

Journal of the **RVW** Society

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From the Chairman

It is a great privilege to be elected the second Chairman of the RVW Society. Stephen Connock, who formed the Society along with John Bishop and Robin Barber fourteen years ago, has been an inspirational Chairman. A man of vision with the energy, drive and “clout” to turn ideas into reality, he has made the Society a body of repute and standing, recognized and respected nationally and internationally. As well as facilitating many wonderful events and recordings, it was his leadership that brought us Albion Music and Albion Records, and under Stephen the Society has burgeoned, in membership as well as profile. His will be the hardest of acts to follow, but the Society is very dear to my heart – I was present at the first meeting forming the Society – and I hope to be a worthy successor.

For those who don't know me, I am the Founding Director of the English Music Festival, an annual festival in Oxfordshire that aims to bring the music of British composers to live audiences. I have worked on the Festival since leaving Brasenose College, Oxford, where I read Greats. I met John Bishop of Thames Publishing through the RVW Society and worked with him thenceforth. I worked at the 2001 Gloucester Three Choirs Festival, was a Hesse Student at Aldeburgh in 2000, and have been Secretary both of the Association of English Singers and Speakers and the Peter Warlock Society, as well as Head of Publicity for the Elgar Society. Music has been my main love all my life (since hearing my father singing *Linden Lea* to me as an infant) and I am currently writing a book on British composers and the landscape. As a journalist and freelance writer I am regularly in print, covering topics from the arts, countryside and heritage to travel, food, wine and real ales!

2008 has been an exciting year for the Society and we still have several major events to look forward to, not least the symposium “Let Beauty Awake”, *Riders to the Sea* at the English National Opera, New Sussex Opera's performances of *The Poisoned Kiss*, the RVW Festival in Cambridge, and the rest of Richard Hickox's Philharmonia Orchestra symphony series. How gratifying it has been to experience Paul Daniels', for me, unrivalled performance of the Fourth Symphony, *The Pilgrim's Progress* at Sadlers Wells, *Riders to the Sea* at Buxton Opera, or any one of the RVW Proms (particularly the splendid Anniversary Concert with *Job* and the Ninth) and to see the enthusiasm, excitement – and numbers – of the audience. Vaughan Williams is clearly a composer who appeals to a great number of people – perhaps more than we ever realized.

I believe Ralph Vaughan Williams to be the greatest twentieth-century composer of this or any nation (*pace* Elgar, Holst and Britten), so naturally a society that furthers his cause and places his music more firmly in the public domain is, I believe, of the utmost importance. I therefore congratulate Stephen on all he has done for our Society, which I intend to serve, if with different skills, with equal dedication.

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From the Editor



When Ralph Vaughan Williams died on August 26 1958 he had known Ursula Wood for over twenty years and had been married to her for five. In 1964 she published her biography of the composer, simply entitled *R.V.W.* “That evening Ralph didn’t want any dinner, but by bed time he was hungry and sat on his bed eating bananas and biscuits and making plans for going to Walthamstow for the recording of his *Ninth Symphony* next day. It was all very ordinary, usual and like many other nights had been and we did not guess that before dawn death, not sleep, would claim him.” Death claimed Ursula too, on October 23 2007, giving us pause to reflect on the long years of widowhood she endured, though given her love of life and of people, perhaps “endured” is not the most appropriate word to choose. Her friends and colleagues were invited to send their memories of her for publication in the Journal, and as will be seen in the following pages, they were happy to respond. I hope they will forgive me if they find a sentence missing here, a phrase altered there, editorial interference inflicted only rarely, and, in most cases, to avoid too much repetition from one contribution to another. Ursula is vividly evoked in these short pieces, and the photographs, also provided by her friends, and in far greater number than there is space available to publish them, add still more to the picture. And so we mark the first anniversary of her death in the year set aside to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the death of her husband. We are proud to dedicate this forty-third issue of the RVW Society Journal to the memory of Ursula Vaughan Williams.

Issue 44, to be published in February, will concentrate on “Vaughan Williams and literature in English”, a rich subject if ever there was one, giving scope to members to indulge their own particular literary enthusiasms. If someone asked me to contribute, granting me completely free choice, I think it would have to be Blake, from the lovely *Cradle Song* in the *Oxford Book of Carols* to the remarkable 1957 cycle for voice and oboe, as powerful and intense as it is spare and austere. (There are members, however, who know far more about Blake than I do.) Is there a common thread or theme to be found in the literary works Vaughan Williams chose to set? Is it no more than a deep

appreciation of fine language? Did the composer’s approach differ significantly from source to source, from author to author? This is truly a huge subject, and one which will surely appeal to those members for whom literary matters assume the same importance as musical ones.

Ralph Vaughan Williams was born into a rural environment and spent his early childhood in the country. Recent studies may have discouraged too much emphasis on this view, but English rural life, the countryside and landscape were important influences and stimuli to composition throughout his life. Yet one of the first consequences of his marriage to Ursula was a move from Dorking to Hanover Terrace in London’s Regent’s Park, and much of his married life with Adeline had been spent in London, notably at Cheyne Walk in Chelsea. He was living there when he composed *A London Symphony*, a work, he said, that might be better entitled “Symphony by a Londoner” and one, moreover, of which he remained particularly fond. The Journal has not paid too much attention to this symphony so far, a key work in the composer’s output, though a relatively early one. The celebration of London that it embodies, the composer’s resistance to the application to it of any kind of programme, the literary associations, and the fact that Vaughan Williams seems never to have been convinced enough of its final form to leave it alone for ever, all these aspects and more should make it a fruitful subject of study for the Journal. And rather than concentrate narrowly on the symphony, the theme for June 2009 is to be “Vaughan Williams and London”. Musical sleuths can therefore look more deeply into the Vaughan Williams catalogue to root out better hidden influences of that great city. Perhaps someone might even organise a walk.

As I write these words, the final submission to the October Journal, the death is announced of Vernon Handley. He was a superb conductor of Vaughan Williams and Bax, Delius and Malcolm Arnold, and a noble champion of many other British composers, but to limit his achievements to the music of the British Isles is to do him a disservice. A full appreciation of this great man will appear in February.

William Hedley

Ursula Vaughan Williams Remembered



I first met Ursula more than sixty years ago, when she came to Oxford with Ralph in the summer of 1947. It was the year of his seventy-fifth birthday, and there was a kind of Vaughan Williams festival to celebrate it, with performances of the *Sea Symphony* and other works, including a setting of *Silence and Music*, a poem by Ursula. My father, who had been a pupil of Ralph's at the Royal College of Music and had become a lasting friend, conducted these performances, and introduced me to Ralph and Ursula.

With Adeline by now an invalid and more or less confined to her home at White Gates, it had become usual for Ursula to accompany Ralph to concerts and on visits of this kind. Though nothing could suppress Ursula's charm and warmth of personality, or her sociability, she seemed to me at this time to be rather self-effacing, as if Ralph was at the centre of the stage and she a supporting player. Her manner with Ralph seemed to be one of easy companionship, modulated on her side by a devoted but unobtrusive protectiveness, as if to ensure that the demands upon him should not be allowed to overtax his strength – or, perhaps, his patience, since he could be easily irritated.

Six years later Ralph and Ursula, now happily married, came to live in their lovely house in Hanover Terrace, in Regent's Park. Ursula described it as the perfect house. My wife and I lived not far away in St. John's Wood, and we came to see a good deal of them both. We were included in the group of friends whom they invited every month from September to April to sing madrigals; we went to various other musical and social gatherings in Hanover Terrace; and we were constantly meeting Ralph and Ursula at musical occasions in London. I was occasionally

summoned for a talk with Ralph – a summons to which I always responded with alacrity.

Ursula was of course deeply devoted to Ralph; and now she was free to be more demonstrative in her devotion. She continued to care for his welfare and to protect him, so that he was able to sustain the creative energy that enabled him to continue to compose. More than this, she enabled and indeed encouraged him to resume an active part in British, and particularly London, musical life. He was frequently to be seen at musical performances, not only of his own works: he was tireless in supporting performances of new works by other living composers. If Ralph became the Grand Old Man of British music in those last years, his ability to fulfil that role owed much to Ursula's loving care and constant support.

We can only speculate on the effect that Ursula had on the music which he wrote while she was part of his life. For my part I am sceptical about theories that the beauty and serenity of (for instance) the Fifth Symphony or the *Serenade to Music* are directly attributable to her influence or effect upon him: I think that in those works he was responding to other and deeper influences (including Bunyan and Shakespeare, who meant so much to them both) which had always been part of his musical inspiration. But in some of the works which he composed during those years he was setting words written by Ursula, the quality of whose writing he understood and appreciated; and I have no doubt that one of the reasons why he was able to realise his aspiration to continue to compose music, and to continue his development as a composer, was her encouragement and her ability to provide him with the "space to breathe" which he needed for composing. So those of us who love and revere RVW's music have reason to be deeply grateful to her.

I know that Ralph admired and loved Ursula, and was himself deeply grateful to her. As for Ursula, she loved Ralph only just this side of idolatry, with passionate intensity. That was the moving and sustaining spirit of her life through the long years of widowhood. She was able to continue her own creative work as a poet, a writer and a librettist, and, being Ursula, she had an active and enjoyable social life: she had many good friends, and she dearly loved a party. She had travelled abroad with Ralph, and she continued to enjoy travelling abroad in her later life. It was fitting, however, that, when the time came, her ashes were placed with Ralph's in Westminster Abbey: she would have been content to be remembered above all else for all that she did, and all that she was, as Ralph's loved and loving wife and helpmeet.

Robert Armstrong

When I first met Ursula she was a remarkably attractive young woman of twenty-seven who was already a prolific writer of poetry and prose. Later, as is well known, she provided words for many of Vaughan Williams' compositions. As a friend she was helpful, considerate and generous. I saw them together on many occasions during the early nineteen-fifties and was soon aware that they were deeply in love. So it was no surprise to me to

receive the news from Ursula saying that they were married on February 7 1953. I wrote to them on that day:

“Dear Uncle Ralph and Ursula, Not surprised but very, very delighted – Bless you both. I know you will be very happy. Yours, Roy.”

No “Wedding Anthem” for the occasion – an opportunity for collaboration missed!

After they were married they made their home in London, where I often joined them in wonderful parties or small gatherings. Then there were leisure enjoyments: concerts, operas, plays, films, books, poetry – all were shared in true happiness by these two loving and lovable people for five precious years.

Ursula was able to arrange for them to travel abroad, which was something RVW had always longed to do.

I am very grateful to Ursula for asking me to deal with her late husband’s manuscripts, a lengthy but absorbing job which occupied me on and off for several months. She was always welcoming and helpful during my many visits. We spent many pleasant hours talking together during this time of our happy memories of Vaughan Williams. After finishing the job the scores were sent by Ursula to the British Library where presumably they will remain for posterity.

Roy Douglas

We had some terrific fun together. Ursula never missed a party invitation if she could help it. She always turned up early, took her usual place on the sofa and promptly lit up a cigarette, chatting with whoever came and sat next to her. She attended exhibitions of my paintings and in 2003 she came to the opening of one show of paintings based on Vaughan Williams’ symphonies. As ever, the moment she arrived, she went straight into her handbag to get out her cigarettes, despite the “no smoking” signs everywhere. But an ashtray appeared, as if by magic, the moment word had got round that UVW was in the house; no-one would have ever dared send her outside to smoke!

Five years ago I approached the composer, Jonathan Dove, to commission a song-cycle to celebrate the fortieth birthday of my partner, David Evans. I selected six of Ursula’s poems to be set to music for mezzo-soprano and piano and the cycle was entitled *All the Future Days*, after a line from one of Ursula’s poems. The first performance took place at Hoxton Hall in the East End and we invited 120 people to hear the wonderful Ann Mason perform the world premiere, with the composer at the piano. Ursula rose to the occasion with characteristic brilliance. She took her place in the front row, smiling and acknowledging greetings from well-wishers. My partner and I sat either side of her and she squeezed our hands, grinning with excitement as the lights went down. At the end of the performance a great applause for the performance went up, but as Ursula rose to take her bow, the cheers, whistles and foot-stamping became deafening.

A second, sell-out performance at Wilton’s Music Hall as part of the Spitalfields Festival, was also an enormous success. Ursula was greeted by friends, enthusiasts and admirers when she arrived, looking magnificent and sporting her new wheelchair! At the end of the performance she was presented with large bouquets and couldn’t have been more regal as she acknowledged the

audience’s appreciation of her contribution to a significant, contemporary work of art. She signed autographs and patiently greeted the people who wanted to wish her well and give their congratulations. It was a memorable time.

The last occasion we saw Ursula was the summer before she died when we took her and two of her carers to Kenwood House, as she wanted to see the Vermeer and Rembrandt paintings. She studied each with immense concentration as she was wheeled up to them and afterwards we had a delicious lunch and a freezing bottle of Pouilly-Fumé out in the garden. It was a wonderful summer’s day and Ursula was also keen to look around the grounds; so we walked through the gardens, pausing every now and then so that she could reach out and touch and smell the different flowers. What a woman: she had so much life, so much enthusiasm and so much energy even at 96!

Gerard Hastings



© Gerard Hastings

I had finished my studies at the Royal Academy of Music and decided to stay in London, hoping to find work and support myself. Among my London friends was Howard Ferguson who became for nearly fifty years a wise and generous mentor, though he was never “officially” my teacher. He often asked me to turn pages for him. On one occasion at the Dukes Hall, Yfrah Neaman gave a private run-through of a violin concerto by Anthony Scott and I turned pages. A small group of invited listeners included the RAM Principal, Alan Franks, Gill Neaman, the Scotts, the Finzis and the Vaughan Williams. When the music was finished we crossed over the road for a delicious steak and kidney pie lunch at Ursula’s little flat. It was so congested I had to sit on the floor, at the very large feet of Vaughan Williams himself, already one of my major “icons”. We would meet at concerts and at festivals. Gloucester Three Choirs in 1956 was very special. Howard’s *Amore Languet* was premiered and the house party assembled in the Cathedral Close included the VWs, the Finzis and Dame Myra Hess. This happy occasion was soon followed by the sadness of Gerald Finzi’s sudden death.

In my studies of VW's work my eye was caught by a piece for small orchestra, *Harnham Down*, which was where I lived, just on the edge of Salisbury. It was embargoed, but when I talked to Ursula about it she agreed that I could have a copy. It was exciting when a facsimile of the score arrived. It had been given at the Proms in 1905 and the score was initialled by Henry Wood. Recently I read that an American enthusiast had finally been given permission to record it (Journal No. 36).

The most touching act of kindness I received from Ursula was in 1989. I was invited to take the Birmingham Bach Choir to Leipzig to perform the *B Minor Mass* in St. Thomas's Church, Bach's workplace for twenty-seven years. Then another invitation came asking me to extend my visit after the Bach to conduct the Gewandhauschor at a big choral weekend in the Gewandhaus. They asked for a twentieth-century English unaccompanied work of thirty minutes duration. I then remembered that the *Mass in G minor* was first heard in Birmingham in 1922 and soon after performed in Leipzig by Thomascantor Straube, a friend of VW. Ursula was thrilled by this when I rang to ask if she could possibly send ninety copies to Germany. This was quickly arranged and she said she would also come to the performance.

On her first evening in Leipzig we went down to dinner together and I noticed that she was carrying a copy of *The Times* which she handed to me, thinking, I assumed, that I might be starved of English news. "Oh, but it's what is inside that really matters". Carefully unfolding it I found an old copy of the Mass. At the top of the front cover was handwritten "from Ralph".

She beamed. "He gave it to me when we first met – I think you should have it now." Not only was this a kind and generous thought, it was an act of trust in my ability to do the work justice!

