but probably that of Mrs Humphreys of Ingrave, recorded around 1908. I apologise for my error.

To close, on the much acclaimed "controversial" nature of the film, may I comment that it is the easiest thing in the world to be "controversial"? One way is to spout a lot of unsubstantiated theories. and illustrate them with inappropriate images.

*Michael J. Gainsford  
Burbage, Leicestershire, UK*

## **More...**

Rikky Rooksby's letter (Journal, Feb 2008) on *O Thou Transcendent* echoes what I feel about this film. He exposes its weaknesses with great clarity and in doing so has made a statement about RVW's music which rings true. At the same time he takes a swipe at the pretentious people who claim to have an insight into the meaning of particular pieces and the more widespread attitudes in the musical 'establishment' concerning what is 'good' and 'bad' music. My congratulations to Mr Rooksby – a fine letter, beautifully argued.

Beauty was important to the composer and when he wrote beautiful pieces or movements, he – to paraphrase what Robert Simpson said about composing a good tune – 'bloody well meant it'. Rooksby is also right to emphasise the 'visionary' or 'transcendental' aspects. It was this aspect of his music that first attracted me to RVW and still hits me hardest emotionally. But his music is also violent, funny, jolly, sad, bleak in turn and it is his mastery of this emotional range which makes the complete composer. If I hear any more tosh about what this or that 'means', I will throw a fit.

The other aspect of the film which upset me was its treatment of Adeline. It is one thing to state the facts but to speculate on the sex life of the couple in the way it was presented was tasteless and, more importantly, probably upsetting to her family, a representative of which also appeared in the film. I would be interested to know his reaction. She probably had rheumatoid arthritis and, apart from aspirin, there was no effective treatment at that time. The therapeutic effect of gold salts was discovered in 1935 but would not have been available for some time. This would have been too late for Adeline.

To add insult, it was suggested that this condition was psychosomatic, the unconscious motive being to avoid marital relations. This is pure psychobabble and to put such unsubstantiated stuff in a serious film is a bit grubby. The

illness doubtless had a major impact on their sex life, so his affair with Ursula would be understandable to many. Once these 'meaning of...' people get into their stride, there is no stopping them and a more forensic mode of thinking might temper their imagination.

Dr Gavin Bullock,  
Winchester, UK.

### More...

With the exception of the objective contributions from Mr. Gainsford and Mr. Rooksby, I was dismayed by the wave of enthusiasm emoted by your members in respect of Tony Palmer's programme on Vaughan Williams, which suggested that the correspondents seem either to possess limited critical faculty or were simply not paying attention. Most of this outpouring was so imbued with personalized reaction that it is impossible to deal with, but I cannot disregard Mr. Nelson's regret that Ursula Vaughan Williams did not live to see it. In response to my criticisms of Ken Russell's *South Bank Show*, Ursula told me that she found Russell a bore, what she would have made of this one is not hard to imagine. I wish I hadn't seen it either. The recording I made has been downgraded from DVD to VHS purely for the purposes of reference.

Over the years the Society has been outstanding in external promotion of the standing and work of Vaughan Williams, unfortunately among some of the regular contributors are those who have apparently gained little from it. The Society was formed only after persuasion of Ursula by people such as Stephen Connock and John Bishop; my understanding is that her reluctance was based on the legitimate concern that societies tend to become mere fans clubs, of which the response to the Palmer programme provides a depressing example. As these letters reveal, most people will have personal reactions to Vaughan Williams' music which will widely differ; there's nothing wrong in that but this does not justify imposing it as definitive where there is nothing but personal reaction to substantiate it.

Mr. Furneaux assures us that the programme was "thoroughly researched". Not thorough enough, considering the many serious omissions for which space could not be found in over two and a half hours, much of which look to be filled out with irrelevancy. "Production values are high throughout." Really? How does that square with a chronologically mixed up account, rambling back and forth, with inappropriate and irrelevant pictorial references, some of them clearly wrong? Mr. Furneaux neglects to explain the significance of derelict Cornish tin mines, especially with regard to Norfolk or the relationship between Oldham and Edwardian London. That VW was in charge of an ambulance we know, seemingly with the French army!

Amongst the "insights" credited by Tadeusz Kasa was the one allowed by the programme to Sir David Willcocks concerning the size of VW's feet but the significance of it escapes me. Compared to this, what does it matter if an important symphony, containing a legitimate reference to war (No. 3) was left out? On the other hand the programme tried to represent the *Tallis Fantasia* and even the *Lark Ascending* as some presage of the

forthcoming carnage on the Western Front, which is manifest nonsense, comparable with a claim in another recent documentary that the Henri Cartier Bresson's photograph of a man jumping a puddle predicted the rise of Fascism and World War II. And yet the Third Symphony, which has a direct relationship with World War I was not even mentioned. How bad is that? Research? What research?

All of this has been submerged in a wave of uncritical reaction as evidenced by praise from the Radio Times and BBC Music Magazine, anything goes. I would be the last to decry Tony Palmer's ambition to demonstrate that Vaughan Williams was not a composer of idyllic folksy arrangements: I have long protested at this view of him, as far back as my summary review of VW's place in the English cultural heritage (RVW and the nation's heritage: RVWSJ No. 3, 1995). While it is right to dispel the notion of bovines looking over gates, as Mr. Rooksby has pointed out, the documentary erred in the opposite direction, VW was a much more complex individual, which brings me to the disservice done to him by personalized interpretations imposed upon the viewer.

It is well known that perception or interpretation of a work of Art will differ from person to person and also from the intention of the artists, if they had one, but when it comes to making definitive statements which may later be taken as authoritative, evidence is needed. In two BBC programmes Mr. Johnson had already categorically stated that Bartók used the Fibonacci series in his famous work *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, although no Bartók authority accepts it and even other Fibonacci enthusiasts differ with him on the examples. So these interpretations of the "meaning" of symphonies 6 and 9 must be similarly questioned. In the case of Symphony No. 6 such evidence as the composer has provided from Shakespeare does not support the above, but, as with the 4th Symphony, why should anyone concern themselves with the mere opinion of the composer? Thematically the work reflects the great influence of VW's relationship with Holst – a major factor which did not receive adequate attention.

The same applies to the Ninth Symphony, the genesis of which has no nihilistic evocations of the kind illustrated by the film's scenes or its commentators. It is widely believed to have developed from an idea about the Wessex landscape, with particular reference to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, an interpretation plausibly supported by structured evidence by Alain Frogley. If anyone doubts the extent of Vaughan Williams' interest in this subject it is worth recording that he undertook to walk at least some of the route taken by Tess from Flintcomb Ash to Emminster, the purpose of which was *not* collecting folksong (see *On the Trail of Tess*, RVWSJ No. 15, June 1999). This did not appear in the programme, neither was the significance of his repeated visits to Weobley (see *An Appraisal of Ella Mary Leather*, Rev. Richard Birt, RVWSJ No. 13, 1998). So much for research.

It is possible that none of this will appear in John Bridcut's programme either because after a long series of correspondence with the BBC, no interest has been shown in acquiring the information or contacts. What correspondents fail to understand is that the media is about serving up what they think you should have – selective and tendentiously. Not long ago a BBC

producer patronisingly defended programme errors on the grounds that programmes are not made for informed people. So what are they doing for “uninformed” people?

The film credits the contributors individually but also “the RVW Society”, which raises the question what assistance did the Society give to this production and to what extent may this be presumed to imply approval? So far as I am able to discover, the answer in both cases is negative, so why was it there? Correspondents are presumably unaware of the controversy which arose from the BBC’s decline of the Palmer documentary: the producer claims to have been rejected out of hand by a BBC commissioning editor who asked to be informed “if Mr. V. Williams has an important premiere in the future, as this findability might allow us to reconsider.” (Observer, 09/12/2007) What palpable ignorant nonsense. Mr. Palmer would not name this source, nor did the Director General on whom he launched a personal attack, challenge him to do so; but this is quite believable since I had a similar experience when offering to provide material and contacts for John Bridcut’s programme.

Like Mr. Rooksby and Mr. Gainsford I found the Palmer programme muddled in the presentation, not comprehensive, and badly stitched up with stock footage. Obviously others are easily satisfied, so where’s the harm of it? The harm is not the quality of programming, which I thought inadequate, nor even the fact that it was an unbalanced presentation of Vaughan Williams’ achievement, but that this sustained chorus of thoughtless endorsement will serve to extend misunderstanding of the composer into the future.

Let Ursula have the last word: despite her sadly obvious physical decline perhaps Ursula was trying to tell us something with “I will not have all these ideas...”

David J. Tolley,  
Southam, Warwickshire, UK.

## Two in One

Perhaps the time has come to draw the exchange between Eric Seddon and myself to a close, so this is coming to the Journal as a letter within a letter. I hope that makes sense.

Dear Eric,

I hope you will forgive the presumption of addressing you by your first name but I feel we know each other quite well by now. Your comments on my *Oedipus Rex* comparison do not seem to me to refute what I was trying to say, though I admit that, like you, I am sometimes forced to be too brief in what I write. The references to Cocteau and to Stravinsky’s “neo-classical” phase are not germane to what I wanted to say, which was that Stravinsky found the story meaningful without sharing its theology. I confess to you now that I have been profoundly shocked when talking to university students who had no idea about the Sermon on the Mount and the parable of the Good Samaritan. You might ask me why this should be so if I have now relapsed into a “reasonably cheerful agnosticism”. I would reply that it is because I profoundly believe in the parable and the sermon, even if I cannot believe in the supernatural aspect of Christianity. Furthermore, I suspect that several other critics

may share my beliefs in this respect (though I have no evidence either way). In this respect, I would respond to your challenge to produce a book from the past thirty years that is “from a perspective incongruent with or challenging to secular materialism” by citing Wilfrid Meller’s *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*. It is written by a man who, I am led to believe, calls himself a “secular humanist”; it certainly gives much attention to the religious, mystical aspects of VW’s works. It was Mellers who emphasised the “double” nature of Vaughan Williams: the Christian agnostic, the radical traditionalist. I suppose I am saying that I do not accept your presentation of two simple opposites, Christian and “secular materialist”. You know, when you write of “...secular scholarship which claimed the composer had no sincere attraction to the supernatural or mystical element of Christianity; no fascination for the deeper aspects of theology...” I am not aware of any critic who has asserted that Vaughan Williams was insincere or that he was not fascinated by deeper aspects of theology. (That said, I agree with you entirely that any attempt to find in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* a “political” paradise is downright stupidity; personally, while being of a leftish disposition, I remain staunchly agnostic as regards the attainment of the earthly paradise.)

As regards the “perfect aural representation of the Cross”, I did understand from the outset the cross-shaped distribution of notes (with a little manoeuvring). Please note what I wrote : I can’t see why it is a perfect aural representation of the Cross, any more than any other similar conjunction. I was not being flippant: Do-Sol-Re-Do can do as well, as, for that matter, could Re-Sol-Do-Do (which imitates the arm movements up-down-left-right, or up-down-right-left in the eastern tradition.) I could expand to Do-Me-Fa-Do and so on. I am not denying that VW’s ordering is better than mine; I suppose it is your word “perfect” that prompted my reaction.

Finally, Benjamin Britten. Yes, of course he can be examined from a Christian viewpoint too. I cited him as an example before I heard John Rutter’s statement that he himself was an agnostic. This came as a surprise to me, and I guess to quite a few others, since a large proportion of his music is of an avowedly Christian nature: carols by the armful, a *Gloria*, a *Magnificat* and so on. But he lives and works at Clare College, Cambridge, part of a long tradition of choral and vocal music expressing the Christian faith. Does that mean that Mr. Rutter is insincere in his compositions?

I have a small confession. In what little spare time I have, I occasionally write music. I make no great claims for it but it does get performed from time to time. Among my compositions are several Christmas carols, a *Missa Brevis*, an *In Paradisum*. I have just finished a *Sanctus* and *Benedictus*, possibly part of *another Mass*. Does this mean that I am “insincere”? Or does it suggest that trying to contribute to a long and beautiful tradition, trying to embellish words and concepts for which I have a high regard, trying in a small way to create a work of art is not a bad aim in life?

Thank you for your insights and your comments.

Jeffrey Aldridge,  
Dalkeith, Midlothian, UK

## The Ninth

I hope it's not too late to contribute another opinion about the Ninth Symphony, a particular favorite of mine. I'm glad you asked for impressions of this work. I love it: to me it is a mixed bag of emotion. It always sparks cinematic images in my imagination (all of my favorite Vaughan Williams music does that for me, it's easy to understand why he was invited to write film scores.) Perhaps because I'm American, I hear passages in the Ninth that remind me of Bernard Herrmann and Aaron Copland.

I own the historic Adrian Boult recording. When I played it again, just before writing this letter, I imagined a world full of grandeur, danger, mystery, ruined in some places, but full of fascinating corners. There's a theme in the second movement that makes me think of tragic love, and I am particularly fond of the quirky third movement, which reminds me of marching robots. In fact I think RVW's Ninth Symphony would have made a fine score for Part 3 of the *Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy. So I'm startled when I read that so many people feel its tone is bleak and ultimately hopeless (and even more startled when people say the same about Symphony 5). I wonder if the answer lies in the fact that the emotions in Vaughan Williams' music are so complex? The first RVW piece I ever heard was the *Thomas Tallis Fantasia*, which pierced me to the core. I had never heard music that evoked the natural world so perfectly, yet was also deeply spiritual. My favorite piece is *The Lark Ascending*, which always reminds me that emotions have two sides. For every moment of joy, there's the knowledge that sorrow exists too.

My favorite movement in the *Pastoral Symphony* is the second. When I was writing my fifth novel, I listened to it over and over, trying to catch the tone. I mentioned it to my brother the other day, and once again heard the "b" word (bleak). And considering that RVW wrote this symphony when he was serving in France during World War I, this interpretation is justified. But it seems to me he must have seen some beautiful, lonely places during this time. I've lived in Arizona all my life, a state full of beautiful, lonely places that many people might consider bleak. I hear that second movement and I see beautiful-lonely. I hear RVW's Seventh Symphony, and I see Scott trekking into Antarctica, but I also see an expedition to Mars. When I hear the Fifth I often see the Grand Canyon, though it couldn't be farther from London during WWII. I hear the Ninth and wish I were a fantasy film maker so I could use it as a score.

Okay, I'm a bit of a kook, and my other musical preferences are eclectic, everything from Rachmaninoff and Prokofiev to Respighi, Grieg, Debussy and Liadov. Much as I love these other composers, no one speaks to me as clearly as Ralph Vaughan Williams. In the last movement of his Ninth I can see things clashing, falling down, coming apart, but the strings and that subtle harp at the end seem to suggest that the stars continue to shine down on us anyway, and maybe the things that fall apart are the things that should. By the way, my favorite piece by Gustav Holst is *Egdon Heath*, the essential beautiful-lonely.