At the reception after the concert we were warmly welcomed by Kurt Masur, who thought the choir had captured the style of the music very well. (I sent him a score of the Sixth Symphony, a work he would surely do superbly.)

Ursula was the perfect companion on such an occasion, giving so much support. We have been greatly enriched by her life, a life in which she reached out and touched so many with her gifts.

Richard Butt

I first met Ursula in the early nineteen-fifties at concerts in Dorking and in London when RVW was conducting or listening to his works. She was always there to help and support him and those he was working with. Particularly memorable, too, were the performances of the Bach Passions in Dorking Halls and Dorking Parish Church.

Later, I went to their lovely house in Hanover Terrace. I was there to accompany a rehearsal, after which Ursula served us a delicious tea. There were several birthday celebrations for "Uncle Ralph" to which I was privileged to be invited along with other, younger friends and colleagues.

In 1958 I was one of 2000 people invited to be present at the service in Westminster Abbey where Vaughan Williams' ashes were interred. This was an occasion never to be forgotten.

Over the years since then I have often visited her in Gloucester Crescent, always receiving her generous hospitality. The last

occasion was some two years ago when she floated downstairs in a chair-lift, immaculately dressed, as always. We had lunch together, beautifully prepared by the lady carers who looked after her for the last few years of her life.

Ursula was a wonderful friend. She helped so many people with her wise counselling and very practical ways of averting disasters. I will always remember and be grateful for what she did for me when times were difficult.

As is well known she was a brilliant professional writer. She published many books and also worked with many composers as well as her husband. I wrote a number of choral and solo vocal works setting her verses. She was always ready to supply texts, and never demanded a fee! In 1965 she prepared for me a libretto from Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*, using the original medieval English. This I set to music for chorus, solo singer and orchestra. After the first performance in Haslemere, Surrey, a member of the audience was somewhat confused by the number of names on the programme. She congratulated us on the performance and then said "I would so much like to meet Mrs. Chaucer." Ursula, quick as a flash, to save embarrassment, said "If I hadn't been married to my husband, Geoffrey Chaucer is the one I would have chosen."

In 1972, Vaughan Williams' centenary year, a production of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was mounted in Colchester, Essex, where I live, with all local singers and players taking part. It was a full stage presentation, conducted by the late Dr Donald Hughes. Ursula came to rehearsals with a mass of help and advice on costumes, make-up, scenery, props and all. The whole project was a great and memorable success.

It is often said that, through her loving care and support, Ursula prolonged Vaughan Williams' life by several years, thus enabling him to complete many compositions whilst they had a wonderful time together as man and wife. Seeing them together, one was never struck by the difference in their ages. Vaughan Williams had the energy of a man half his age, as well as terrific mental agility and alertness. He always had a great zest for life. We must be grateful to Ursula for the way she looked after him. They adored each other and she never wanted to remarry, remaining a widow for nearly fifty years, keeping alive the memories we all treasure and can pass on to future generations.

Here, to close, is an amusing story. On their travels around the United Kingdom, whenever Vaughan Williams saw a specially beautiful church, he would say to Ursula "We could do the 'Matthew' there." Poor Ursula would immediately have visions of organizing coach loads of singers and orchestras, scores and music stands to wherever the place happened to be!

Roy Teed

Ursula was one of the most gracious and wonderful people that I have ever been privileged to know. She changed my life immeasurably when she answered a letter that I wrote to her. I had seen a recent photo of her in a CD booklet and wrote to her care of Nimbus Records. Her reply reached me on Christmas Eve 1993, a day I will never forget.

Not long after that, Dawn and I had the opportunity to meet her. She invited us to visit with her at her home and could not have been more welcoming. That first visit was just magical, a lovely

afternoon with Ursula, some cats hopping around and tea in the garden. She had a way of making you feel completely at ease and we talked about all sorts of things for hours. I would occasionally think that I should be asking her lots of questions about RVW and be taking notes, but I couldn't bring myself to change the moment.

After that we exchanged a lot of letters. She would always write back, often very quickly. I was so very lucky to have made so many trips across the pond since then and getting to see Ursula was the highlight of any of those journeys. She was so very encouraging to me as a composer, she gave me the wonderful gift of assurance and confidence which only she could give at a time when I needed it most. I would always tell her that she changed my life.

My musical tribute to Ursula is a string piece that I wrote for her, *A Suite for Ursula*. She told me that she liked it very much, which meant the world to me. When I wanted to do a choral setting of one of her poems I was intimidated to say the least, knowing of her many collaborators, especially of a certain one that we all know. When I asked her if she would allow me to use one of her poems she said "why of course, I would be honoured." That was her beautiful poem *Learn to Love said Nature*. Whenever it's performed people always remark on the beauty of her words.

I was introduced to RVW's music by my High School choral director when we sang *Hodie*. I remember I was so taken by that music, just as I am to this day. It was then that I first encountered Ursula's poetry, words that will often float into my mind: "Never since the world began, Such a light such dark did span."

I feel so fortunate to have so many treasured memories of Ursula, a wonderful woman who changed my life. She will be in my thoughts always.

Frank James Staneck

Ursula was the most generous and hospitable of women, not only to friends but also to public causes. I first met her, with Ralph, in 1956, at Hanover Terrace. I was then secretary to the newly-formed Third Programme Defence Society and we needed prominent names for our nation-wide campaign to preserve the Third Programme from possible abolition by the BBC. Ralph and Ursula offered to give us tangible public support by hosting a press conference at their home. Among those present were Sir Laurence Olivier, Sir Michael Tippett, Peter Laslett and Paul Sieghart, then a prominent lawyer. This gathering gained wide press coverage for our cause and the Third Programme did, of course, survive.

Ursula became a close friend of ours and, from the 1960s onwards, we enjoyed regular dinner parties and went to the theatre and opera together on many occasions. Ursula stayed with us when we had a posting in Brussels and we shared some wonderful holidays, especially in Sardinia. She even called a character in one of her novels after our daughter, Laura. She gave a spirited rendering of the ode from *Cymbeline* at my husband's funeral in 1992. Time and time again, I open a book to find a letter or card from her: she was a regular correspondent in the true Edwardian tradition – and we shared a passion for cats.

It is common knowledge that Ursula enjoyed fashion and had a highly developed aesthetic sense. Knowing that I had once been a photographer, she asked me to make portrait photographs of her

on many occasions. I still treasure a portrait in oils I have of her by the now-famous Austrian painter Marie-Louise von Motesiczky, where she is wearing some of her favourite jewellery.

Erica Propper

Ursula entered my life years ago when she consulted me about her sight. Bowled over by her quick wit and unusual charm, and having been entranced by RVW's music since childhood, I found meeting her an almost supernatural experience.

I mentioned that operations might be needed, but a few weeks later Ursula returned, bringing watercolours that she had painted on holiday in the Mediterranean. She also produced a copy of a novel by Balzac, in very small print, from which she proceeded to read. I readily agreed that surgery could be safely postponed.

That was before her stroke. When she consulted me again, her sight had deteriorated alarmingly, and we agreed that something needed to be done. I have rarely had to operate on so fascinatingly vocal a patient (under local anaesthesia) but all went well and good vision was eventually restored to both eyes.

Our relationship remained a professional one until I approached Ursula about illustrations for a short biography of RVW that I had agreed to co-edit. She unhesitatingly gave me access to her files of photographs and the book benefited from images that had not been seen before, or had been seen only rarely.

One day in the autumn of 1997 I was invited to tea. ("Do you take milk?" "No, thank you." "Oh, good! Or sugar?" "No, thank you." "Oh, good!" – for this, she explained, was how she preferred her tea.) Another mutual liking was for islands of the Mediterranean and our discussion ranged over many of them. Eventually I turned the conversation to RVW's *Four Last Songs*, in which I was shortly to accompany the mezzo soprano Nora Sirbaugh in a recital in Philadelphia. Of the circumstances of the setting by Ralph of her poems, she spoke most movingly. She told me that the words of the first song, *Procris*, had been inspired by a painting in the National Gallery, and went upstairs to bring me a postcard of it: *A Satyr mourning over a Nymph* by Piero di Cosimo (1462-1515). Various elements of the poem describe the scene depicted. I told her that RVW had written difficult rhythms for this one, and she laughed. Ursula eventually supplied a short programme note for the recital.

As things seemed to be going well, I asked her if she had considered writing her autobiography. "Oh yes", she replied, "I've done it!" – many years ago, she thought, but she had not brought it up to date. I volunteered to look at the manuscript for her. She went upstairs again and returned with 308 pages of typescript. She insisted that I take it away; I promised to guard it with my life and to let her know as soon as possible whether I thought it might be published.

It was soon agreed that I would edit the autobiography and so began my regular visits to Ursula. The pattern was fairly consistent. Every other Saturday I would walk over Regent's Park from Marylebone, my laptop in a bag on my back, arriving at 10.30 or 11am. Ursula would make coffee and drink a cup or two with me in the dining room while we discussed our respective activities of the previous fortnight. She would then leave the coffee pot on the table and I would set to work, usually visited by one friendly cat or another, until aromas from the kitchen

indicated that lunch was nearly ready. Ursula would then tempt me with a drink and we would adjourn to the kitchen for delightful conversation and delicious food (and more drink). I have happy memories of Eleanor's cooking. In summer we ate in the garden. Sometimes Simona Pakenham would be there; or Ursula's sister, Rosemary Lock, Josie Baird, a friend and neighbour or Ken Blakeley, Ursula's travelling companion and tireless aid. These were lovely, convivial occasions.

Paradise Remembered was eventually published in 2002, and very warmly received by the critics.

I had hoped to help Ursula to update her work, but this was never really possible. Whenever I set the tape recorder running, Ursula wanted to talk about her various holidays, an interesting matter in itself but not really the stuff of autobiography. I listened patiently while she struggled to remember names and dates, feeling all the while that the exercise was sadly pointless. When I did manage to steer the conversation to other topics, such as her work for the Musicians' Benevolent Fund and the RVW Trust, matters became even more disjointed and my spirits sank. However, Ursula was keen on the initiative and I had yet to think of a way of telling her that we were probably wasting time.

One experiment that we tried had an amusing outcome. Aware that Ursula had an aversion to gadgets, I obtained for her the simplest possible hand-held dictating machine with the very minimum of controls. I asked her to speak into it whenever she thought of material for the autobiography and I proposed a trial run. I had been asked to obtain from Ursula a short piece to mark the ninetieth birthday of Roy Douglas. She agreed to record some memories for me to transcribe and the arrangement was that she would then mail the miniature tape cassette to me. Imagine my surprise, a week or so later, when on opening a small bulging envelope addressed in Ursula's hand, I found not a cassette but the *batteries* of the machine! (The tribute was eventually written: it was detailed and entirely lucid.)

There were many happy occasions over the years, often involving visits to the theatre and the concert hall at Ursula's invitation. In particular I recall *The Pilgrim's Progress* at the Barbican, a number of RVW's works at the Proms (and Szymanowski's *King Roger*, which, she told me, Ralph had admired), and the *Tallis Fantasia* at the Mayfield Festival.

The Mayfield Festival concert was followed by a reception, at which Ursula speedily downed two large glasses of red wine, and advised me to do the same. Then we were led into an adjacent room where tables were laid for dinner, but it was 10.30pm and we still had to drive back to London. Explaining that the driver was waiting, we left, but Ursula had a surprise for me in the car: two boxes of sweet and sticky cakes, which she began to demolish. We both ate until there were no more, then sat surrounded by crumbs. Throughout the journey we talked. She told me about meetings with Gerald and Joy Finzi, Philip Heseltine, Herbert Howells, Marion Scott and Ivor Gurney's brother, among others. I wished I had had the little tape recorder with me. There were also, I recall, quite a few laughs along the way. We reached London around midnight, and Ursula seemed not at all tired.

Though we got on so well, there were areas of disagreement. For example, I had learned that it was profitless to enthuse about Elgar and advisable, if his name came up, to change the subject to Sibelius, whose music we both loved.

In 2000, hearing that the Gloucestershire composer Christian Wilson was looking for lyrics to set to music, I sent him Ursula's *Collected Poems*. Within a week he responded, saying: "I think I might be stirred!" Christian was indeed stirred and over the next few months a torrent of UVW settings flowed from his pen. Three of them (*Joy Needs No Words*, *The Looking-Glass* and *Music and Silence*) were premiered at the Gloucester Three Choirs Festival in 2001 in a recital given by Helen Withers. One of the joys of the occasion was that both lyricist and composer were present.

During the course of my editing of the autobiography I began work on an appendix of Ursula's collaborations with composers. A happy moment occurred while I was transcribing her poem *To Cecilia, Singing and Dancing*, set by Byron Adams in 1994. It suddenly occurred to me that the "angels voyaging in upper air" suggested the celestial beings in Botticelli's painting *The Mystic Nativity*. At that moment Ursula was handing me a cup of coffee, so I indicated the passage and asked: "Is this Botticelli?" "Why yes, of course! – what else?" she replied. She confirmed *which* Botticelli. I was thrilled, and I think she was rather pleased.

Gently chiding the author for stylistic shortcomings in *The Story of Rimini*, which Leigh Hunt had dedicated to him, Byron extolled the virtue of "saying common things in the common way". This was a matter that Ursula understood perfectly. For that noble simplicity, for her inquisitive mind, her poetic sensibility and most of all for her generosity of spirit, I shall never forget her. There is a great void in my life, left by her passing.

Roger Buckley

"**Do come and look** at this slum colony of sparrows in the gutter." These were the first words Ursula said to me when she and RVW moved in next door at Hanover Terrace. For the next forty years there was an apparently unending stream of wonderfully funny and spontaneous remarks, often based on anthropomorphic projections onto some bird or animal. For example when she took her cat Topaz to the vet for some injury, I asked her what the vet had said. "Just get her to keep her paws up for a few days," was her reply. When Miller, a neighbour's cat, took advantage of the exquisite cat food on offer he was reproached for stealing the lobster pâté. "He blushed to the roots of his fur", she remarked. On another occasion her cat Romeo came in with some blossom on his back. "He's been to a wedding", she remarked. We became close friends as well as neighbours, and this continued right up to her death.

When they moved into the house next door, RVW was already walking rather slowly. I remember them going for walks together – he would gently wander along, with Ursula, always elegantly coiffed and dressed, tottering on very high heels by his side, holding his hand. Their happiness was evident to all and somehow seemed to spread itself around. My small son Peter was often rather scruffy in those days. When he objected that the clothes of RVW were also quite scruffy, he had to be told that until he became equally distinguished, he had to make the effort to look smart.

Ursula was very generous to everybody, in an original and charming way. For instance, she went to a lot of trouble to get a really thick pair of woollen socks for the fishmonger, because she feared his feet would get cold in his gumboots. At Christmas time she would buy a bunch of violets for all the shop assistants who had served her during the year. There were innumerable examples

of this instinctive, thoughtful generosity. I fear that from time to time her characteristic generosity was exploited by a few less scrupulous acquaintances.

She was a wonderful hostess, and loved parties. She would chatter away with her characteristic sing-song style of speech, rather reminiscent of Joyce Grenfell. Such strings of amusing anecdotes would pour out that the whole company would be laughing aloud. She was an excellent broadcaster too, and I was delighted by her story about providing food for musicians, which I heard by chance one day on the radio.

There could be an edge to her wit. At one dinner party, a guest was rather sanctimoniously praising the virtues of humility. Ursula remarked, "No; when the meek inherit the earth, I'm leaving." Well, she has left us now, and like many others I shall miss her for her warmth of personality, as a splendid human being and a good friend.

Josephine Baird

"Life is here to be enjoyed." It was a frequent saying of Ursula's and that is how she lived right to the end. Despite the ravages of strokes and constant pain from an injured shoulder, she never complained (although she did once say "Bugger!") and continued going to concerts, to performances of Shakespeare (she knew the plays in great detail and loved them), to restaurants and continued having parties at home. The week before her death she was at a reception to launch a new recording of Ralph's songs and spent the whole evening talking with people, glass of wine in hand. Afterwards it was to a restaurant for dinner. She was indefatigable. Once, after a temporary set-back, a friend rang to say she would like to take Ursula for a meal. "I suppose lunch would be easier than dinner?" "Oh no," Ursula replied, "I always prefer dinner."

But her philosophy of enjoyment was not a selfish one. She wanted others to enjoy themselves and did much to see they did. It took various forms, from giving students at the London Opera Centre a bottle of champagne at Christmas to keeping on one of her cleaners who, at the age of 90, wanted to continue for something to do. It didn't matter what she did: Ursula simply wanted her to feel needed and to be happy. Many friends, too, have reason to be thankful for the support they received when they needed it most. The flat downstairs was a haven for them.

Those who did not know Ursula were sometimes wary of her and even put off, but once they knew her their opinion changed. In the words of one well-known singer, "I used to be terrified of Ursula but she's lovely." One man simply said, "She's a game old bird." She would have liked that.

For Ursula there were no social barriers. Workmen in the house, painters and decorators, all were on first name terms and if they happened to be there at lunchtime they were automatically invited to lunch. It really didn't matter to her who people were, they were all treated alike. Taxi drivers loved her (I don't think it was only because she was a good tipper) and if they picked you up from the house without Ursula, they usually enquired about her. One evening after a party we had a driver who didn't know her. When we arrived back at Gloucester Crescent, I asked him to wait for me whilst I saw Ursula inside. On getting back into the cab he said, "Been having a crafty snog have you?" The next morning when I

told Ursula, she laughed – as she would have said herself – "and laughed and laughed".

Life really is here to be enjoyed.

Kenneth Blakeley

As mentioned in my comparative survey of CD recordings of Vaughan Williams' Sixth Symphony (June 2003), I first wrote to Ursula Vaughan Williams in 1972 when, aged 17, I had become obsessed with the music of VW, especially with my Decca Eclipse LP of Symphony No 6, with Boult conducting and the composer's speech at the end: "I want to thank you, most heartily..." She sent me back a charming letter and a present, an inscribed copy of *National Music and Other Essays*. I never met her but I saw her at various VW concerts and corresponded with her occasionally over the years. Here are a few extracts from her letters to me, which I felt might be of interest, especially her comments about the Ninth Symphony.

March 14 1989

"...I am so glad that you have discovered *Epithalamion* – so few people ever had a chance of hearing it until it was recorded and...it's a splendid performance. I think that the four hymns and the Chaucer rondels make a very good programme.

I'm so glad that you have met Roy Douglas – he's a marvellous friend and his book about working with Ralph is beautifully done – I wish he did not live so far away – well it isn't far really, but geography does have its effect when life gets rather too full of things, happenings, pleasures etc etc. So we gossip by telephone, mostly..."

July 8 1999

"I think that you should try to listen to his last piece – the Ninth Symphony – one of his strange and magic ones – [frustratingly it is difficult to read the next sentence but I think it says] – I remember Ralph said that he was burying all his dead comrades in the Ninth – perhaps you noticed it as well?"

If I have read this correctly, what Ursula says about the Ninth Symphony is extremely interesting, especially as Vaughan Williams always resisted giving "meanings" to his music.

September 4 1999

Thank you for your letter – *Tallis* was a beautiful piece [in a televised performance from Gloucester Cathedral]. I enjoy Michael [Berkeley] very much. I love Gloucester Cathedral and we went to look at "the king-that-never-was" [Robert, Duke of Normandy, eldest son of William the Conqueror] in his fixed place...I wish to remind you that you should see a repeat performance of Ralph's No 9...next Wednesday evening on the Box. [The performance of] No 9 is a special one, one that I believe is Ralph's most extraordinary piece – I knew it when I first heard it, as he played it as he wrote it – "in bits and pieces" – and I think it told us all we could know –

With blessings
From Ursula VW.

Jeffrey Davis



with Penelope Thwaites

Having been entranced by reading both Ursula's biography of RVW and her own autobiography about 2 years ago, I wanted to thank her. By chance a colleague was helping to care for her and arranged a meeting.

It was a real sense of history as I thought back to keenly remembered encounters with Vaughan Williams' music in my childhood and onwards : *Linden Lea* – which I have always loved, the *Folksong Suite* – listened to in a hot Australian summer, arousing a longing to travel back to the land of my birth, *On Wenlock Edge* - one of the first concerts in which I was involved when I did return, and then the wonderful John Shirley Quirk recording including the *Songs of Travel*.

I very much wanted to ask Ursula about their meetings with Percy and Ella Grainger, but sadly, by this time she was not able to respond specifically. But my vivid memory of that afternoon was that words might not have been under control, but that she exuded such warmth and enjoyment of life as she tried to tell me about Vaughan Williams. I am sad to have missed an earlier opportunity, but I would not have missed that visit in 2007. I felt heart spoke to heart, and that was what mattered.

Her funeral was a fittingly celebratory occasion. So many people knew Ursula well for so long, and yet even my brief encounter with her remains a memory I will cherish. I am glad to be once more involved in the world of music in which she played such a distinctive part.

Penelope Thwaites

It was 1962 and I had just come back from Cameroon, racked with every kind of fever that the White Man's Grave could confer. Let out on parole from the Hospital for Tropical Diseases, I went to call on Ursula to catch up and exchange gossip; we had been in touch all through my time abroad – it was shortly after she had

been out to Ghana – and she was intrigued by my traveller's tales. Tea graduated to chamberizette – at that time one of Ursula's favourite tipples, a strawberry pink vermouth, with a liberal spike of gin “to taste” - and it was dusk when I finally left, slightly unsteadily, with the lights of Gloucester Crescent just coming up. As she came down the garden path with me, she said casually “I don't suppose you'd like to come to live here?” And so began one of the richest and most precious times of my life.

I had got to know her five years or so earlier: that never-to-be-forgotten long weekend when she and RVW were down at Ashmansworth staying with the Finzis. For some reason we clicked almost immediately: her enthusiasm and easy laughter quickly disarming any shyness I might have had. We used to talk about poetry and all sorts of things. She was so open; and, as I was to experience again and again throughout our long, loving friendship, unstinting and uniquely imaginative and thoughtful in her generosity. In kind as well as in feeling: soon after Ralph died, she passed on to me his copy of Forsythe's *Orchestration*. Her little note said: “This was always on Ralph's table, and I like the idea of you having it so much – there must be something comforting in using, so sharing, a book with someone who has wrestled with the same sort of dragons for years. I feel I'm handing over a book of good spells to you, and that for you, the magic will work.”

Generous, too, in friends, all those remarkable individuals – Ursula's world – to whom I became attached in turn: Betty Maconchy and her husband Billy; the Hornsteins; Jean Stewart; and of course Gill (Sir Gilmour Jenkins), who often used the house as a *pied à terre*. People were always passing through. When I first came on the scene – “The Lodger” – she was in the throes of completing her biography of RVW, and I used to help out with the typing – she was an erratic typist! – and proof-reading. Subsequently Imogen Holst became a regular visitor when they collaborated on *Heirs and Rebels*. Strange encounters: Canetti turning up on his bicycle in the middle of supper and wolfing down an omelette; going to take tea with the birdman, Ludwig Koch, and his wife Lottie; and the whole Bernard Hermann circus – the recording of his opera *Wuthering Heights* – when we all lost a stone or two. And then those wonderful parties...

It was a life of exuberance; but I remember too those quiet hours at the end of the day when we'd get together in the study upstairs, she in her peignoir, smoking her endless cheroots, as we sipped jasmine tea and swapped reports of our doings: some deep talk as well, cats sharing in the harmony and stillness.

I got married from her house – Joy Finzi and Howard Ferguson among the tiny crew of witnesses. Later, after her move, her home became my refuge and she my rock during the long final illness of my brother, when I was trailing backwards and forwards to the Royal Middlesex – the door always open, and a stiff whisky to hand at all hours of the day or night.

So many of us are now bereft: quite simply Ursula was irreplaceable.

Jeremy Dale Roberts

Ursula knew me before I was born, and I knew her as far back as I can remember. She was my mother's best friend, and I was always taken up to London whenever they met. One of our early landmarks was the year after Ralph died, when Ursula came on

holiday with my parents, my friend Mary, and me. Mary and I were fourteen. We drove to Italy. The holiday in Camogli was lovely, and Ursula taught my father to swim, but he was a terrifying driver and the journeys were a nightmare for us. Toward the end of her life Ursula's conversations were something of a challenge, but if I brought up the subject of that Italian holiday, her reminiscences were crystal clear and hilarious.

Once I was eighteen she was greatly relieved. It was no secret that she much preferred adults. When I first moved to London she found me a flat at 3, Gloucester Crescent, opposite her house at 69. She always had a leisurely breakfast in the dining room which overlooked the front garden. Sometimes I crossed the road for a quick coffee on the way to work, sometimes I just waved. When she moved from 69 to 66 she stayed in my flat while the new house was being decorated. Breakfasts on the second floor (no view) were not so elegant. The new dining room also faced the front garden and coffee or waving was resumed.

We were neighbours for eighteen years and I cannot begin to count the number of operas, concerts, plays, films and exhibitions we went to together or in larger groups. Not to mention parties on both sides of the Crescent. When I decided to celebrate my twenty-first birthday, I hired a juke box and invited my wildest friends. My mother reported that Ursula was rather sad she hadn't been included. There was still time to amend matters and everybody appeared to enjoy themselves. Needless to say, at her parties I met many wonderful people, some of whom are probably also contributing to this commemorative edition.

Ursula's generosity to those in need is legendary; anything from housing them in her basement to a cup of tea in the kitchen while they cried on her shoulder. On a typical day she could be coping with a friend's matrimonial disaster at five o'clock but by 7.15 she was in the Royal Box at the Festival Hall, wearing her newest gown and looking forward to a performance of one of Ralph's symphonies.

Even after the stroke Ursula's appetite for life never diminished. When she became less mobile, Ursula read voraciously and eagerly looked forward to visits from friends old and new. The day before her final illness Ursula was taken round the British Museum. If each of Ursula's friends launched a coloured hot-air balloon at the same time to commemorate her life, this planet would look suitably festive.

Eva Hornstein

It is agreeable and satisfying that this opportunity is being offered to Ursula's legion of friends who might otherwise have to settle for a private and voiceless appreciation of her remarkable and unique capacity for an equally remarkable and unique quality of friendship.

Despite the numerous demands on her time and not discounting her own work, Ursula always emanated an air of relaxed control over anything that was occupying her and therefore appeared to have all the time in the world for any imposition from a friend. Together with the time, she also had the imagination to divine why she had been sought out, and the sensitivity to know whether or not to offer advice, solutions or silence.

In my case this cheering relationship dated back to her Thayer Street days and her frequent appearances at the White Gates in

Dorking. Her hospitality was legendary, of course, but there was an incident of international misunderstanding on one occasion when I went to tea with her. A raw and untested young American, I was confronted with what had to English people been a wartime treat, toast with dripping. I found it revolting and really struggled to disguise this reaction. It was certainly the only offering of hers over scores of subsequent meals that was not tasty, satisfying and, frequently, an original idea. (I shouldn't refer in the same breath to the smell of her lovingly cooked coley for the cats...)

At the White Gates I had the tremendous privilege and pleasure of being present for the playing-through of Ralph's Sixth Symphony.

The exchanges of neighbourly sociability when I was at Park Village West involved ad hoc visits, the exchange of meals and dinner parties and visits to the opera or a concert. Around the table she was always bright and entertaining, a dextrous and compelling raconteur devoid of all the usual "uums", "you knows", clichés and platitudes through which one cringes in much social exchange. This accomplishment was undoubtedly also responsible for the essence of a wonderful remark she once made to me as we were standing in a hotel in Madeira. I suffer from curiosity covering a wide front, and had just asked Ursula some question resulting from this. Her reply was "You should know better than to ask me, because you know that if I don't know I'll make it up!"

As is evident, it was my privilege to have her as a genuine friend, to bask in the warmth of such a generous and imaginative character. Her innate capacity for good cheer and a rare quality of encouragement meant that one inevitably left her company with a smile. I was reminded of this recently as I happened on a little collection of recipes and "cook's tips" that she made for me when I went to sea in a small sailing yacht. It was this amazing ability to put herself in another's shoes and "come up with something" of her own devising that would be helpful.

As another of her good friends and neighbours said, "Ursula is one of the least greedy people I have ever known." Her thoughts were always for others.

Jean Fraser-Harris

Ursula was the most entirely generous person. Her generosity was on a completely different scale to anyone else I have ever known. It was impulsive, continuous, embracing any living creature she encountered, ranged from imaginative and discreet financial support for people she thought needed it, to the smallest practical kindnesses – for instance, for many years she cooked a fried breakfast for her daily cleaner on the grounds that this lady would never otherwise have anything of the kind done for her; she bought oiled wool socks for her local fishmongers to wear inside their Wellingtons as they worked in the open air in winter; for years she made an arduous bus and train and taxi journey to visit an ill friend in the country – in fact she honoured her impulses, and very few people do that with such fidelity and diligence. I owe her an enormous debt. At a difficult time in my life she took me to live with her for nearly two years. She took my dog as well; she had no hierarchical view of animals – although she loved and kept a succession of cats, all creatures had a right in her view to justice and comfort (and this included the slugs who drank milk put on the doorstep for a stray cat. "Plenty for all", she said, as she filled up the saucer.) She had a great sense of pleasure, of frivolity – loved parties, concerts, theatres, any festive occasion excepting

Christmas which she loathed. She loved clothes and dressing up. Because her movements – like her nature – were often impulsive. I started to worry about her high heels on polished floors, but she simply said; “Ralph always liked me to wear high heels”, and that was that.

She could be very bossy, disliked children, although she was never unkind to them, loved her garden and the birds that came to it, loved drinking with friends, adored sea bathing and travelling. She was not in the least acquisitive, the only collection she accumulated was a quantity of costume jewellery, much of which didn't seem worthy of her. She was given to wonderfully trenchant remarks. “If the meek are inheriting the earth, I'm leaving it” is one I particularly remember.

All her life when I knew her she passionately wanted to be taken seriously as a poet and – like so many poets – never received the desired recognition. Of course she also wrote libretti and novels, but I think it was the poetry that mattered to her most.

She told me that when Ralph died, she really understood about Indian suttee – that she had not wanted to continue her life without him: there was always a touching dignity about her grief – it was never paraded, but I think always there, at the centre of her heart. “Now” she said, “there are simply small pleasures.”

She had vanity that was charming because it was so simple and transparent – she positively purred when she received compliments. She loved men, but unlike many women said to do that, she also loved women, and I, for one, shall always be profoundly grateful for her love.

Elizabeth Jane Howard

For over half a century, Ursula was one of my most cherished and intimate friends. She sustained me through some of the worst times in my life. Her door was always open to me, as it was to her legion of friends. How did she manage this, when she had commitments to Ralph's music, the charities, her writing, her ceaseless activities in all the other arts, her voracious reading (she could remember all the plots and characters in every book)?

Her cards and letters flutter out of many places in this house, always beginning “Darling Gossip”. Just as she sustained me during my husband's slow death – the only person I could tell when the doctors asked for silence at the outset – so her capacity for pleasure, her own and other people's, was infinite. When I was widowed she wrote “You can either be like deadly nightshade or agreeable for picnics” – wise counselling indeed.