Emily Hogan,  
Glendale, Arizona, USA .

## More...and Religion Too

Alas, the "printer's devil" has made my letter in the last Journal read that the "finale of the Ninth" had been called "heaven-storming", whereas I meant the finale of *Hodie*, that is, the last climax of the cantata "Ring Out Ye Crystal Spheres".

I fear I'm inflicting too many letters on your readers, so this will be my last word on RVW and Religion – until I find something else to say, that is! I grant to you that it can be too easy to claim that the Ninth is fundamentally optimistic just because it ends with a long-held E major chord. Nevertheless a case can be developed, namely that as in the Symphony 5/Symphony 6 thesis/antithesis "in the furious turmoil of the first few bars" of the latter "Eden is obliterated" (Mellers), so in the still small voices of the last few bars of symphonies 6, 7 and 9, Paradise is rescued, if not regained, in accordance with Shelley's lines:

*To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite...  
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates  
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates...  
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.*

Thus we have: Symphony 6: the warmth which penetrates the end of the Epilogue is bested when the E flat major chords no longer hold their own against E minor. Symphony 7: The final desolation of song and wind is earthed on the low strings' pedal drone on tonic G, so quiet that I can't now hear it. Symphony 9: The firm E major chords outlast the demented feline saxophones, and release us from the "Slough of Despond" (Parry-Jones in Journal No. 3). Add the evidence of RVW's last work *The First Nowell*, and the letter to Mrs. Hooper (Journal No. 27) saying that not to sing the words of *My Dancing Day* is to "miss a great spiritual experience" and I conclude with the thought, on RVW's spiritual/religious stance, that "if it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it is a duck."

As for his status, Rabinowitz and J. F. Weber damn him with faint praise. My orchestral premierships of twelve, in birthdate-order, is: Handel, Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Berlioz, Wagner, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Sibelius and Vaughan Williams. If there has to be a "top four" as in football, I recognise the "3 B's" – Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. I demur to name the fourth, but think Sibelius is a strong candidate...Enough, lest I draw a hornet's nest down on my head.

Frank McManus,  
Todmorden, UK.

## RVW at the Proms

Having had a previous letter published in the Journal where I berated the BBC for scandalously virtually ignoring Vaughan Williams at the Proms, it is only right that, having recovered from the near fatal shock of seeing five symphonies and much else besides in this year's schedule, I pay tribute here to the new Controller or whoever was responsible. I am particularly delighted to see the *Sinfonia Antartica* and *Job* included as both are unfairly underrated even by Vaughan Williams admirers.

Let us hope that this marks the start of better things to come. What with this, twelve entries in Classic FM's Hall of Fame and

*The Lark Ascending* at No.1 for the second year, RVW is suddenly fashionable. Whether he would be as enthusiastic as I am might, however, be questionable. The somewhat austere Holst was reported as saying “Woe are you when men speak well of you!” when *The Planets* achieved its great success. Margaret Hodge and her politically correct ilk will doubtless regard this as socially exclusive, that an English music festival actually celebrates English music, but no matter!

Nigel Blore,  
Billericay, Essex, UK.

### RVW on Classic FM

Every year, the radio station Classic FM invites its listeners to vote for their most popular pieces of classical music. Classic FM then draws up its “Hall of Fame” comprising the 300 most popular works.

Readers of the Journal will be delighted to hear that, for the second year running, the most popular piece of classical music was Vaughan Williams’ *The Lark Ascending*. In fact, the work has been one of the top choices for some years, reaching third position in 2006 and second in 2005. No less than twelve Vaughan Williams works reached the top 300, believed to be the largest number since the Hall of Fame was established.

The third most popular work was the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* which has now been in the top thirteen for the last four years. Other works include *Five Variants of “Dives and Lazarus”*, the *English Folk Song Suite*, the *Fantasia on “Greensleeves”*, the *Serenade to Music*, the *Sea Symphony*, the *London Symphony*, the *Pastoral Symphony*, *Symphony No 5*, *The Wasps Overture* and *Toward the Unknown Region*.

In comparison, Elgar has had a total of fourteen works in the top 300 in the past four years. Like VW, twelve of his works appear in this year’s top 300, of which the *Cello Concerto* was in seventh position and the *Enigma Variations* in ninth.

With regard to other British composers, Malcolm Arnold managed to get into the top 300 for the first time in four years, with his *2nd Clarinet Concerto*. Benjamin Britten, George Butterworth, Jeremiah Clarke, Gerald Finzi, Gustav Holst, Hamish McCunn, Peter Maxwell Davies, Henry Purcell, John Stanley and Thomas Tallis all had just one work. Frederick Delius, Hubert Parry, John Rutter and William Walton achieved two works. George Frederick Handel managed seven.

However, as readers will no doubt point out, the list has substantial omissions. There is nothing of Bax, E J Moeran or Stanford. The recently formed Stanford Society is determined to make amends next year.

It is also significant that, apart from Peter Maxwell Davies and John Rutter, no contemporary composers appear at all. It will not surprise readers to learn that there was no music by Harrison Birtwistle!

May I urge all members of the RVW Society to make a diary note for March 2009 and then vote for their most favourite piece by VW, so that next year’s Hall of Fame will see VW as

Britain’s most popular classical composer with substantially more than merely 12 works.

Chris Cope  
Kings Nympton, Devon, UK.

### A Plea

It is good to be able to wholeheartedly welcome the Society’s issue of two discs of RVW songs. I have enjoyed listening to both of them very much indeed and anticipate with pleasure any future issues.

It occurs to me that it might be possible for the Society to issue under its own aegis one of EMI’s RVW recordings that has not seen the light of day on CD. I refer to the late 70s LP, HMV HQS 1412 “As I Walked Out – Folk Song Arrangements of Vaughan Williams”.

It contains twenty-four songs performed by Robert Tear with Philip Ledger and Hugh Bean as accompanists and whilst I can imagine a slightly lighter voice than Tear’s being more to my taste, nevertheless the whole record is a delight.

So far only eight of these have been re-released, as fillers to a HMV Classics disc of Britten folk-song arrangements and it would be nice to have the rest. For me, the two best things on the LP are the first and last tracks, *The Captain’s Apprentice* and *How Cold the Wind Doth Blow* (or *The Unquiet Grave*) – the latter with its unforgettably beautiful violin part.

In the sleeve note, Michael Kennedy writes “*The Unquiet Grave*, one of the greatest and most harrowing tunes in the world...the violin part was provided ad lib, but by now should be compulsory! Some years ago I described this as VW’s greatest work for voice and violin, and I stand by that assessment.”

So, need more be said? Officers of the Society; how about approaching EMI on the subject?

E.J. Westhead,  
Penwortham, Lancashire, UK.

### Another

On Sunday April 20th the broadcast of *The Choir* on BBC Radio III featured the Leith Hill Festival and memories of RVW in Dorking. Unfortunately I was unable to record this for my collection of RVW items.

If any reader of the Journal did manage to record it I would be happy to meet the cost of copying it and posting it to me at: Michael J Gainsford, 156 Sapcote Road, Burbage, Hinckley, Leics LE10 2AY.

Michael J. Gainsford  
Burbage, Leicestershire, UK

# Concert Reviews

## **The sixth (Closely Followed by a Lark) in Leicester**

On Saturday February 2nd the Bardi Orchestra, under Andrew Constantine, presented a “Vaughan Williams Anniversary Concert” at the De Montfort Hall, Leicester.