On my desk, framed, are wild oats, sent by her from the legendary birthplace of Venus. We had sailed among the Greek islands exchanging confidences on the shores (though she had never hinted she was a martyr to seasickness!) We had a rendezvous in Paris in 1968 in the Latin Quarter, with hair-raising obstacles in getting back to England from *les événements*. She was always the right person to be with abroad and in a crisis.

In spite of all Ralph's Centenary concerts in 1972, she was with me on the last night of my husband's life. She rose at early light to go to Covent Garden for the flowers she arranged for his Memorial Service some months later.

How I wish I could have reciprocated all her acts of generosity, imagination and love! One should make declarations to the living.

Jill Balcon



with Lady Susanna Walton and Jill Balcon (© Gerard Hastings)



SPOKEN TO A BRONZE HEAD

URSULA VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Bronze, where my curious fingers run
matching each muscle and each metal feature
with life's austerer structure of the bone,
each living plane and contour so well known,
you will endure beyond the span of nature,
be as you are now when our lives are done.

On unborn generations you will stare
with the same hollow eyes I touch and see,
look on a world in which no memories share
the living likeness of the face you wear,
keep, in unchanged serenity
all that time gave him in your guardian care.

His name is yours to keep, so will his glory be,
who are his only, his inheriting son:
and when the hand that writes so ardently
the sound of unknown sound reaches finality,
the music captured, all the work well done,
stand in his place and bravely wear his immortality.

United in Death

On a windswept April 21st 2008, at Westminster Abbey, Ursula Vaughan Williams was reunited, after almost fifty years, with her beloved husband, Ralph.

A strictly limited group of twenty-five friends and relatives of Ursula were privileged to be part of the interment of her ashes in the composer's tomb. After a moving Evensong that included The Song of the Leaves of Life and Rhosymedre the congregation left the Abbey and the small party were led to the Musicians' Aisle. Here was an unforgettable sight. The flagstone marked "Ralph Vaughan Williams OM 1872 – 1958" had been removed, placed to one side, leaving a large hole in the Abbey floor. There, deep inside this tear in the fabric of the church, was a wooden casket containing Ralph's ashes. Will anyone ever see this casket again? The Dean of Westminster paid a moving tribute to Ralph and

Ursula as another casket, lighter and elegant, was laid to rest alongside Ralph. Ursula was with Ralph again, just as she wished.

In a reception afterwards, in the room where Henry IV died, Lord Armstrong warmly thanked the Dean. Michael Kennedy then paid a poignant tribute to Ursula and proposed a toast to the memory of Ralph and Ursula, united in death.

Now visitors to the Musicians' Aisle can see Ralph's tombstone and just behind it, close to Herbert Howells, there is a smaller stone, marked very clearly 'UVW'. This is, as she wanted it – simple but memorable, for all time.

Stephen Connock

Ursula, Charterhouse and *O Thou Transcendent*

by D. R. Thorpe

Tony Palmer's impressive film about the life of Ralph Vaughan Williams, *O Thou Transcendent*, evoked many memories – of Tony Palmer himself, as the cutting-edge arts impresario at Cambridge University in the early 1960s, always approaching things with a fresh eye, but above all of Ursula Vaughan Williams and her musical associations with her husband's old school, Charterhouse. It was a touching moment in the film to see John Parsons, the current Head of Strings, conducting the school orchestra in Vaughan Williams' *Charterhouse Suite* in the very hall, lined with portraits of Carthusian luminaries, where Vaughan Williams himself first performed one of his works in 1888, a Pianoforte Trio in G. On that occasion, the school mathematics master, James Noon, came up to the young composer and said, 'Very good, Williams, you must go on.' And go on he did, as Tony Palmer's film abundantly demonstrates.

One of the things brought out by Tony Palmer is the autobiographical element in much of Vaughan Williams' music. Gloucester Cathedral Choir, from the area near Down Ampney, his birthplace, features in performances of various pieces, a felicitous choice. We soon learn though that the seeming tranquillity of his early life - Down Ampney, Charterhouse, Cambridge - was but a prelude to the experience of darker events. The account of Vaughan Williams' Great War experiences and the composition of the subsequent *Pastoral Symphony* evoke thoughts that lie too deep for tears. The anguished ferocity of the Fourth Symphony of 1935 is

convincingly linked by Palmer with the anguish and despair Vaughan Williams felt about his first wife's physical disablement, and the serenity of the Fifth Symphony with the comfort and care which Ursula Wood, later his second wife, brought into his life.

The Fourth Symphony has always attracted programmatic explanations. Frank Howes famously saw in it the prophet of the 'naked violence triumphant in Europe'. Vaughan Williams always played down such associations. 'I wrote it not as a definite picture of anything external – e.g. the state of Europe – but simply because it occurred to me like this', he wrote in 1937 to his friend R. G. Longman. At a performance of the Charterhouse Masque in 1950, the last he attended of this musical pageant, and for which he had composed music for the final tableau, incorporating the *Carmen Carthusianum* (in his considered opinion 'the finest of the school songs') as the climax, Vaughan Williams was again pressed, by a visiting musicologist, as to whether the Fourth Symphony presaged the coming of the Second World War. 'No', replied Vaughan Williams, quizzically, 'I was just rather exercised about the Dorking by-pass!'

Vaughan Williams famously dedicated his Fifth Symphony – 'without permission' – to Sibelius, who noted in his diary 'Vaughan Williams gives me more than anyone can imagine.' The *Romanza* slow movement of the Fifth Symphony contains extracts from what was to become his morality opera *The*

Pilgrim's Progress and it was a performance of this work at Charterhouse in 1972, the centenary year of both Vaughan Williams and of the school's move from London to Godalming that proved pivotal in Ursula Vaughan Williams' involvement in its musical life. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, to Vaughan Williams' intense disappointment, had received a tepid welcome when it was first staged at Covent Garden in 1951. Bulky, unwieldy, visionary (like the composer himself), it encapsulated so much of Vaughan Williams' central, life-long concerns as he journeyed, an agnostic, towards the unknown region. The then Director of Music at Charterhouse, Bill Llewellyn, who appears in the Tony Palmer film with a perceptive story about Vaughan Williams and Charles Darwin, had long harboured a desire to conduct the work.

A performance of *A Sea Symphony* by the school in March 1972 had been a great success, both musically and with the audience. (It is interesting to hear Michael Kennedy in *O Thou Transcendent* speak of *A Sea Symphony* as the Vaughan Williams work that encapsulated the composer to him more than any other, and this work certainly inspired Tony Palmer to create the single most memorable section of the film, the visual imagery surrounding the performance of the emotional core of the work to Walt Whitman's words 'O vast rondure, swimming in space'.)

The Pilgrim's Progress project at Charterhouse involved even more intense preparation, both musically and dramatically, and in a manner that would have delighted the Vaughan Williams of the Leith Hill Festivals, the local community was enlisted - professional musicians, pupils, painters, singers, set builders - and John Noble reprised the role he had created at the Cambridge University revival in 1954. None of this could have happened without the full support of the Vaughan Williams estate and Ursula Vaughan Williams' enthusiasm.

Subsequently the RVW Trust, again with Ursula Vaughan Williams' blessing, established a pioneering Composer-in-Residence scheme with generous financial backing. The first such Composer-in-Residence was Roger Steptoe, who composed an opera *Philip of Macedon*, again, like *The Pilgrim's Progress*, performed in Charterhouse Hall. Ursula Vaughan Williams' skill and success as a poet made her the ideal person to write the libretto for *Philip of Macedon*, which would make a marvellous piece for the ENO at the Coliseum. Also, as befitted a Vaughan Williams Composer-in-Residence, Roger Steptoe composed a Tuba Concerto (now available on Naxos Records.) Ursula Vaughan Williams always took a great and active interest in the appointment of the Composers-in-Residence and attended the selection meetings. The success of this post led the school to establish an RVW Research Fellowship, the first holder of which was the distinguished Vaughan Williams scholar, Byron Adams, who also collaborated with Ursula Vaughan Williams and set her texts.

But it was not only with the Composer-in-Residence scheme that Ursula Vaughan Williams enriched music in the Charterhouse area. Impetus was given to the building of a new Vaughan Williams Music Centre, for which Ursula Vaughan Williams laid the foundation stone which, when unveiled, revealed, to general embarrassment, a misspelling (later

corrected) of Vaughan as Vaughn. Her comment at the time, which defused the situation, was 'how very Elizabethan!'

She later opened the RVW Centre when it was completed and a picture of her by Benedict Rubbra hangs beside the picture of Vaughan Williams in the foyer. She was very anxious that the RVW Centre should not be a shrine to the composer, but should celebrate all English composers and their music.

Ursula became a welcome and frequent visitor to all manner of functions and was always ready to share her enthusiasms with those she met. Her last visit to the school was on the occasion of the RVW International Seminar held in the summer of 2000. In the summer of 1997 she excitedly told me that she had persuaded Sir Georg Solti to take the Ninth Symphony into his repertoire. She was convinced, and rightly so, as the Palmer film shows, that the Ninth, not over-enthusiastically received at its 1958 premiere shortly before the composer's death, was the great, culminating under-rated masterpiece. The film relates how Vaughan Williams at the time said with resignation that he supposed the critics were really rather surprised that he could still compose a symphony, but of course, as Sibelius said, 'Nobody ever put up a statue to a critic.' Solti was planning to programme the work in his autumn concerts that year. Sadly, he died in September 1997, so this remains one of the great might-have-beens.



Ursula Vaughan Williams with Brian Rees, Headmaster of Charterhouse, and William Llewellyn, Director of Music

Ursula's death too marks the end of a distinct era in British cultural life. How marvellous it is that *O Thou Transcendent*, in which she appears to telling effect, should be such a comprehensive tribute to her husband and to the part she played in his creative and personal life.

When Sibelius had composed his Seventh Symphony, Vaughan Williams told him 'You have lit a candle in the world of music that will never be put out.' *O Thou Transcendent* will always remind us of two great lives that, with all their humanity and generosity of spirit, enlivened not only the England they loved, but the whole of the musical world.

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Not in an Ivory Tower

by Linda Hayward

A chance discovery of an arrangement of Vaughan Williams' *Job* for solo piano by Vally Lasker, made me wonder about the links between the composer and Gustav Holst's circle of friends and colleagues. In particular, how their activities, and others, were encouraged by mutual contact between Holst and Vaughan Williams.

Vally Lasker was a piano teacher at St. Paul's Girls School and became one of Holst's invaluable scribes. It seems that Vally was an extraordinary accompanist and arranger, and this fact was not lost on Vaughan Williams, who took advantage of her skills and asked her to arrange works of his when he needed them in a hurry. The first arrangement was probably a piano version of *A London Symphony* in 1920. This may have been used to illustrate one of Holst's lectures in the 1920s. Recording was in its infancy and so any musical examples were likely to have been live performances. Vally Lasker and either Nora Day or Helen Bidder usually played these examples. Both these ladies were closely associated with Gustav Holst. Nora Day was a St. Paul's pupil from 1907-1910, a piano and organ student who obtained her LRAM in piano teaching in 1912. She took on Vally's younger pupils at St. Paul's Girls School and later became Holst's assistant and deputy. Helen Bidder won the Walter McFarren Gold Medal for piano recital at the Royal Academy of Music. She was appointed a music mistress at St. Paul's in 1920.

When Holst joined the teaching staff of St. Paul's Girls School in 1905, he encouraged every girl in the school to attempt singing, an activity that until then had been unpopular with the pupils and their parents. Soon, the pupils found they were enjoying singing classes because of their new teacher's enthusiasm and a change of repertoire. It was difficult to find suitable music, so he "adapted mixed-voice works such as Bach cantatas, in which the tenor parts were sung by the senior girls, with notes transposed up an octave where necessary". Music by Palestrina, Vittoria and Lassus was also a rich source of material.

Holst had had experience of teaching at the Passmore Edwards Settlement, an adult education facility, and at James Allen School for Girls, a post he had accepted as a replacement for his friend Vaughan Williams, who found he could not continue as Music Director. In 1907, Morley College had a vacancy for a Music Director and Vaughan Williams was offered the job, as he had done some lecturing there. However, he was unable to

accept and recommended Gustav. Holst was accepted and took up the appointment at the beginning of the summer term. The college was specifically for working men and women and the object was to teach subjects not connected to "handicraft, trade, or business". Everyone, young or old, absolute beginners or more advanced, were welcome. Holst "placed weaker players next to stronger players so that they was learning all the time. His constant question was 'Do you enjoy it?'"

Vaughan Williams' close friendship with Holst meant that their lives were often entwined within their everyday musical activity. Both composers were involved with amateur musicians. Vaughan Williams had accepted the conductorship of the Leith Hill Musical Competition – only later called Leith Hill Musical Festival – in 1905. This new venture had been an idea of Vaughan Williams' sister, Margaret, and her friend Evangeline Farrer. They had wanted to encourage singing in the surrounding villages near Dorking, after attending a competitive festival in Petersfield. A committee was formed and rules decided upon. Evangeline became the first President, and Margaret the first Secretary. They naturally asked Ralph if he would undertake to conduct the concert at the end of the competition stages when all the participating choirs would sing together, and to coach them beforehand. From the beginning the aim was to achieve high standards in choral singing and this involved village choirs learning to sing unfamiliar choral works by major composers. Trying to find appropriate music for village choirs to sing was not easy. The music needed to be challenging but not so hard that the choirs would become discouraged. On the other hand, it should not be so easy that they became bored before the competition took place. In the first year part of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* was tackled, as well as shorter works including Brahms' *In silent night*. Bach was represented by *Now Praise my Soul* in 1906. Elgar's *It comes from misty ages* and Holst's *Love is enough*, showed that contemporary composers were not ignored. In 1907 part of Haydn's *The Creation* took centre stage, and by 1908 the competition was getting into its stride as an annual event in which the choirs were anxious to improve on previous years. *Sleepers Wake* by Bach was performed in this year.

Good adjudicators for the competition were essential and the organisers were able to get people of note from the beginning. Dr. Arthur Somervell, the composer, was the judge for the first two years, to be followed in 1907 and 1908 by Dr. Hugh Allen,

Crossword Solutions:

ACROSS: 1.Flemish Farm, 6.Red Barn, 9.Los, 10.Item, 12.Noble, 14.Green, 15.Weed,
17.Ben, 18.Russell, 20.Harham Down.
DOWN: 1.First Nowell, 2.Mab, 3.Hands, 4.Amati, 5.Norman Allin, 7.Double, 8.Allen,
11.Twelve, 13.Agnus, 16.Dover, 17.Birth, 19.Sad.

who was at this time the conductor of the Oxford Bach Choir. By 1909 two adjudicators were needed to judge the choirs! Dr. William McNaught, editor of *The Musical Times* and a well-known adjudicator of competitive music festivals, and Gustav Holst took up the challenge.

As far as the two composers were concerned there was involvement in each other's ventures, and separate work along parallel lines. Holst was organising concerts at Morley College and at St. Paul's Girls School for whatever musical forces he could muster, and both composers became involved with the revival of Henry Purcell's music. They took part in a performance of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* while students at the Royal College of Music when Stanford conducted the first modern performance in 1895. Vaughan Williams edited the first volume of Henry Purcell's *Welcome Songs* published by the Purcell Society in 1905, and Holst included part of Purcell's *King Arthur* in a concert at Morley College. The second volume of the *Welcome Songs* edited by Vaughan Williams was published in 1910, and Holst gave the first performance of Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* since 1697, at a Morley College concert in 1911. The score of *The Fairy Queen*, lost just after Purcell's death, had only recently been rediscovered and this meant that the vocal and orchestral parts needed to be copied out. Students of the college accomplished this mammoth task. One of the copyists was Vally Lasker, who had joined as a student. Amazingly Vally learned the viola, in four lessons, especially to play the instrument in the orchestra for the performance of Purcell's masterpiece.

The concert was a great success and was reported by the national newspapers. The *Morley College Magazine* for July 1911 included reports from them as well as making comments itself. The *Daily Telegraph* reported "Certainly praise is due to the chorus, orchestra, soloists, and Mr Gustav Von Holst, who conducted, for the good results which attended their efforts, and to Dr. Vaughan Williams, whose brief expositions proved more than usually illuminating." *The Times* reported "Mr. Isidore Schwiller played the violin obbligato to the best known number in the work." A full report of the concert from the college magazine gave some indication of how involved everyone was. They mentioned how the parts were copied and how both Holst and RVW worked to put the concert into performance. They wrote "This splendid illustration of seventeenth-century English music by our students, under the direction of Mr Gustav Von Holst possessed not only the charm of artistic excellence but also in a marked manner that of historic interest. The overture, with a bold theme announced on the trumpets, followed by a more fanciful subject given on the violins, prepared us for the short explanation by Dr. R. Vaughan Williams, and in his genial company, we soon imagined ourselves in the wood near Athens gazing on the forms of Titania and Oberon and the dazzling throng of attendant fairies." The fact that Isidore Schwiller was leading the orchestra was evidence of the close co-operation of personnel who were involved with Morley College activities and the Leith Hill Musical Competition. Mr. Schwiller had been playing at Dorking as leader of the orchestra from 1908. By doing all this music in the community both composers were bringing music to the masses, something they both felt passionate about.

Holst continued to teach for the rest of his life, and founded the Thaxted Whitsuntide Festival in 1916. The Festival involved students from St. Paul's Girls School, and Morley College, as well as the choir of St. John the Baptist, Thaxted. It was not competitive but involved local people, and was smaller in scope

than Leith Hill. The numbers taking part amounted to around forty-five. The music included 16th-century motets, Palestrina's *Benedictus* and Bach's *Sleepers Wake*. There was official music making as part of the church services over the Whitsun weekend and unofficial music making at every opportunity. Holst wrote to his friend W. G. Whittaker, "Our music festival at Thaxted was a feast – an orgy. Four whole days of perpetual singing and playing... We kept it up at Thaxted about fourteen hours a day. The reason we didn't do more is that we were not capable mentally or physically of realising heaven any further. Music, being identical with heaven, isn't a thing of momentary thrills, or even hourly ones. It is a condition of eternity."

As usual, he was willing to adapt and write for the festival. In 1916 he spotted a poem posted on the church notice board. It was *This have I done for my true love*. Holst set this poem to music as a part song and dedicated it to Reverend Conrad Noel, the vicar of Thaxted. The song was first performed on May 19 1918.

In 1917 the first performance of *Three Festival Choruses* by Holst took place, and in the same year he began writing *The Hymn of Jesus* at Thaxted. In 1919 no festival took place because Holst, working for the YMCA, was in Constantinople organising music making among the British troops awaiting demobilization. By chance Vaughan Williams was doing much the same in France, having been made Director of Music of the First Army, B.E.F. France. He managed to establish nine choral societies, three classes, an orchestra and a band before he left the army, having served throughout the war in the Royal Army Medical Corps and later the Royal Garrison Artillery.

After the war both festivals continued. However, the Whitsuntide festival changed to various venues in London, and later at other venues including Canterbury and Chichester Cathedrals. At the festival for 1920, which took place at Dulwich College chapel, two world premieres took place. Holst had written a *Festival Te Deum* and Vaughan Williams had brought a copy of the Kyrie from his *Mass in G minor*, as yet unpublished. As usual Holst was anxious to try it out so he got a pupil, Dorothy Callard, to copy out the voice parts so they could have a go in the chapel gallery. Dorothy later recalled "Mr. Holst perched on the corner of the balustrade, and Ralph Vaughan Williams on the organ seat."

Other activities included lecturing and writing in music publications. Vaughan Williams was a regular contributor to *The Vocalist* on various subjects including "Librettos", "Bach and Schumann" and "Good Taste". He also contributed to *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* on the subject of "Conducting". Holst wrote about his "favourite Tudor Composer" in *The Midland Musician* of 1926. He wrote "Thomas Weelkes is my favourite Tudor composer because I get more enjoyment and less disappointment from his music than I do from that of any of his contemporaries."

In 1925 Gustav gave a series of lectures on "England and her music" at Liverpool University. They included a lecture on Purcell, and reminiscences about his early days as a trombonist when a foreign sounding name was an advantage. This was because the public and critics considered foreign musicians better qualified than native ones. The Liverpool Post and Mercury dated November 21 1925 reported "It seemed to him that, on the whole, every branch of music was better than it was in 1893 when he was a raw student. He observed that Bach's *B minor Mass* required a special choir fifty years ago, while today it was being done as a

matter of course even by village choirs.” The report continued “Following his lecture at the University, Mr. Holst delivered a talk later in the evening to the members of the British Music Society at the Picton Hall on “The works of Ralph Vaughan Williams”. Dr. J. E. Wallace’s choir sang the opening of the Kyrie of the *Mass in G minor*, and Miss Vally Lasker and Miss Nora Day played the arrangement for two pianofortes of the *Pastoral Symphony*.”

Apart from all these activities they were active composers endeavouring to find their way in the musical world. When Holst received the completed copy of Ralph’s *Mass in G minor* dedicated to “Holst and his Whitsuntide Singers” in 1922, he wrote to the composer “How on earth Morleyites are going to learn the Mass I don’t know. It is quite beyond us, but still further beyond us is the idea that we’re not going to do it. I’ve suggested that they buy copies now and then when we meet in September, I’ll sack anyone who does not know it by heart!”

Vaughan Williams, who had become the conductor of the London Bach Choir in 1921, conducted the first London performance of Holst’s *Ode to Death* at the Queen’s Hall on December 19 1923. Holst wrote “It’s what I’ve been waiting for for forty-seven and a half years...you are really teaching these people to sing!” Vaughan Williams replied “What a wonderful experience it was for all of us learning your wonderful music – which got better and better as we went on.” Holst asked “Are you willing to sign a contract to conduct every first performance I get during the next ten years or so?”

Their “field days” when they worked on their recent compositions, meant that they were aware of each other’s efforts and aims. In his musical biography Vaughan Williams wrote “...we would devote a whole day, or at least an afternoon to examining each other’s compositions.”

In the autumn of 1929, Holst spent a day with Vaughan Williams at Dorking, having a “field day”. The composition Vaughan Williams was working on was *Job*. Vaughan Williams wrote “I should be alarmed to say how many ‘field days’ we spent over it. Then he came to all the orchestral rehearsals, including a special journey to Norwich, and finally he insisted on the Camargo Society performing it.”

When it was clear that *Job* would be staged, Vally Lasker received an urgent request for an arrangement for solo piano to be made from an existing two-piano version. This new version would be used for rehearsals.

Arthur Bliss was present at the orchestral rehearsal at Norwich. Vaughan Williams was conducting. Bliss remembered “Suddenly Holst, and when he was listening to music he listened with a frightening intensity, said to himself ‘That doesn’t come off. I must go and tell him.’ He stepped on to the platform, looked at the score with Vaughan Williams, discussed and suggested, and then came back to his place, while the composer spoke to the players. The section was tried over again, but with what a different sound! – clarity instead of thick obscurity. Holst always probed like a fine surgeon to the root of the difficulty.” Vaughan Williams acknowledged this when he wrote that “Holst would spend hours bringing his mastery, his keen vision, and his feeling for clear texture to bear on my work...”

In 1930 Holst was helping Vaughan Williams put the finishing touches to his piano concerto. It was tried out in a two-piano

version in Holst’s room at St. Paul’s Girls School on May 29 by Vally Lasker, Nora Day, and Astra Desmond. Helen Bidder was to have taken part, but was ill, and Holst wrote to her: “I rang up Uncle Ralph and explained that when you are well and strong he shall hear his concerto properly played. Meanwhile he and his missus are coming tomorrow to hear a strictly improper mess up of it by Vally, Nora and Astra. They’ve refused to even look at the finale and the composer will only be admitted at owner’s risk.”

The arrangement of the *Piano Concerto in C* with the orchestral part played on the second piano was another one done by Vally, not to be confused with the later arrangement for two pianos done by Joseph Cooper with the composer’s co-operation. Unfortunately, Holst was unable to attend the first performance of the concerto in February 1933 due to ill health, but Vaughan Williams did ask his opinion about revisions.

Vaughan Williams was also writing to Holst in 1930 “I want very much to have a lesson on ‘Riders’ [*Riders to the Sea*] soon. I’ve been revising and rough scoring it.”

Holst had been working on a piece, which had been commissioned by the BBC who wanted a piece for military band lasting twelve to fifteen minutes. This was the Prelude and Scherzo *Hammersmith*. On November 11 1930, Vaughan Williams heard Vally Lasker and Helen Bidder play it through in a two-piano version. He was unenthusiastic and told Holst this. However, he changed his mind when he heard the instrumental version. Although the piece was tried through at a studio at the BBC in April 1931 it did not receive its first performance until 1954. Holst made an orchestral version of *Hammersmith* during 1931 and this version had its first performance on November 25 1931 by the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Adrian Boult in the Queen’s Hall. Was this the version that Vaughan Williams preferred? Or was it the military band one? It is unclear.

The Fourth Symphony was the last one on which Holst and Vaughan Williams had “field days”. Vaughan Williams showed Holst the score on New Year’s Day 1932. On January 6 1932 Vally Lasker and Helen Bidder played a two-piano version at St. Paul’s Girls School.

When Holst was in America on a lecture tour in 1932, both composers were keeping in touch with each other’s activities by correspondence. RVW wrote to Holst “I got the ‘Intercession’ (through Nora Day). Thank you so much. I like it as much as when you played it to me which is a lot. Did I tell you I am writing a ‘Magnificat’ for the Worcester Fest?” Holst replied “It’s grand news about the Magnificat...” He also asked “How is the New Sym? [No 4] When I come home in July I want a two-piano field day on both old and new versions.”

In this letter Holst told RVW about his collapse and time in hospital while at Harvard University. He returned in June 1932, not July, as expected.

Vaughan Williams embarked on a lecture tour at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, USA, in the autumn of 1932, where he delivered a series of talks under the title “National Music”. When he returned the two friends continued their “field days”. Vaughan Williams wrote to Holst “I like especially Fields of Sorrow and David’s Lament – the two big ones I feel I am going to like – but can’t visualise them yet. I liked the old Trio [Terzetto] – but always thought that its being in 3 keys was more seen by the eye

than felt by the ear.” Holst wrote to Vaughan Williams regarding a performance of *A Pastoral Symphony* that the composer had conducted on August 31 1933. He said “I went expecting a treat but I doubt if I’ve ever been so carried away by it before – which is saying a great deal.”

Although Vaughan Williams knew that Gustav’s health was failing, it was a great shock when Holst died in May 1934. There would be no more “field days” and where would he turn for advice now? In an interview Imogen Holst explained that the “field days” had given Vaughan Williams confidence but this was reciprocal because Holst derived confidence from the mutual feedback and frank discussions too.

Vaughan Williams took over Gustav’s duties at St. Paul’s Girls School as a letter to Vally Lasker proved. He wrote to her in September 1934 “I find SPGS (and nothing else) in my diary for Wed 26 – wd you write a card and tell me what time I said I wd be there and what I am to do when I arrive?” He continued to help out at the school until Herbert Howells accepted the post of Director of Music in June 1936.

Vaughan Williams kept in touch with Morley College, even though Gustav had resigned in 1924. Arnold Goldsbrough had been appointed as Gustav’s successor. One of the first concerts he conducted was a programme of music by Vaughan Williams which Holst had been determined to attend even though he had been ill. Goldsbrough was also the accompanist at Leith Hill so the connections between the activities and interests of both composers continued. Arnold Foster succeeded Goldsbrough at Morley College and was another person with connections to Leith Hill, serving on their music committee for a number of years.

In his lectures under the title “National Music” Vaughan Williams had talked about how, in his opinion, a composer could not be international without first being national, that is home-grown. Whichever country of origin the composer came from he would have a unique approach to his composing because of the culture, history, and background of that country. He maintained that “...if the roots of your art are firmly planted in your own soil and that

soil has anything individual to give you, you may still gain the whole world and not lose your own souls.”

He also said “What a composer has to do is find out the real message he has to convey to the community and say it directly and without equivocation.”

All their lives both composers had striven to get their message to the public and to write music for all occasions. Through working with amateur as well as professional musicians they had managed to bring music to whomsoever they could. Therefore, in considerable measure achieving what an English composer should do, according to Vaughan Williams, which was to “...live with his fellows and make his art an expression of the whole life of the community”. As a result, countless people became involved with music making having been influenced by Gustav Holst and Ralph Vaughan Williams.

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Vaughan Williams and the Oxford Bach Choir

by Peter Gilliver

An important Vaughan Williams event will be taking place in Oxford’s Sheldonian Theatre on 6 December 2008. The Oxford Bach Choir will be renewing its acquaintance with what is surely the most important piece it has ever premièred: Vaughan Williams’ oratorio *Sancta Civitas*. But the choir’s relationship with Vaughan Williams extends far beyond the fact that they gave the first performance of *Sancta Civitas* in 1926: in fact it had an important part to play in establishing the young composer’s reputation, and continued to have a close working relationship with him for the rest of his life. This article looks at that relationship, with a few glances at some of Vaughan Williams’ other connections with Oxford.

The most significant figure in the OBC’s relationship with Vaughan Williams was Hugh Percy Allen, the choir’s conductor during the first quarter of the twentieth century (and

who also became conductor of the London Bach Choir, professor of music at Oxford, and director of the Royal College of Music). Hugh Allen was of course a great friend and champion of Vaughan Williams, whom he had known since his undergraduate days at Cambridge; his championing of Vaughan Williams’ music was acknowledged by the composer himself in a letter to Hubert Foss, his publisher at Oxford University Press, in 1941: “I know that I owe any success I have had more to you (except H. P. A. who insisted on shoving the S[ea] Symph[ony] down people’s throats [...]) than to anyone.”

Allen first conducted the OBC in 1901 – in a performance of Brahms’ *Requiem* with the slightly surprising accompaniment of organ, two pianos, and timpani – but lost no time in introducing modern English music into the choir’s repertoire.

In 1905 they performed Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens*, with the composer wielding the baton; and the following year they gave the first performance of a *Hymn to Dionysus* by Ernest Walker, the organist of Balliol College. In 1909 Allen conducted the choir in their first piece of Vaughan Williams, *Toward the Unknown Region*, which had been first performed only in 1907, and in March 1911, only five months after the Leeds première of *A Sea Symphony*, the composer came to Oxford to conduct the choir in the work's second performance. In fact this was in some ways another première: the work had been substantially revised after the first performance at Leeds, so that the Oxford performance was the first performance of the symphony in the form in which it has become generally known. (One myth about this performance should be firmly laid to rest, namely the suggestion – made, for example, in Cyril Bailey's biography of Hugh Allen – that it was the first time the symphony's marvellous Scherzo was included, the Leeds choir being supposedly too scared to sing it. Michael Kennedy has established beyond doubt in his books that the Scherzo was performed in Leeds along with the rest of the work. It is not inconceivable, though, that Allen, anticipating alarm among the Oxford singers at the difficulty of the music – and who could blame them? – may have told a little white lie so that they would feel spurred on to do better.)