The Bardi Orchestra was founded by Andrew Constantine in 1986 “with the aim of providing a new standard of orchestral playing in Leicestershire”, and this aim has been achieved. For an amateur group it plays to a very high standard, as attested to by Dame Janet Baker, after a concert in 1997. The Honorary President of the Bardi was Lady Barbirolli until her recent death.

The programme chosen was imaginative, opening with Vaughan Williams’ Sixth Symphony followed by *The Lark Ascending*, and closing with Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony. The latter two works provided a pastoral contrast to the first. (Incidentally, it has just occurred to me that nobody has dared to even whisper “cowpats” in relation to the Beethoven masterpiece!)

The orchestra performed to its usual high standard, but I was a little surprised that the opening of the Vaughan Williams symphony was not so loud as I had expected from listening to CDs and previous concerts. This was perhaps understandable bearing in mind the amateur status, and slightly reduced numbers, of the orchestra. The movement seemed to be taken at a slower pace than usual (although I did not note the timing), and appeared to present a more benign aspect than that to which I have been accustomed. But any sense of benignity vanished thereafter. There was menace aplenty in the “two hot sausages” movement. The cor anglais solo near the end was played most movingly by Stephanie Oatridge.

The third movement was exciting and I got the impression that the conductor was just about holding things together, which is perhaps how things should be! The saxophonist (Andrew Piper, doubling bass clarinet) played splendidly. I was quite disappointed that his contribution was not acknowledged by the conductor at the end of the performance. The Epilogue was performed as the composer wished, with little overt expression and no crescendo, with a minimum of fluffs from certain instruments. The audience (the house was about sixty per cent full – good for a non-professional orchestra) was remarkably free of the coughs and shufflings that often disfigure this movement.

It always seems rather a desecration to applaud after this supposedly nihilistic ending, and there are usually a few seconds of quiet before the clapping starts. But we were in for a big surprise this time. The last chord had hardly died away before the conductor raised his baton again, and the leader (Adam Summerhayes) rose to his feet and launched into *The Lark Ascending*.

Now, I have conceived a violent antipathy to *Neptune* from *The Planets* being followed by Colin Matthews’ execrable appendage *Pluto*, and cannot conceive how any composer with any aesthetic sense at all could perpetrate such a thing; so why was my reaction to the *Lark*’s coming hard on the heels of the Sixth not similar? The two pieces seemed to fit together seamlessly (same or related

key?) Whatever one thinks that the *Epilogue* is “about”, its being followed by the life-affirming *Lark* seemed to give out the message that there was some hope for us after all! But I am ninety per cent certain that the composer would not have approved the juxtaposition of these two works so far separated by mood and time. I remain ambivalent, but the near faultless performance by the soloist certainly helped.

After the interval we had Beethoven’s *Pastoral*, a complete contrast to Vaughan Williams’ symphony with the same number, and everyone went home happy. The concert had even erased the unpleasant memories of watching Wales inexplicably win at Twickenham that very afternoon.

A word of praise finally for the concert programme, only £1 and most informative. The article on Ralph Vaughan Williams was factual, to the point, and happily free from such errors, inconsequentialities, and wild theorising as disfigured Tony Palmer’s recent film on the composer.

Michael Gainsford

## **JOB in London**

It was back on October 12th 1972 that I sat in this same Royal Festival Hall to hear *Job*, as part of the Centenary celebrations. On that occasion it was the London Philharmonic under Sir Adrian Boult. On Tuesday February 19th, thirty-six years later, it was the BBC Concert Orchestra under Barry Wordsworth. The Boult concert was an inspiring evening so my expectations were high. In the event, this was a disappointing, even dispiriting concert.

The introduction to *Job* was a bland affair, not much improved by the wonderful *Serenade to the Sons of God* that follows. To my astonishment, the audience applauded at the end of this section. Well into *Satan’s Dance of Triumph* I was wondering why. Were they celebrating hearing this superb work in London, or did they think (or hope) it had finished? I concluded the latter. Barry Wordsworth’s conducting did not bring out the mystery of the piece. There was little inner tension in *Job’s Dream* and the *Dance of Job’s Comforter* lacked all sense of oily charm that Boult brought to the scene. *Job’s* subsequent curse lacked conviction – no Old Testament wrath here. As a consequence, Elihu’s gorgeous *Dance of Youth and Beauty* did not console as it can and should. *The Pavane of the Sons of the Morning* made its mark – who could fail with such lovely music – but the performance returned to its bland ways in the *Epilogue*.

Having applauded during the work, the audience singularly failed to respond at the end, the conductor coming out only once. Bizarre.

Stephen Connock

## **Mass in G Minor at Market Harborough**

On March 8th my wife and I attended a Vaughan Williams 50th

anniversary concert presented by the Market Harborough Choral Society, conducted by Anselm Kersten, in the excellent venue of the modern Methodist church hall in this small and attractive market town. The only details of the programme that I had in advance was that the *Mass in G minor* was to be presented, together with Handel's *Zadok the Priest*. On arrival at the hall it was found that we were also to be offered the *Serenade to Music*, and a selection of short works performed by the Sirocco Wind Ensemble.

The MHCS is an amateur group, established in 1967. I counted about sixty-five in the choir, only fifteen of whom were tenors and basses, the latter including, rarely enough, one lady.

Some indication of the difficulties in putting on the *Serenade to Music* became obvious when the opening Handel was performed. Although the choir performed *Zadok* creditably, the only accompaniment was a piano. There was nothing wrong with the pianist, Alan Barraclough, but it just didn't sound right, especially when one has heard it performed at a coronation, with full orchestra and/or organ.

My worst fears were realised when the *Serenade* (in the four soloists version) commenced. Without an orchestra this work does not come over at all, and I thought that both soloists and choir had bitten off far more than they could chew. The result was a bit of a mess, and I hope there were not people in the large audience that had never heard the *Serenade* before, otherwise I fear they'd never wish to hear it again. It was more a foolhardy than bold decision to attempt this work, which after all was written for the best sixteen soloists available in 1938. I am tempted to say that, like Rachmaninov at the first performance, I was reduced to tears, but for a different reason. I did check in Kennedy's catalogue when we got home but found no mention of an arrangement with piano accompaniment. I am not surprised.

I am feeling guilty about panning the choir's efforts in the *Serenade*, but am pleased to report that their performance of the *Mass* was far superior. Having originally been written for Holst's amateur choir meant that it was much more within the capabilities of this group. The choir and soloists sang most movingly, with an unobtrusive *ad libitum* organ accompaniment (as sanctioned by the composer). A performance like this should have gained a few converts.

In between the Handel and the Vaughan Williams the excellent amateur Sirocco Wind Quintet (mostly from nearby Kettering) played miniatures by Gilbert Vinter, Pierre Passereau and the contemporary Gwyn Parry Jones. For a spirited rendering of *Pastime with Good Company* by Henry VIII they discarded their modern instruments and took up crumhorns and drums. This is a very polished group indeed.

My latest two expeditions to Vaughan Williams concerts have coincided with dismal displays by the England rugby team. This time the *Mass* and the wind quintet dispelled all memories of that afternoon's debacle at Murrayfield.

Michael Gainsford

#### **GREENSLEEVES and A SEA SYMPHONY in TOKYO**

On March 15th this year, a quite unusual concert was held in Tokyo, Japan. Why unusual? Because it featured the works by

a well known by name, but rarely performed composer, commemorating his anniversary. The title of the concert was "The Ralph Vaughan Williams Anniversary Concert after 50 years of his death". I dare say it must be the first and the last opportunity of this kind here this year. To my regret, this clearly represents the reality regarding the acceptance of, not only Vaughan Williams' music but also British Classical Music as a whole, in Japan. ("British Pops" has another story, of course.)

#### **The outline of the event is as follows:**

1. Venue: Main Concert Hall (with 1,999 seats) of Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space, Ikebukuro, Tokyo
2. Programme: Vaughan Williams, *Fantasia on "Greensleeves"*; Mendelssohn, *Violin Concerto in E minor*; Vaughan Williams, *A Sea Symphony*
3. Performers: Tokyo Symphony Orchestra conducted by Naoto Otomo; Yasuko Otani, violin; Sally Harrison, soprano; Owen Gilhooly, baritone; Tokyo Symphony Chorus (Chorus Master: Hirohisa Tsuji)

Honestly speaking, the concert can be said a great success. The hall was almost full with very eager, sincere audience, and their response was warm and enthusiastic, especially to the highlight piece *A Sea Symphony*. Maestro Otomo was very relaxed with full confidence as usual, grasping every detail of his beloved symphony, and never lost the intensity and concentration from the beginning to the end. His tempo was proper and persuasive, and the whole music breathed easily and comfortably like a wide ocean tide.

The outstanding performance by Tokyo Symphony Chorus is no doubt worthy of special mention. They are all amateur singers, being organized occasionally on every specific performance basis. For this commemorative concert, they all sang without music. The result was superb. The pitch, the balance, the dynamics, the nuance were almost perfect. The white-out climax they created at the finale was irresistibly moving. I deeply respect their long, patient, dedicated endeavor behind their achievement of the day. The two solo singers specially invited from U.K. for this performance did also very well.

After all, in my opinion, the remarkable success of the anniversary concert should attribute to the long, consistent collaboration between Maestro Otomo (1958) and TSO, under Otomo's strong initiative. TSO, one of the leading orchestras in Japan, has been taking a challenging role as a promoter of rarely performed masterpieces in the modern and contemporary repertoire since its start in 1946. (In fact the *Sea Symphony* was premiered in 1972 in Japan by this orchestra.)

Otomo assumed TSO's Resident Conductor in 1991 and, since then, he has been energetically promoting his beloved British music with TSO, among his audience. So far, he performed three major oratorios of Elgar (how courageous!) for example, and as far as Vaughan Williams is concerned, he has already performed six symphonies of his (how ambitious!) In the course, he must have a tough time quite often to persuade the rather reluctant management side of TSO, I imagine.

Now, together with Maestro Tadaaki Otaka (1947~), Music Director, Sapporo Symphony Orchestra and Conductor Laureate of BBC Symphony Orchestra of Wales, Otomo is one of the most

active champions of British music in Japan. I believe that those who filled 2,000 seats of the hall at the anniversary concert largely consisted of the audience cultivated and enlightened by Otomo. They all seemed to warmly understand and share Otomo's love and enthusiasm toward Vaughan Williams' music, creating a sort of friendly unity in the atmosphere of the hall. Please keep your eyes on Otomo and his company from now on, and cheer them whenever you have any opportunity to do so!

Shigeo Nakano

[Shigeo lives in Tokyo and is a member of the RVW Society. He was worried about his English and asked me to tidy it up before publication.

I changed one word and added one other, but otherwise decided to leave the text as it was. I will pass on members' congratulations – provided they are written in near-faultless Japanese, of course.]

Editor

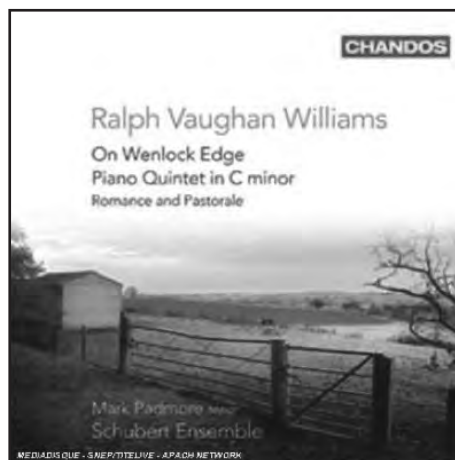
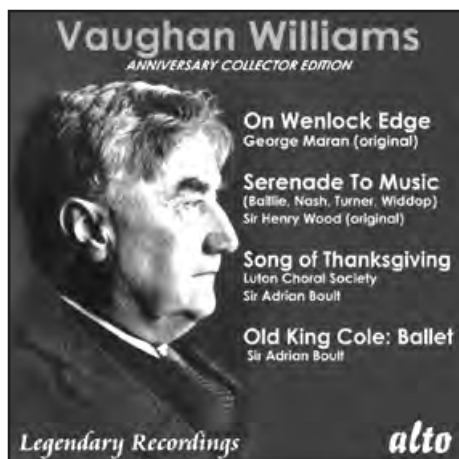
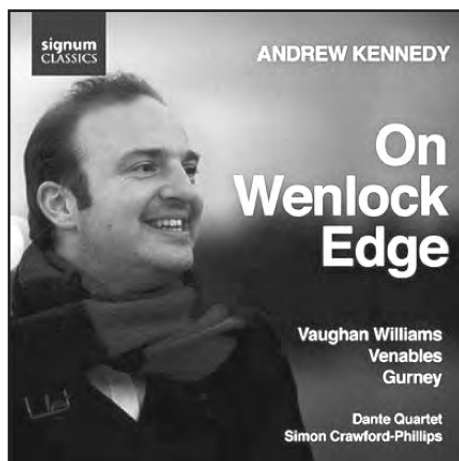
# CD Reviews

## THREE NEW VERSIONS OF *ON WENLOCK EDGE*

Andrew Kennedy (tenor); Dante Quartet; Simon Crawford-Phillips (piano); Signum Classics (SIGCD 112) (coupled with Gurney and Venables)

Mark Padmore (tenor); Schubert Ensemble; Chandos (CHAN 10465) (coupled with *Piano Quintet in C Minor, Romance and Pastorale* for violin and piano).

George Maran (tenor); London String Quartet; Ivor Newton (piano); Alto (ALC 1025) (coupled with *Old King Cole, Song of Thanksgiving* and *Serenade to Music*)



Networks do help in life. Edwin Evans, critic and specialist in contemporary French music, M. D. Calvocoressi, writer, musicologist and friend of Ravel and Vaughan Williams met for dinner in late November 1907 at the Savage Club in London. The subject at hand was to agree on which French composer might benefit Vaughan Williams who, according to Evans, felt “tongue-tied” at this point in his life. This feeling had led Vaughan Williams to visit Delius on October 24th 1907 but the meeting had been of little value. Edwin Evans explained why a different approach was now preferred: “As the French composers, whatever they had to say, seemed to have little difficulty in expressing themselves, Vaughan Williams thought he might learn from them.” Evans recommended Vincent D’Indy but Calvocoressi insisted on the thirty-two year-old Ravel.

He had met Ravel in 1898, attracted by a mutual love of Russian music. Calvocoressi has said of Ravel: “From the very outset, he was quite sure of himself, of his purpose, of his technique. He knew exactly what he wanted to do, and why.” This was the opposite of the unsure Vaughan Williams who felt his music was “lumpy and stodgy”.