A review of the OBC's performance in the *Oxford Chronicle* of 10 March 1911 commented on the "vividly picturesque" way in which Vaughan Williams had set Whitman's words, his "clever orchestration", and noted that the composer "was accorded a great ovation". The fact that this performance was followed by one of Beethoven's *Choral Symphony* is an indication of the greater stamina of choir and audiences alike a century ago. (1911 was something of a vintage year for the choir: for their December concert they were conducted by Elgar in *The Kingdom*, also still a relative newcomer to the repertoire. Elgar's music did not feature prominently in the choir's concerts during Allen's conductorship: he had little

enthusiasm for his music, reputedly referring to *The Dream of Gerontius* as "the Nightmare".)

The choir's second performance of the *Sea Symphony* was also a special occasion. In June 1919 Vaughan Williams again came to Oxford, this time to receive an honorary Doctorate of Music, and the ceremony was followed by a concert marking the 250th anniversary of the opening of the Sheldonian Theatre, at which, joined by a contingent of singers from the London Bach Choir, the OBC sang *A Sea Symphony* and *Blest Pair of Sirens*.

For the rest of Vaughan Williams' life, the choir regularly performed his music, frequently with the composer present at the performance and occasionally on the rostrum. A particularly special year was 1922, when four of the choir's five concerts featured his music. On two occasions the piece in question was substantial – *A Sea Symphony* again in May (with the composer present), and the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* in December – but the two concerts given on November 12 included only the hymn *For all the saints*, in the composer's own orchestration: a version which is not listed in Michael Kennedy's catalogue of Vaughan Williams' works. This, together with Elgar's orchestration of *Jerusalem*, formed a rather extraordinary pendant to a concert (or pair of concerts!) in which the main item was Verdi's *Requiem*.

In 1926, the last year of Hugh Allen's conductorship of the OBC, a Festival of Music was held in Oxford in commemoration of Allen's first predecessor as professor of music, William Heather (c.1563–1627). The piece of contemporary music chosen for performance in the festival, in a concert which also featured Parry's *L'Allegro ed il Penseroso*, was Vaughan Williams' new (and as yet unperformed) oratorio *Sancta Civitas*. Ralph and Adeline came to Oxford in February for some of the early rehearsals, staying at New College where H. A. L. Fisher, Adeline's brother, was

Warden, and returned for the first performance. This is perhaps not the place for a detailed discussion of this remarkable piece. Suffice it to say that Elgar told Vaughan Williams after hearing a performance of *Sancta Civitas*: "I once thought of setting those words, but I shall never do that now, and I am glad I didn't because you have done it for me." Vaughan Williams himself said in later life that of all his choral works *Sancta Civitas* was the one he liked best; and Ursula Vaughan Williams comments that "it epitomizes much of his thought, belief, and imagination."

Although Allen's successors as conductor of the OBC, William

Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford



Harris (conductor 1926-33) and Thomas Armstrong, were no strangers to Vaughan Williams or his music, for the next ten years the choir sang nothing by him. In the late 1930s, however, there was a return to form: in 1936 they gave another performance of *A Sea Symphony*, with Isobel Baillie and Leyland White, and in 1938 there was a bumper concert, with the composer present once more to hear his *Benedicite, Sancta Civitas* (for the second time), and a performance of *A London Symphony* under the baton of Sydney Watson. During the Second World War, when tenor and bass numbers were much depleted, the choir nevertheless managed performances of the *Serenade to Music* and the *Mass in G minor*. In 1947 the first Oxford performance of *Flos Campi* was given by the choir's recently formed "Cantata Section", with the viola part taken by Jean Stewart, the dedicatee of Vaughan Williams' String Quartet No. 2.

1948 was another vintage RVW year. It was also a great year for Parry, whose music was celebrated in another music festival held in Oxford in May. Unsurprisingly, Vaughan Williams was only too happy to associate himself with his former teacher, and came up with the choir's second Vaughan Williams première, the little gem *A Prayer to the Father of Heaven*, with its touching dedication to Parry's memory, "not as an attempt palely to reflect his incomparable art, but in the hope that he would have found in this motet (to use his own words) 'something characteristic'." Those alarmed at the prospect of a choir of several hundred tackling this beautiful unaccompanied motet may be reassured to know that the première was given by the "Cantata Section" – though this in turn (in the form of the "Little Oxford Bach Choir") came to number over 100. (Ursula recalled that "Ralph was very pleased with the performance.") How performance practices change.

Vaughan Williams returned to Oxford to hear the OBC sing his music on two further occasions. The first was in 1952, when he himself conducted the *Serenade to Music* (he returned to Oxford five days later to hear the first performance of *An Oxford Elegy* in Queen's College, conducted by Bernard Rose.) The second occasion was a concert in 1956 graced by

the presence of both Vaughan Williams and Herbert Howells, who heard the latter's now little performed *Kent Yeoman's Wooing Song* and the former's *Five Tudor Portraits*. Rather more poignantly, in November 1958 the widows of two composers were present: Joy Finzi, to hear her husband's *In Terra Pax*, and Ursula Vaughan Williams, who heard the choir give its sixth performance of *A Sea Symphony*, with John Cameron and Stella Hichens. By this time the conductorship of the choir had passed to Sydney Watson, under whose baton the number of Vaughan Williams performances dipped sharply. This can only have been a reflection of the general falling-off of interest in his music; it surely cannot be due to a lack of sympathy with the composer on the part of Watson, who often conducted his music, and gave a series of lectures on the symphonies in 1961. He also conducted the choir in *Five Tudor Portraits* on two further occasions, and in 1960 revived *Sancta Civitas*, in a performance which featured Keith Falkner as soloist (and of which a recording was made). In 1966 a section of the choir also performed *An Oxford Elegy*, at the first ever Churchill Memorial Concert in Blenheim Palace, conducted by Clive Muncaster. Over the next four decades, however, very little of Vaughan Williams' music has featured in the choir's concerts, with two performances of the *Five Mystical Songs* and two of *A Sea Symphony* (the second of which, in 2003, was with the New Queen's Hall Orchestra, playing instruments of Vaughan Williams' period, a fascinating opportunity to reassess the symphony's instrumentation and balance). It would be wonderful to think that our concert on December 6 might mark a resurgence of interest in Vaughan Williams in Oxford.

[The concert Peter Gilliver refers to will be given in the Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford, on Saturday December 6 2008 at 7.30pm. The Oxford Bach Choir will be joined by Daniel Turner, tenor and Derek Welton, baritone, and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra will be conducted by Nicholas Cleobury. As well as *Sancta Civitas* the programme will include the *Five Mystical Songs* as well as Holst's *Hymn of Jesus* and Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens*. For further details members can go to www.oxfordbachchoir.org.uk or reserve by email at tickets@oxfordbachchoir.org]

NEW BINDERS NOW AVAILABLE!!!

As members of the RVW Society we are justly proud of our Journal. In this special 50th anniversary year we are pleased to announce the arrival of a handsome new Binder, custom-made for the Society. The new binders are black with the Journal logo in gold on the spine. Each one holds 12 issues (four years' worth) with easy-to-use elasticated cords and just 4 will hold all the issues from no. 1 to the present, with room for several more. The price is unchanged at £12.50 each, incl. p&p.

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Eric Seddon on *Flos Campi*: two members respond

Adam Stern

I enjoyed much of what Eric Seddon had to say about *Flos Campi* (Journal No. 42, July 2008). It may therefore seem petty to seize upon one detail with which I disagree, but I couldn't help being struck, in the midst of some well-researched and -expressed views, by the statement "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."

It seems to be yet another instance of the proselytizer saying, in effect, "I know best, and those who remain unconvinced, however subjective my views, are wrong." Perhaps, like the "some people" in his poem *Ascension* who "look for what they want to see", Mr. Seddon is unable or unwilling to consider the validity of viewpoints that diverge from what he fervently wishes to be so. I'm going to put forth some thoughts on Vaughan Williams', and others', art that might not fly with some readers, but, as the Journal and the members of the Society have not shied away from controversy in the past, I'll proceed.

The now-oft-consulted online encyclopædia, Wikipedia, defines "program music" as music "intended to evoke extra-musical ideas [and] images in the mind of the listener by musically representing a scene, image or mood." To me, this means that when a composer goes beyond a description more generic than "Symphony No. 1 in C Major" or "Piano Concerto No. 9 in E-flat", the music is open to interpretation based on the provided subtitle, program or, in the case of anything vocal, text (although the chorus' text in *Flos Campi* is of no help to my argument whatsoever!) With instrumental music, these extra-musical condiments can be anything from a title that gives a general, overall clue (e.g. *Nightride and Sunrise*) to a more detailed account of people, places, actions, etc. (e.g. *Symphonie Fantastique*). The trick, of course, is to write music which can still stand on its own without the support of non-musical ideas (which Sibelius and Berlioz have most certainly done in the examples cited.)

Now, assuming there are no quibbles with these definitions and parameters, I will go a step further with the statement that all sacred music – Bach's cantatas, Handel's oratorios, Haydn's masses, the lot – is program music. This may be an affront to those who think that sacred music is automatically loftier and of more spiritual depth than works dealing with Americans in Paris, Roman pineries or syncopated chronometers, but whatever their intrinsic worth, I believe all these compositions fall into the same category.

Then follows the question of connection: how much actual experience or empathy must the composer have with the "subject matter" by which a piece is inspired for the music to be valid, heartfelt and convincing? Did the retiring, pacifistic Holst ably communicate the chaos, heartbreak and "stupidity of war" (his description) in *Mars* from *The Planets*, in spite of never having served on the battlefield? Could the severely flawed human being that was Richard Wagner nevertheless conceive and deliver music

of nobility, compassion and tenderness? And did Tchaikovsky depict Hell in the most terrifying musical terms possible in *Francesca da Rimini*, in spite of writing it seventeen years before having any possible knowledge of the place? I believe the answer to all three questions is "yes".

All great artists, whether creators or re-creators, are graced with the ability to understand and communicate many things, whether part of their personæ or not. Think of such actors as Robert Ryan and Richard Widmark, lauded for their kind hearts and gentle souls off-screen, who gave us so many thrilling jolts of pure cinematic villainy. Or playwright Georges Feydeau, known as a man of unrelieved sadness and moroseness (some who knew him said they never saw him smile), and remembered for a catalogue of crackling farces such as *A Flea in Her Ear* and *Hotel Paradiso*. Or those operatic geniuses Verdi and Puccini, neither of whom were angels in their private lives but were no monsters either, whose music for Iago and Scarpia, respectively, can freeze the blood in one's veins.

Which brings us back to Vaughan Williams, through all of whose vocal music – whether settings of scriptural texts, Shakespeare, Walt Whitman or his beloved Ursula – runs a vein of absolute commitment and sincerity. I think that this was simply a facet of the man himself, who, irrespective of the project at hand, "did his best, because nothing else was good enough" (to paraphrase one expression of his work ethic). Was it possible for him, with his worldliness, his compassion for the human spirit, and his supreme artistry, to live in the moment when creating music (be it "absolute" or "program") and, in the sacred works, to project a spirituality so great as to convey a sense of theism? I believe this absolutely. I can listen to his sacred music and be swept up in its *expression* of belief, while also accepting the veracity of his remarks about his atheism/agnosticism, made to those he knew best and to whom he entrusted his innermost thoughts.

In a marvelous essay on the subject of program music, W. J. Turner had this to say: "I do not propose...to explain why God loves a sparrow or why Berlioz loves Harriet Smithson and composes a *Symphonie Fantastique* rather than a string quartet. The value of the *Symphonie Fantastique* – as of the C Sharp Minor Quartet (Beethoven's Opus 131) – depends equally upon what Berlioz and Beethoven respectively *give* in their work. If Van Gogh chooses to paint a sunflower and Rembrandt an old woman, the virtue of their pictures depends entirely upon Van Gogh and on Rembrandt, and not upon the sunflower or the woman – which have both been the subjects of many lifeless and valueless but recognizable paintings."

And the value, the virtue, of *Flos Campi* – and the *Magnificat*, and *Sancta Civitas*, and *Sir John in Love* and *Epitaph on John Jayberd of Diss* – depends entirely on Vaughan Williams, one of those creators who consistently and generously gave his all. When a personality of that magnitude and goodness gives everything he has to his art, he can convince you of anything.

No, Mr. Seddon, the notion is not at rest. It is awake, fully conscious, and still cheerfully divisive. Which, as I hope anyone assessing a subjective issue would agree, is all for the good.

Michael Farman

Mr. Seddon's bewilderment is understandable if he insists on continuing his search for ecclesiastical significance in *Flos Campi*, in spite of the fact that the composer himself denied any such significance. If however, Mr. Seddon could regard it simply as a very beautiful, exotic and sensual evocation of the spirit of the *Song of Solomon*, he might enter more fully into the world of the piece. Of course, since it's by Vaughan Williams, there is a spiritual dimension to the music, but surely this is more widely encompassing than can be explained by reference to any specific theology. The claim that it can be seen as the centerpiece to a theological triptych including *Sancta Civitas* and the *Magnificat* therefore seems far-fetched; the unique nature of *Flos Campi* in the composer's output, both in the conception of the work and the orchestral resources used, has frequently been remarked on.

Mr. Seddon begins his piece with a long paragraph in which he overstates his case by claiming that, before Vaughan Williams' time "...it had already become common practice for major composers to be, in a sense, literary men as well". He cites Wagner and a few twentieth-century examples, and goes on to say "the modern world...demanded political theorists, sociologists, even seers – very clearly men of the written word as well as the musical score." While it's true that there is an abundance of scribes ready to write about each new score, where is the pressure on composers to do likewise? Program notes and reviews are more often than not written by the scribes rather than the composers. For every major composer who is comfortable explaining the sources of his inspiration, I'll bet there's another who prefers to remain silent.

Although conceding that Vaughan Williams published plenty of program notes, criticisms, lectures and books, Mr. Seddon says "a close reading of them makes one wonder whether he didn't disdain the discipline or see it as somewhat irrelevant to the business of music-making." Is this true of a composer who wrote passionately and cogently about music in his lectures on *National Music*, in *Who Wants the English Composer?* and a host of other occasional writings? His reticence was entirely about his own

work, and this can surely be explained partly by his upbringing as an Englishman of his class and time, for whom speaking of deep emotions would not be considered the "done thing"; but most of all by his conviction that music should appeal directly, without resort to external supports. Hence the smokescreens of public schoolboy jokes, flippancies and red herrings in his program notes. He expressed this conviction elsewhere forcefully enough (quoted in Michael Kennedy's *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*):

"There is but one really musical emotion, and it is produced by the music composed, and not by the agency which composed the music....we are not called upon to peep into the mysteries of the laboratory; it is enough for us to delight in the lustre of pure gold."

"If my music doesn't make itself understood as music without any tributary explanation – well, it's a failure as music and there's nothing more to be said. It matters, of course, enormously to the composer what he was thinking about when he was writing a particular work; but to no one else does it matter one jot."

Vaughan Williams is, in fact, by no means alone in his unwillingness to reveal to the public the genesis of his works. Many composers prefer their music to "speak for itself". Even Mahler, for example, who wrote several scenarios for his Third Symphony, in the end discarded them and wanted the music to stand on its own. The difference is that Vaughan Williams' strength of character ensured that he remained true to his convictions throughout his life.

So, however we may disagree with the composer's view and wish for more insight into the origins and thoughts behind works such as *Flos Campi*, it seems we must be content with supplying our own subjective interpretations. Mr. Seddon appears to understand the subjectivity of his own notions. I welcome this, as evidence of what political observers in the USA like to call a more "nuanced" position than some of his assertions in his previous essays.

In conclusion, how fortunate we are that, in Vaughan Williams' music, there is so much "lustre of pure gold" to enrich our lives with meaning that transcends words.

RVW, Email and the Internet

Thanks are due to those members who have responded positively to the request to provide email addresses. Email is a cheap and convenient way of communicating and the Society invites members to pass their email addresses on to the Membership Officer, David Betts, whose contact details are to be found on the front page. All information pertaining to members is of course held in strict confidence and is used only by the Society.

Please don't forget the Society's website which received a positive write-up in *The Times* recently. Type 'Vaughan Williams' into the best known internet search engine and our site is the first result to come up. It is a high quality site with far too many features to mention here. Members are urged to visit and see for themselves.

www.rvwsociety.com



Let Beauty Awake

Last chance to book for a 2008 highlight!

With over 100 delegates already signed up for the British Library Symposium on November 22-23 2008, members are urged not to delay their booking. The two-day conference considers the influence of literature and poetry on both Elgar and Vaughan Williams. The following internationally recognised speakers are taking part in our Symposium:

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A detailed programme and booking form is enclosed with this Journal.

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Albion Records' latest CD is, perhaps, our finest to date. It is for mixed chorus and includes world premiere recordings such as *Sun, Moon, Stars and Man*, to words by Ursula Vaughan Williams.

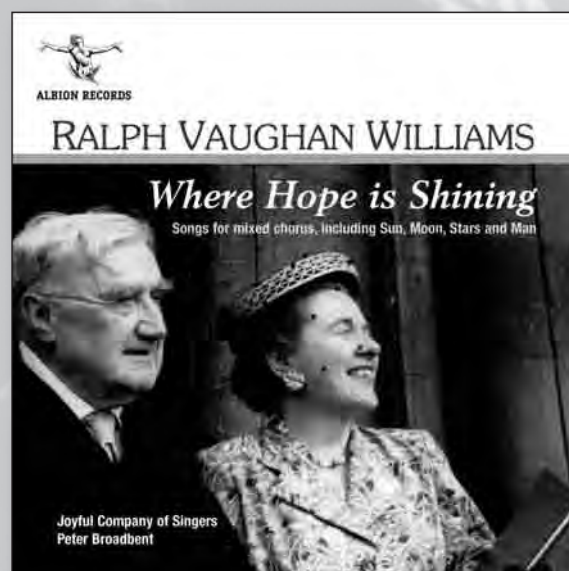
There are a number of beautiful folk song settings, including *Mannin Veen*, *Loch Lomond* and *The Turtle Dove*.

One of the highlights of the disc is the choral setting *The New Commonwealth*, from the prelude to the film *49th Parallel*.

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Down Ampney Day

by John Calvert

I retired as Vicar of Down Ampney last June but returned on the May 5th Bank Holiday Monday this year for a day of Celebration of Ralph Vaughan Williams in the village. It was part of the Gloucester Choral Society's weekend of celebrations of the composer. The concert on the Saturday in Gloucester Cathedral included *The Wasps Overture*, the *Tallis Fantasia* and the *Sea Symphony*, Vaughan Williams settings were used at services on the Sunday and the finale was the Monday in Down Ampney. In addition, Tony Palmer's film was shown on the Friday, Michael Kennedy spoke on "Vaughan Williams, the Pioneer" and another concert on Sunday evening included *A Vision of Aeroplanes*, *Five Mystical Songs* and *Three Preludes founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes*. (Incidentally my wife walked in to the *Prelude on "Rhosymedre"* at our marriage 40 years ago!)

The Down Ampney Day began at 11am with a superb talk by Stephen Johnson entitled "RVW: his Passion for English Folk Music". Then followed lunch in marquees on the lawn of the Old Vicarage. After lunch small groups were taken round the house. Division into two separate residences, possibly in the 1930s, has

altered much of the building. The main entrance, adjoining the garden where lunch was served, opens on to a drawing room and stairs, both of which remain substantially unaltered since it was built to house the Vaughan Williams family. Above the kitchen door, which is visible from the main road, is an inscription to Ralph Vaughan Williams.

As The Old Vicarage is now in private hands it was a real privilege to be allowed such a detailed glimpse of the composer's early childhood home.

The event ended with a concert in church given by Iestyn Davies (countertenor), Rachel Baldock (oboe) with Anna Tilbrook (accompanist). Works by Butterworth, Britten, Quilter and Warlock were performed together with Vaughan Williams' *Ten Blake Songs*, *The Sky Above the Roof* and *Silent Noon*.

It was a pleasure for me to return and meet some old friends but also to engage again with Vaughan Williams in spoken word and song.



A group beginning their tour of the Old Vicarage



The side of the house visible from the main road. On the right is what may have been a private chapel. RVW was baptised either here or in the church



All Saints', Down Ampney



The performers at the afternoon concert



Sir Bernard Lovell at the afternoon concert

In the first of a new series, **John Wright**, introduces the **ARTHUR BLISS SOCIETY**

Sir Arthur Bliss



In celebrating the anniversaries of Vaughan Williams this year and Elgar last year the huge achievements of these giants among English composers have been justly acknowledged, and it is satisfying to know that public awareness of their music will have increased considerably. A number of other English composers of the twentieth century still need a considerable helping hand to promote their music more widely, and one of these is Sir Arthur Bliss, a name that is known and respected, but whose music often doesn't achieve the recognition it deserves. Most people will know that he was Master of the Queen's Music (an honour that he took very seriously), but how much of his music is generally known? Perhaps some of the orchestral music, such as the *Colour Symphony*, *Music for Strings* or the Piano Concerto, or maybe the ballet *Checkmate*, or his film music for *Things to Come*. There is much more out there waiting to be discovered by a wider audience, and it covers a long composing career from the *enfant terrible* days of works like *Rout* immediately following the First World War, via a gradual mellowing of style, right through to his late choral work *Shield of Faith*, written in 1975.

Early in 2003 the Arthur Bliss Society was formed by Gerald Towell, now its Chairman. In the years immediately following Sir Arthur's death in 1975, Gerald had heard some of his music at the Cheltenham Festival (of which Bliss had been President) and made a point of telling Lady Bliss how much he had enjoyed it. A friendship was struck up that has remained to this day, and Gerald began to enthuse others living in the Cheltenham area with the music of Bliss, myself included. He introduced me to the lovely choral work *Pastoral* and I decided to perform it with my choir (Charlton Kings Choral Society) in 1986. Lady Bliss, who had

welcomed me to her London home to discuss the work and study the manuscript, attended the performance and was delighted with it. The choir found it to be one of the most enjoyable pieces they had sung and we gave a further performance in 1999. Spurred on by the enthusiasm shown, in 2001 we performed what is arguably Bliss's greatest masterpiece, the choral symphony *Morning Heroes*, in a concert which also included his Cello Concerto (with soloist Emma Denton) and the March from *Things to Come*. The Orator in *Morning Heroes* was Peter Ainsworth (currently the MP for East Surrey), another Bliss enthusiast. Thus the town of Cheltenham became a cradle for all this Bliss activity, and we even have a road named after him now, pre-dating by a few years a long-awaited statue of another of its great sons, Gustav Holst.

The Arthur Bliss Society was formed with the aim of furthering the appreciation, understanding and knowledge of the music of Arthur Bliss. The main focus of our activity is the twice yearly newsletter, which has gone from strength to strength and received many favourable comments about the quality of its articles and the high standard of presentation. People who knew Bliss have reminisced in print about their experiences, and others have written analytical articles about his music, sometimes sharing the fruits of their research. A particularly enjoyable and thought-provoking article recently was *The Making of Morning Heroes* by Malcolm Brown (Autumn 2007) in which he describes his making of a BBC Radio 3 broadcast in 1985 about the historical background of this work. The newsletter also reviews CDs (we recently compared three recordings of the Bliss Piano Concerto, for example) and lists forthcoming performances. Up to the minute information can be found on our website (www.arthurbliss.org) which is expertly administered by committee member Isabel Syed. Our President, Lady Bliss, although rather frail now at the age of 104, has always actively encouraged and supported the society's activities. Our Vice-President is George Dannatt, a distinguished artist and sometime music critic, who was a close friend of the Bliss family.

Although the Arthur Bliss Society is still relatively young (and its members currently number only about a tenth of those in the RVW Society!) there are encouraging signs that interest is growing. There have been several social gatherings at Three Choirs Festivals, including a lunch and talk by Andrew Burn at Hereford in 2006 and members have attended Terry Barfoot's "Arts in Residence" courses. We recently advertised the Philharmonia's *Vaughan Williams – the Pioneering Pilgrim* series in our newsletter and in return they have been displaying our brochures at each concert.

There is also a Bliss Trust, and people sometimes wonder what the connection is between the two organizations. The Trust exists separately to administer financial and other matters relating to Bliss recordings and publications, and it awards grants towards future live performances and recordings of his music. The members of its committee are from a variety of musical and non-musical backgrounds, and include Sir Arthur's two daughters Karen Sellick and Barbara Gatehouse. We have a very good relationship with the Trust and it has become common practice for one of our committee to attend their meetings.

So what of the connection between Bliss and Vaughan Williams? In his autobiography *As I Remember* (Thames Publishing, revised and enlarged 1989) Bliss remarks: "To us musicians in Cambridge Vaughan Williams was the magical name; his *Songs of Travel* were on all pianos and under the direction of Cyril Rootham the Cambridge University Musical Society prepared one of the earliest performances of his *Sea Symphony*."

He goes on to give his impressions of the first performance of *On Wenlock Edge*, describing how his attention was "riveted on VW himself as he sat in front, dressed in tweeds, smoking a pipe, a massive man with a magnificent head."

Much later, in the year of Vaughan Williams' death, Bliss ended a radio broadcast with the following tribute to the great man: "Vaughan Williams grew in stature as the years went by, like some magnificent tree. At the end his mind was still filled with music. He was always an explorer, a searcher. He was a great man, as we judge great men, and it was wholly fitting that he should be laid to rest in the Abbey beside Purcell and Handel."

The whole of this, and other remarks about RVW, can be read in *Bliss on Music – Selected writings of Sir Arthur Bliss 1920-1975* (OUP, 1991)

The respect was mutual, and it is interesting to reflect that in the Norwich Festival of 1930, two works were receiving their first performance, *Job* and *Morning Heroes*. These and other connections were reflected upon in a fascinating radio broadcast (*Comparing Notes*, 1987) in which Richard Baker interviewed both Ursula Vaughan Williams and Trudy Bliss. We printed a complete transcription of that broadcast in our newsletter of Spring 2007.

For further information about the Arthur Bliss Society do visit our website or contact our membership secretary Jill Smith on 01242 578688 or jillsmithclady@aol.com.

John Wright is newsletter editor of the Arthur Bliss Society

Members will be familiar with the name Frank McManus, a regular correspondent to the Journal. An extract from his *Book of Days* appeared in Journal No. 7, and he has now published the complete book privately, as Mardale Books, under the title from a Walter Scott poem, *The March and the Muster*. Its wide-ranging contents, one per day of the year plus sectional prologues and a postlude, include a dozen references to classical composers. Vaughan Williams gets four entries, and Brahms, Sibelius and Tchaikovsky enjoy similar coverage. There are also sections on ballads, parlour music and playground songs. Frank writes "With

items on literature, science, church doctrine and social history, plus cartoons and frolics, the book earns its subtitle 'Daybook, Commonplace Book, Muchness, Omnium Gatherum, Nightcap and Cornucopia'."

Members can secure their copy by sending a cheque payable to Frank McManus (UK £9/Europe £12/rest of the world £15) at 97, Longfield Road, Todmorden, OL14 6ND, UK. He even offers a discount of £2 per additional copy for multiple orders.

Poisoned Kiss Update

We can now give more details of the production announced in the last edition of The Journal – including a change in one of the venues, and full cast details.

This is a new production by New Sussex Opera, with the full NSO Chorus and Kent Sinfonia, conducted by Nicholas Jenkins, and directed by Michael Moxham. Cast includes established operatic stars and talented newcomers: Tormentilla - Anna Dennis, Amaryllus - Nicholas Sharratt, Angelica - Heather Shipp, Gallanthus - James McOran Campbell, Dipsacus - Ian Caddy, The Empress Persicaria - Margaret Preece. (Our versatile Empress is in fact taking a holiday from singing the Mother Abbess in *The Sound of Music* at the Palladium in order to sing this role!)

The venue for the opening performance is now The Pavilion Theatre, Worthing, on Saturday November 8 at 7.30 pm. Subsequent performances: The Floral Hall, The Winter Garden,

Eastbourne, on Sunday 9 November at 3 pm; Lewes Town Hall on Wednesday November 12 at 7.30 pm. See www.newsussexopera.com for booking details and more information.

NSO has presented three British premières in its thirty year history and is delighted to be mounting a new production of this enchanting work. It is very grateful to the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society and to the Chairman for their support. Don't miss the all too rare opportunity to experience a live performance of this ravishing opera!

Special Offer to RVW Society members: buy a top price ticket and then quote your RVW Society membership number to a programme seller at the theatre to get a free souvenir programme.

Raymond Monk would appreciate hearing from any Society member who can make available to him recordings of the Vaughan Williams Oboe Concerto [Leon Goossens] and the *Six*

Studies in English Folksong [Jean Stewart]. In return for these a couple of rare recordings of *A London Symphony* will be offered. Telephone 0116 2544613 or email raymond.monk@amserv.net.

[*Editor's note: Ralph Vaughan Williams' relationship with religion has preoccupied many members ever since it featured as the theme of the Journal in June 2005. Given the importance of the subject, the interest and controversy it has provoked are not so surprising. Two further contributions appear in this issue. On an earlier page two members from the United States reply to Eric Seddon's article on Flos Campi (issue no. 42). And here is a sermon, preached by Canon Neil Heavisides at Gloucester Cathedral on May 4 2008 as part of the Vaughan Williams Festival. With these two pieces I propose that we lay the subject to rest, at least until such time as new evidence emerges which might help us elucidate it further.*]

"O farther, farther, farther sail." The whispered words of Walt Whitman at the end of the *Sea Symphony* are where we need to begin this morning on the Sunday between Ascension and Pentecost. But perhaps even more significantly we need to begin with the silence that followed those words last night. It is a time when only longing and imagination will enable us to engage with the depths of the mystery of the "Word made flesh, God-with-us" and God utterly other than us. Perhaps Vaughan Williams felt obliged to call himself an atheist because the Church of his day appeared to make the reality of God far too mean and small.

God is not to be bounded by our language and structures. No wonder one of our greatest contemporary composers, James MacMillan, speaks of music as the most spiritual of the arts and is, both historically and culturally, vitally connected to religious experience. "One is struck", he says, "by how many key figures in contemporary music were deeply spiritual people: Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Messiaen, Poulenc, Britten." Yes, he includes Britten in his list. Like Vaughan Williams it was conventional religion which Britten so abhorred – a narrowing of horizons and vision which stultifies and damages.

Vaughan Williams in the last year of his life sent a message to a school in Norfolk (the primary school at Swaffham) where one of the houses was to bear his name: "I am very much pleased to think that one of your houses is to bear my name. I am myself a musician and I believe that all the arts, and especially music, are necessary to a full life. The practical side of living of course is

important and this, I feel sure, is well taught in your school: such things teach you how to make your living. But music will enable you to see past facts to the very essence of things in a way which science cannot do. The arts are the means by which we can look through the magic casements and see what lies beyond." This spiritual vision was rooted in relationships, most especially of course with Adeline and then Ursula but crucially too

with folks of all shapes and sizes who were part of the many choirs he encouraged and conducted. Choirs of troops during the First World War, choral societies up and down the country.