So Ravel it was. Vaughan Williams travelled to Paris on December 12th 1907 and returned at the end of February 1908. He had four or five lessons a week from the young Frenchman, concentrating on Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov. Vaughan Williams reported that, after a shaky start, he was “getting a lot out of Ravel” who “showed me how to orchestrate in points of colour rather than in lines”. He returned with a new emphasis on texture, lucidity and clarity, less on form. One direct consequence of this period of study with Ravel was the superb song-cycle *On Wenlock Edge*.

These musings were prompted by the arrival of three new recordings of *On Wenlock Edge* by Andrew Kennedy, Mark Padmore and George Maran. I have known and loved the Maran recording since purchasing it in 1964 – attracted more (I confess) by the atmospheric cover of the 10” disc, as two lovers, hand in hand, gaze at the distant coloured counties. George Maran, American and specialist in opera was an unusual but compelling choice of soloist. With clear enunciation, an ardent tone and intelligent characterisation, this version is to be warmly welcomed onto CD for the first time.

By contrast, Andrew Kennedy’s voice sounds strained, particularly in the opening song. However, the modern recording does full justice to Vaughan Williams’ atmospheric effects, with superb playing from the Dante Quartet with Simon Crawford-Phillips (piano).

Mark Padmore takes a generally lyrical view of the cycle with clear, confident and articulate singing. The lovely second song is taken slower than usual, emphasising a more lyrical interpretation. Overall, however, there is less bite and fewer gales in this recording.

A coupling on the Chandos disc is the early *Piano Quintet in C Minor*. Here, again, there is a lack of bite in the playing of the Schubert Ensemble, compared to the Nash Ensemble on Hyperion CDA 67381/2. The score is marked *triple forte* in the opening bars and the Nash Ensemble certainly does full justice to this dynamic marking.

Returning to the Maran recording, the old Decca sound on the Alto re-issue is inevitably more constricted, even with Ivor Newton at the keyboard. However, the couplings – especially the evocative *Song of Thanksgiving* – make this disc an essential purchase. Of course, Robert Speaight as narrator is rather dated and Betty Dolmore (soprano) rather thin-toned, but the sense of poetry, nobility and sincerity carries all before it in Boult's inspired reading.

Of modern versions of *On Wenlock Edge*, how do Andrew Kennedy and Mark Padmore compare? Ian Partridge (on EMI 5655862) brings a wonderfully warm tone and intelligent singing to the cycle with superb support from the Music Group of London. Adrian Thompson is ruled out because of an astonishingly slow version of *Bredon Hill* – at 8'25" he is over a minute slower than other versions. Both Anthony Rolfe Johnson (Naxos 8.557114) and James Gilchrist (Linn CKD 296) are excellent – I would have both not just for *On Wenlock Edge* but for the additional material on both CDs. Gilchrist is very moving in Warlock's evocative *The Curlew* and Simon Keenlyside's, singing of *I got me Flowers*, in the voice and piano arrangement, is indispensable.

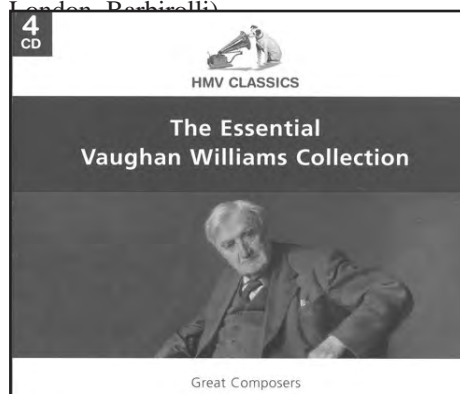
In summary, the Alto disc is an essential buy and for *On Wenlock Edge* Ian Partridge, James Gilchrist and Anthony Rolfe Johnson are all to be preferred to the Andrew Kennedy/Mark Padmore recordings.

Stephen Connock

**The Essential Vaughan Williams Collection. HMVQ 5 06056 2 (4 CDs, available from HMV shops or mail order only; £15.00)**

*A Sea Symphony* (Lott, Summers, LPO, Haitink); *On Wenlock Edge* (Partridge, Music Group of London); *Serenade to Music* (Burrowes, Armstrong etc., LPO, Boult); *A London Symphony* (LPO, Boult); *All people that on earth do dwell & The*

*Old Hundredth* (The Wallace Collection, Bayl, Cleobury); *Mass in G minor* (Choir of King's College, Cambridge, Willcocks); *Job* (Bournemouth SO, Hickox); *Fantasia on "Greensleeves"*, *The Lark Ascending* (Bean, Boult); *English Folk Song Suite*, *The Wasps Overture*, *Norfolk Rhapsody No 1* (LSO, LPO, New Philharmonia Orchestra, Boult); *Five Variants on "Dives and Lazarus"* (CBSO, Del Mar), *Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis* (Sinfonia of London, Barbiselli)



In commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Vaughan Williams' death in 1958, HMV have issued in their own exclusive series an attractively packaged and inexpensive boxed set of largely (though not entirely) familiar material. In fact there is a considerable overlap with an EMI double CD collection, also rather confusingly called "The Essential Vaughan Williams".

What exactly is "Essential Vaughan Williams"? This will be a largely subjective choice, although there will, perhaps, be certain areas of consensus: the *Tallis Fantasia*, *Dives and Lazarus*, *On Wenlock Edge*, *A London Symphony*, *Job*, *English Folk Song Suite*; and these are all included in this HMV Collection.

One thing worth mentioning is that this set only contains music composed between 1909 (*On Wenlock Edge*) and 1939 (*Five Variants of "Dives and Lazarus"*). It thus omits anything composed in the last nineteen years of Vaughan Williams' life, when, many would argue, his greatest works were composed (the symphonies 5 and 6 for example).

My only real quibble with the selection is the lack of any symphonies written after the *London*. Personally, I would have excluded *A Sea Symphony* and included a later one instead. Here is another missed opportunity for EMI to have reissued Alexander Gibson's fine recording of the Fifth Symphony and Paavo Berglund's gaunt, Sibelian account of No 6, both of

which have appeared on an earlier HMV CD. Ian Partridge's *On Wenlock Edge* with the Music Group of London, has always been my favourite recording of the original version from 1909. Ian Partridge brings a compelling sense of urgency to Housman's poetry (notwithstanding the fact that A E Housman himself was apparently incandescent with rage when he heard the music!)

In fact, many of the performances here come into the "essential" category and amongst these I would include the classic Hugh Bean and Adrian Boult recording of *The Lark Ascending* with the New Philharmonia Orchestra, recorded in 1967 and originally coupled on LP with Boult's EMI reading of the Sixth Symphony. Haitink's *Sea Symphony* is another top recommendation, as is Sir Adrian Boult's 1971 version of *A London Symphony* with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. This appeared in time to complete the EMI LP complete set of symphonies which was originally issued to celebrate the centenary of Vaughan Williams' birth in 1972. Boult's performance has an eloquence and dignity unlike any other (although Previn's RCA recording comes close.) Having spent much time listening to Richard Hickox's recording of the original 1913 version of this work, I was interested to see if I missed any of those sections which Vaughan Williams later excised. In fact, this was only the case with the beautifully poetic passage, which Vaughan Williams removed, just before the end of the Epilogue. Sir John Barbirolli's *Tallis Fantasia* with the Sinfonia of London from 1963, would also be many people's first choice.

More of a rarity is the dramatic version for brass ensemble and organ, by Roy Douglas, of Vaughan Williams' arrangement of the *Old Hundredth*, *All people that on earth do dwell*. This appears, interestingly coupled, with Sir David Willcocks' beautiful 1969 recording of the *Mass in G Minor* with the Choir of King's College, Cambridge. No one, I believe, could argue with the "essential" nature of this performance.

This also applies to the final work on the same CD, Richard Hickox's *Job* with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, a 1992 recording. I had never heard this performance before and it goes right to the top of my list (together with Boult's final EMI recording.) Hickox's deeply moving account is undoubtedly one of the highlights of this boxed set. The opening is

beautifully paced and the James O'Donnell organ contribution in the "Dance of Job's Comforters" is spectacular. The "Galliard of the Sons of the Morning" and, in particular, the "Altar Dance", display more of the qualities of an Elizabethan dance than in any other recording. My own feeling is that this is how Vaughan Williams probably intended them to sound. The more violent sections suggest links with works like the Sixth Symphony (still seventeen years in the future) and, in the final section, there is a wonderful serenity and eloquence.

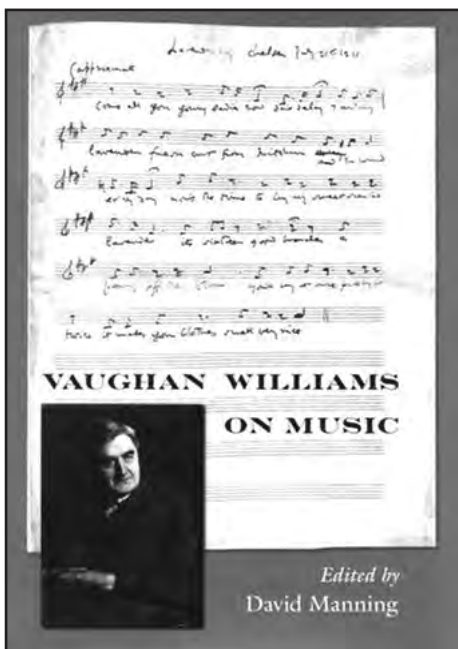
The set comes with interesting and helpful notes from George Hall and Andrew Achenbach, in the case of Haitink's recording of *A Sea Symphony*. The cardboard box containing the four individually boxed CDs is a bit on the flimsy side but the cover design, featuring Sir Gerald Kelly's wonderful painting of Vaughan Williams (uncharacteristically dressed in a smart suit) from 1952 is terrific and far more appropriate than the drab, uniform designs of the boxes containing Haitink's and Boult's complete EMI sets. This painting is the earlier of two Kelly portraits of the composer; the even

greater later one, from the time of the Ninth Symphony, was not completed until 1961, three years after the composer's death. HMV's inexpensive commemorative box set, available at less than the price of a single full-price CD, is a worthy commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Vaughan Williams' death, and, notwithstanding the reservation made above about the absence of the later symphonies, would be an ideal introduction to the music of this great composer.

Jeffrey Davis

# Book Reviews

**Vaughan Williams on Music, Edited by David Manning, Oxford University Press, £19.99**



This is a fascinating, but also a frustrating book. Fascinating in that David Manning has done us all a great service by bringing together unpublished or rare writing by Vaughan Williams on music into one reference book. Here we have 102 items written between 1897 and 1958. Manning helpfully includes transcripts of broadcasts, as well as programme notes. It has not been easy for the researcher to find these articles and broadcasts as many were written for obscure publications that have long ago gone out of print. The best articles have Vaughan Williams pushing the cause of British music for "if an art is to live it

must spring direct from the life and character of the people where it had its origin" (p.43).

So why is it frustrating? Vaughan Williams in his music believed in "sincerity, simplicity and serenity". He sought, successfully, to follow Ravel's advice, "complex but not complicated". Yet in his written work he was often too brief and – especially when writing about his own works – frustratingly off-hand. Thus after a lifetime of contemplating Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* we have for a Cambridge programme note of 1954 just fourteen lines, including, for example "The text is chiefly from Bunyan, with additions from the Psalms and other parts of the Bible." Those seeking help from the composer to understand this glorious work will not find it here. Similarly, the gorgeous Intermezzo from *Five Tudor Portraits* is captured thus: "The second movement is an Intermezzo, a love-song in praise of 'Pretty Bess', sung by a baritone solo, accompanied by the choirs." Vaughan Williams often makes reference to musical examples when discussing his own work but this can be unhelpful to the non-musician. Thus the Sixth Symphony note begins "The key of E minor is at once established through that of F minor, A flat becoming G sharp and sliding down to G natural at the half bar..."

All this is, of course, quite deliberate. Vaughan Williams, in an article here on *Ein Heldenleben*, says "Music is not a symbol of anything else, it has no 'meaning'". He follows this principle by

resolutely refusing to give "meaning" to his own works. Admirable as philosophy, but it does not always make for illuminating reading.

Vaughan Williams was less idiosyncratic in the earlier articles, ones on folksong and the struggles of the English composer to find a true voice. When he is in the role of advocate, or is espousing a cause about which he feels passionately, then the writing becomes more engaging, insightful and fresh.

Despite my reservations, this book of Vaughan Williams' writings on music takes its place as an important reference source, alongside Hugh Cobbe's eagerly anticipated letters, due out shortly.

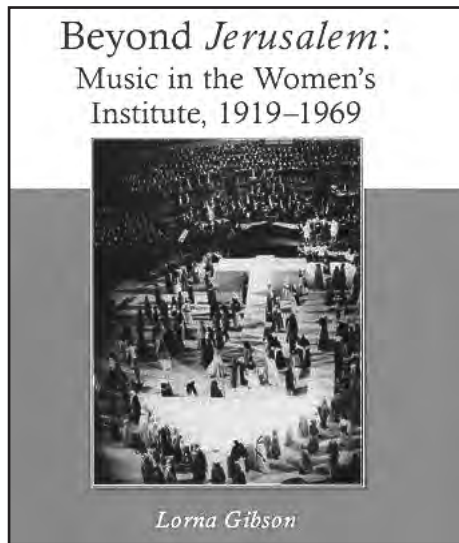
Stephen Connock

## Special Discount for Members until 15 July 2008

Oxford University Press is kindly offering members of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society a special promotional discount of 30% off *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958* by Hugh Cobbe and *Vaughan Williams on Music* by David Manning. This offer is available exclusively online until 15th July 2008. After 15th July 2008 the discount will revert to 20%.

To claim this discount please visit [www.oup.co.uk/sale/WEBSOCR/VW/](http://www.oup.co.uk/sale/WEBSOCR/VW/).

**Beyond Jerusalem: Music in the Women's Institute 1919 - 1969, Lorna Gibson, Ashgate Publishing, £45.00**



At first glance the book on Music in the Women's Institute, dedicated to "the women of Britain" would not seem to have much interest to members of the RVW Society. Not so, for there are two chapters of considerable relevance. The first looks in considerable detail into the background to Vaughan Williams' cantata *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* and the second relevant chapter covers Ursula Vaughan Williams' collaborations with Malcolm Williamson for *The Brilliant and the Dark*.

The *Folk Song Cantata* is one of the few large-scale (forty-five minutes) Vaughan Williams works never to have been recorded in full in any format. Lorna Gibson describes the origins of the work as part of the WI's inaugural Singing Festival of 1950. She refers to the pivotal role of Frances (Fanny) Farrer in arranging the key commission and shows how this work touched two key aspects of Vaughan Williams' art, his love of folk song and his support for amateur music-making. The depth of research here is impressive and anyone involved in this particular work should not fail to consult this book.

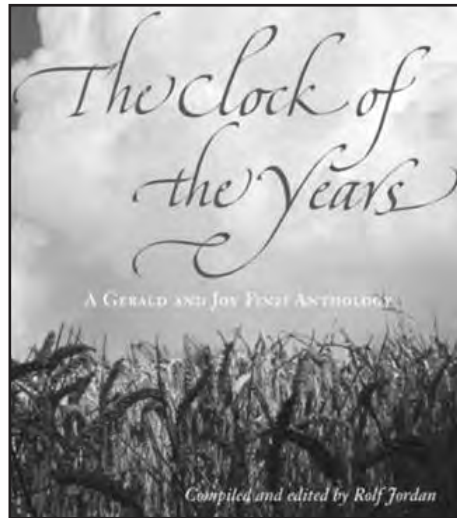
*The Brilliant and the Dark* was conceived seven years after the 1950 Singing Festival. Benjamin Britten was the preferred composer in the early days, but he rejected the commission and recommended Malcolm Williamson whom he described as "very brilliant and well on the way to becoming very famous" (p.93). Ursula Vaughan Williams was, as librettist, a "happy link" with the 1950 Festival. Subsequent events are described with insight and care by Lorna Gibson.

A specialist book to be sure, but one recommended to those specialists

interested in *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* or *The Brilliant and the Dark*.

Stephen Connock

**The Clock of the Years: A Gerald and Joy Finzi Anthology, Compiled and edited by Rolf Jordan, Chosen Press**



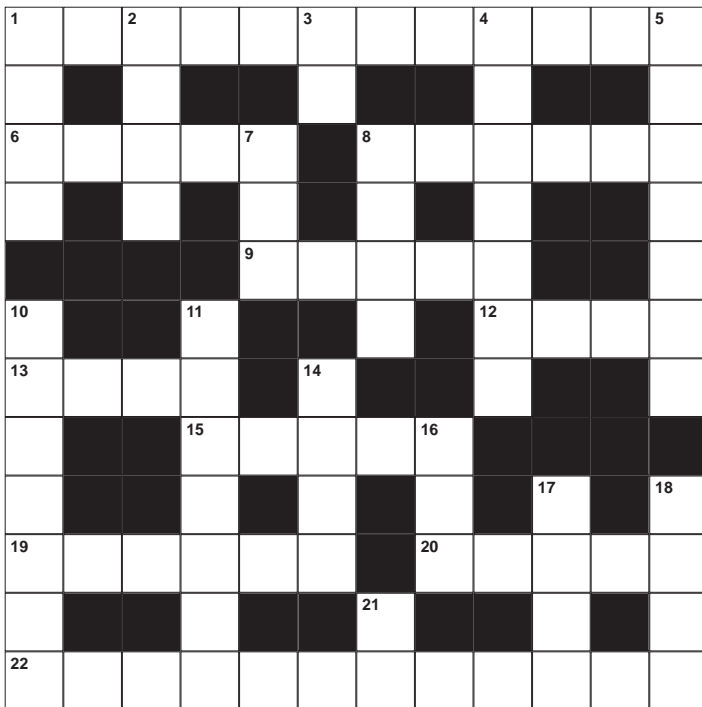
Pity the poor composer society journal editor, passionately interested in his subject, happy to spend all day (and every day) working on it yet obliged to go out and make a living! RVW Society member Rolf Jordan has found time in between editing the Finzi Friends Newsletter and, I suppose, trying to earn a crust, to edit this excellent book, and I take my hat off to him. The book's subtitle describes it perfectly: "An anthology of writings on Gerald and Joy Finzi marking twenty-five years of the Finzi Friends Newsletter". Rolf Jordan has organised the book into twelve chapters. The first centres around Church Farm, the house which the Finzis had built at Ashmansworth in Hampshire. The second is a series of reminiscences of Finzi by friends and colleagues; in the fourth chapter it is Joy Finzi who is remembered. Another chapter gathers together four articles written by Finzi himself, including a transcription of a talk on Ivor Gurney he gave in London in 1954; and another, entitled, "Composer's Gallery" is a series of articles about composers associated with Finzi. Hugh Cobbe writes about Howard Ferguson, for example, and Paul Spicer contributes a short but touching piece about his time as a student of Herbert Howells, this particularly vivid for me as Paul and I were in the same class at the Royal College of Music in the 1970s and I well remember the awe-inspiring sight of Howells passing by in the College corridor. Most of the material first appeared in the Finzi Friends Newsletter, and so by its very nature the book does not aim to break much new

ground. What it does is to gather together an enormous amount of that kind of anecdotal information which comes above all from personal knowledge and contact and which is only infrequently found in more formal biographies. As such, and this is not something one can say about all books on musical subjects, once you begin it you don't really want to put it down for very long. The material is well chosen – though I don't think I would have bothered with Howard Ferguson's recipes myself: others may not agree - and is arranged in easily-digested chunks amounting altogether to a Good Read.

There are some real gems here. All six pieces which make up the chapter "Writings on Finzi's Music" are especially interesting, and one of them, Stephen Banfield on Finzi and Wordsworth, is a particularly wise and balanced commentary on the two figures and the qualities which attracted the one to the other. The various memories of Finzi and (especially) his wife inevitably contain a fair amount of repetition, but the overall picture they provide is a vivid and satisfying one. Christopher Finzi gave a particularly evocative address to the Finzi Friends in 1996, but his memory seems fallible on one matter when talking about Vaughan Williams. He states that he attended the world premiere of Tippett's opera *The Knot Garden* with Vaughan Williams, and even goes into some detail about the composer's rather bemused reactions. Now I was myself present at that first performance at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. It was 1970 and the young music student that I was probably spent as much time spotting stars in the audience as listening to the opera. I would have been thrilled to see Vaughan Williams there, but since he died twelve years earlier the chances were slim indeed. Ralph Vaughan Williams was of course a major figure in Gerald Finzi's life and RVW Society members who buy this book will not be disappointed by the number of references to him, including a short, charming reminiscence by Michael Kennedy. I'm also happy to signal a short piece by Simona Pakenham which first appeared in the RVW Society Journal and in which she recounts a radio production of Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* and her success in persuading Finzi to compose the music. The book runs to over three hundred pages and was clearly a labour of love for its editor. I recommend it to Society members and wish Rolf Jordan and the Finzi Friends every success with it.

William Hedley

## RVW Crossword No. 28 by Michael Gainsford



### Across

1. O thou film 1 down and 8 across (12)
6. Minor female character in Hugh (5)
8. Second name of person responsible for recent film on RVW (6)
9. We are such ..... as dreams are made on. (5)
12. Impulse (4)
13. Water feature in the Canadian mountains (4)
15. There's one for Two Veterans in Dona Nobis Pacem (5)
19. Malcolm who wrote the Peterloo Overture and many more works (6)
20. Saint found in Household Music (5)
22. Presided over the trial in Vanity Fair (4, 4-4)

### Down

1. First name of 8 across (4)
2. Composer of Rule Britannia (4)
3. Many RVW works are on this (1,1)
4. These creatures appear in Pilgrim's Progress (7)
5. Another character from Hugh (7)
7. ... we have no bananas (3)
8. + (4)
10. Start of Shrubsole's hymn (3, 4)
11. Bunyan wrote Pilgrim's Progress in jail here (7)
14. I have done this on the slope both up and down (4)
16. Coda (3)
17. 'For .... Us a child is born' (Messiah) (4)
18. Is this motor to be found in Sir John in love? (4)
21. Doh in France (2)

## Answers Page 6

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