He once said "I would rather be guilty of encouraging a fool than discouraging a genius." His encouragement was infectious and it inspired many, founded as it was on making connections with and between people. I was speaking recently with the distinguished contralto Helen Watts who often sang here in Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester during the Three Choirs Festivals but also sang with Vaughan Williams at his own local festival in Surrey. She remembers how helpful Vaughan Williams was to soloists and singers alike: he looked for the best in people and always encouraged it.

Jesus in the Gospel for today (John 17 vv1-11) cries out, "Father, the hour has come, glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you." Only the language of relationship will do. Not because "relationship" explains anything about the way we encounter the

mystery of God but it is the nearest way we can find to express the personal nature of that encounter. It is depth meeting depth, mystery meeting mystery. Something emerging beyond language and discourse. Listen to part of R.S. Thomas's poem entitled "Emerging":

"We are beginning to see
now it is matter is the scaffolding of spirit....that
as form in sculpture is the prisoner
of the hard rock, so in everyday life
it is the plain facts and natural happenings
that conceal God and reveal Him to us
little by little under the mind's tooling."

And, we may want to add, under the heart's pain and longing. For the glory given to the Son is a strange and terrible glory. "Eternal life" is not bright reward but a learning to know the truth (verse 3) through suffering. The anguish of all those affected by the cruelties in Austria cannot be by-passed. And of course they only represent the countless cruelties presently being afflicted on human beings all over the world. Christ's making of the name of God known (verse 6) can take only one course. And it took the First World War and its terrible toll on life for the Church to engage properly with this truth: love moves eternally from Bethlehem to Calvary.

There are no short cuts – the eternal note of sadness in Vaughan Williams' Ninth Symphony is the truth. The cross is the glory that was of God before the world existed (verse 5). Alleluias are not an inoculation against the pain.

The glory of the cross which is where John's Gospel sees the heart of glory, does not pretend the darkness is light. This is a dazzling darkness which perhaps our greatest twentieth-century poet, David Gascoyne, expresses in his poem *De Profundis*. This poem was written out of the terrors of the Second World War.

"Out of these depths:

Where footsteps wander in the marsh of death and an
Intense infernal glare is on our faces facing down:

Out of these depths, what shamefaced cry
Half choked in the dry throat, as though a stone
Were our confounded tongue, can ever rise:
Because the mind has been struck blind
And may no more conceive
Thy Throne...

Because the depths
Are clear with only death's
Marsh-light, because the rock of grief
Is clearly too extreme for us to breach:
Deepen our depths,

And aid our unbelief."

Sometimes we can only whisper, "Alleluia, Christ is risen."
Amen.

R. S. Thomas



The 2008 **STANFORD SOCIETY WEEKEND** is being planned for November 1 and 2 in London. This will include music of both Stanford and Ralph Vaughan Williams in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of Vaughan Williams' death.

Final details of the Weekend are still being planned at the time of writing but already confirmed for November 1 are the Brodowski String Quartet, who will perform the Vaughan Williams String Quartet in G Minor and the Stanford String Quartet Number 8 in E minor Opus 167; Stephen Varcoe will lead a Master Class based on Stanford's songs and there will be an evening concert of Stanford and Vaughan Williams part songs by the de Merc Chamber Choir under the direction of Adrian Jolliffe. Professor Jeremy Dibble will also give a talk on the relationship between Stanford and Vaughan Williams. Most events will be at St Luke's Church Chelsea.

On November 2 there will be a morning service at Holy Trinity Church, Prince Consort Road, across from the Royal College of Music. This service will include music by Stanford. In the afternoon of November 2 there is a concert of Vaughan Williams' music at the Royal Festival Hall given by the Philharmonia Orchestra under Richard Hickox. This concert will include the Symphonies Nos. 5, 6 and 9 as well as the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* and the *Three Shakespeare Songs*.

Further details of the Weekend and booking information can be found on the Stanford Society website at www.thestanfordsociety.org or can be obtained by contacting the Society Chairman, John Covell, at cvstanfordsociety@msn.com. Reservations for the November 2 Vaughan Williams concert should be made on the Royal Festival Hall website.

Letters

We are always pleased to receive contributions for this page

THE FILMS

I enjoyed both *O Thou Transcendent* and John Bridcut's *The Passions of RVW*, but appearing as they did close together, as manna in the wilderness, does seem to have blunted some critical faculties.

There were obvious inaccuracies in both films, particularly in *O Thou Transcendent* when the mock-RVW voice stated that being appointed as organist at St Barnabas Church, Lambeth was "the only paid appointment I ever had". Surely there were others, not least the Army. Was RVW's tenure as Professor at the Royal College of Music voluntary?

Also *The Passions of RVW* appeared to have a performance of *Dona Nobis Pacem* taking place before the Third Symphony. Of course, it took place considerably later although he did a draft prior to 1914.

However my main concern with both films is their cruel portrayal of Adeline.

Adeline was a beautiful young woman, musically gifted, lively and highly intelligent. She understood R's music and supported him in all his endeavours. Coming from an eminent family she was used to exceptional and complex people whose marriages were often unconventional.

We know little of Adeline's life during the Great War but she must have been extremely worried and anxious about R as she would know from family members just how badly the first stages of the War were going and as far as we know she remained devoted to him throughout his War service.

Most combatants returned from the Front damaged in a number of ways and it was R who said that he hardly dare go back to the old routine as "there were so many gaps". Adeline's post-war loving care and organization helped him to rehabilitate and to start composing again. Far from R actually being "tied down" or "in

exile" Adeline accompanied him on his lecture tour to the U.S.A. and their Silver Wedding found them celebrating with a trip abroad.

I am grateful to your previous correspondent, Dr. Bullock, for referring to Adeline's "rheumatism" as rheumatoid arthritis which can strike anyone of any age at any time and is as incurable now as it was then. Like R, Adeline was just as sorry to leave Cheyne Walk where they were part of one of the liveliest artistic communities in London. However, London to this day remains difficult for even slightly infirm people with its huge flights of stairs, high chassis taxis and crowded pavements. Even with modern drugs and adaptations rheumatoid arthritis means continual pain and one must still draw the same conclusion as Adeline and "ignore it as far as possible".

The finest parts of Ursula's biography of R are based on Adeline's sparkling letters and in them we see a compassionate, thoughtful, loving, lively and capable person managing an often difficult household full, not just of her family, but also of R's friends and family, various lodgers and "favourite nieces".

She coped with an excruciatingly painful disease with great fortitude and intelligence, making adaptations e.g. to her pen, out of necessity, not eccentricity, so that she could continue supporting R as much as possible.

The years of R and Adeline's marriage included the most difficult times ever faced by people in this country and like thousands of other couples they were forced to drink too deeply of the well of grief, pain and suffering. In spite of that Adeline's spirit shines out to me and I am sorry that our lifetimes have not coincided as I would have liked to have met her.

Of course, R's and Ursula's romance is a great love story but there seems no reason to use it simplistically in order to attribute any marital shortcomings to Adeline alone. In *The Passions of RVW* Adeline seemed almost type-cast as a witch "in a high-backed wheel-chair". My twenty-one year-old daughter was puzzled by the approach since she thought disability in old age might befall us all as, of course, it did to Ursula in her turn.

The Passions of RVW was obviously designed to dispel the familiar misconception of R as a tweedy, folksy farmer. However whilst trying to portray him as something of a "man-about-town"

it went overboard on the intrigue and R only just escaped appearing as a middle-aged voyeur. Apart from the unedifying piffle about Adeline's arthritis being psychosomatic which appeared in *O Thou Transcendent* BBC 4 went further and we were treated to lip-smacking references to R's love of pretty young women (how odd!), curtain-twitching speculation about the timing of R's and Ursula's extra-marital sex (surely not the first such experience for either party) and in both films coy asides about "a termination" (ooh what's next?) All of which told us more about the tellers than the tale. Did John Bridcut really think that a woman of Adeline's age, intelligence and experience would be upset by a few childish valentines? I confidently expect to hear about a newly-discovered, illegitimate RVW son in Australia (love child!) any day now.

I have loved R's music all my life and for most of that time I knew nothing about his marriages. There is every indication that R's music is doing its own work and is growing in popularity particularly amongst young people. However, if it isn't, then outmoded views on old-age and disability laced with misogyny won't do the trick. Like Dr. Bullock I think the treatment of Adeline in both films will have hurt the feelings of her family not to mention those of any viewers who are similarly afflicted.

R was married to Adeline for 50 years during which he composed most of his great works and was left perfectly free to do so. For most of that time he was part of a well organized, convivial, highly cultured household run entirely for his benefit and whenever it was appropriate Adeline was at his side right up until her last few years. He always returned to that home so there must surely have been something more than duty awaiting him there.

Ursula made R's last few years wonderful by rejuvenating him with her zest for life. Apart from writing her entertaining biography she worked tirelessly over the last 50 years promoting his music and other cultural and philanthropic causes.

For over a hundred years R inspired the love and devotion of these two remarkable women. We should be celebrating both their lives.

Liz J. Luder,
Bedford, U.K.

MORE...

I awaited with some trepidation the broadcast of John Bridcut's film about Vaughan Williams. The blurb in *Radio Times*, with words like "morals" and "trail of broken hearts", let alone the rather lurid title of the programme itself led me to expect something akin to a musical *Peyton Place*. Headlines to an article in the *Daily Mail* more suited to the *Sun* even hinted at "three-in-a-bed romps" as doodlebugs rattled overhead.

So what a pleasant surprise was the programme itself. And what a refreshing change from the unsatisfactory Tony Palmer film. At last a properly researched and structured record of RVW's personal and musical life, with relevant interviews, excellent musical illustrations (far better than those in Palmer), appropriate visual illustrations, and no errors at all that I could detect. And we got the bonus of the first performance for over 80 years of RVW's arrangement of *Mr Isaac's Maggot* (unfortunately marred by a voice-over). Furthermore, how good it was to see the *Pastoral Symphony* given its rightful position in relation to the composer's WWI experiences, a point totally lost in Palmer's film. This work has always been to me almost unbearably sad and poignant, and

what with bugle calls and keening voices how so-called critics could have missed the point is beyond me. Cows looking over gates indeed!

And no *trail* of broken hearts at all. Perhaps just one, that of Frances Farrer who seemingly had a severe crush on the composer, and that's all there was to it as far as RVW was concerned.

I found it a most moving programme, and the details of the relationship between Ralph and Ursula, and the latter's contribution to the film, touching in the extreme, a view shared by my wife. The fact that Prof. Byron Adams sadly came over as a naughty schoolboy disclosing grubby secrets detracted but little from the overall effect.

Unlike Palmer's two and a half hour film, which attempted to be all-embracing, Bridcut restricted himself more to Vaughan Williams' relations with the opposite sex, and the influence this may (or may not!) have had on his musical output. In Palmer's film it was presented more or less as a proven fact that the Fourth Symphony was born out of the composer's sexual frustration. Bridcut wisely left this matter open. As Jill Balcon very sensibly said, who can tell what goes on in a composer's mind during the process of composition?

Some may cavil at the omission of any reference to Vaughan Williams' contribution to film music, or to the very important friendships with other composers. The lack of any reference to Gustav Holst was a major fault. But there's a limit to what one can fit into a ninety-minute programme, and there were no repetitions, irrelevancies or downright inappropriate illustrations such as disfigured Tony Palmer's much longer effort.

Thank you, Mr Bridcut, for showing us that it could be done properly. But it's a pity about the title! And I was sorry to see no acknowledgement of the RVW Society in the closing titles, such as appeared in the Palmer film.

Mike Gainsford
Burbage, Leicestershire, U.K.

MORE...

Having shared with previous correspondents serious disappointments regarding the Tony Palmer film on RVW, I was more than pleasantly surprised by the quality of John Bridcut's rival offering. All the right works were featured, the images were all apposite, and speculation and comment were kept within reasonable bounds; those interviewed were close to and, moreover, sympathetic to all involved. Particularly effective was the use of *The Cloud-Capp'd Towers* behind the closing credits. I am sure one could find things about which to quibble, but to one who has studied RVW and his works for many years there was nothing jarring, and the performances (with the reactions of the interviewees) were all first class – no awful Barbara Dickson, nor badly synchronised filming against soft-focus backgrounds of sound pre-recorded elsewhere. Still not on a main channel, admittedly, but in prime time, and one hopes it may have prompted some at least to further their interest in that marvellous music.

Charles Paterson,
Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, U.K.

MORE...

As a long-time member of the Society and an intermittent contributor to the columns of the Journal may I say that I take great exception to the insulting not to say patronising letter of David Tolley's. And since he mentions my name in a clearly implied derogatory manner may I assure him that I am perfectly aware that it is possible to pick holes in Palmer's film (for example, like others, I was concerned about the absence of the *Pastoral Symphony* and its associations with VW's wartime experiences). As well, I would be the last to claim that everything VW wrote was a masterpiece – just as I would not claim it of Mozart.

I viewed the film not only in regard to its subject matter but also as a film documentary within the long and honourable tradition of the genre in Britain. On both counts I still think it a magnificent piece of work and a fine contribution to the Fiftieth Anniversary celebrations. I am sorry Tolley thinks otherwise.

Perhaps I might also mention that for once we can enthusiastically applaud the BBC for programming so many of the works in this year's Proms and for including a perceptive article in the Proms book.

Michael Nelson,
Leeds, U.K.

MORE...

It was predictable and fair that the films by Tony Palmer and now John Bridcut should be subjected to vigorous critical scrutiny, but it is disappointing to see Journal contributors sneering at other Society members for supposedly possessing limited critical faculties or simply not paying sufficiently close attention.

After lifetimes of waiting for anything approaching a rounded and sympathetic treatment of RVW's life and music, we have been given two major pieces of work in the space of a few months. Should this not be an occasion for rejoicing, even if we are perfectly aware of the films' imperfections, rather than carping and infighting?

It is true that there were mistakes in the first pressing of *O Thou Transcendent* – errors cheerfully admitted to by Tony Palmer when I asked him about them, and largely corrected subsequently. As for "controversy", theorising, and provocative images of sometimes tangential appropriateness, have the critics never seen another Tony Palmer film? This is what he does, his trademark, and it has great power.

I am trying – and failing – to avoid using the phrase "the big picture", but if some of those watching *O Thou Transcendent* were more concerned with inaccuracies and possible omissions than with the many important truths and suggestions it contained, let alone the musical examples, which burst upon the viewer with tremendous force, they are not appreciating what a film like this can do to broaden, deepen and adjust the general perception and appreciation of the great man, something we all feel to be long overdue (and which is at the core of the Society's stated aims).

We, the already converted, have made our various ways to a love and understanding of the man and his work, but others are not so lucky, and if the need for "accessibility" demands that we meet them somewhere approaching half-way, so be it. Welcoming the

films does not mean that one is incapable of registering slips of fact or (debatably) taste, or of spotting tendentious arguments, or a bit of dodgy kite-flying. The fact is that because of the films – *O Thou Transcendent* is apparently selling very well on DVD, surely to be followed by *The Passions of Vaughan Williams* – many more people will now appreciate the range and complexity of the work, and the breadth and depth of humanity of its creator, and may well be stimulated to explore further, and form their own judgements and theories. After decades of patronising simplification and ignoring, that is no small thing.

Barry Fogden,
Lewes, East Sussex, U.K.

"POP" GOES THE MUSIC

I should like to offer a different response to Scott Aniol's "Pop Goes the Music" from the July 2008 Journal.

There is a theory (to be found in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*) that Ralph Vaughan Williams influenced The Beatles in certain of their compositions. *A Hard Day's Night* and *Eleanor Rigby* start in the Mixolydian and Dorian modes respectively, for example.

It also occurred to me that the introduction to *My Girl* sung by Chubby Checker is pure pentatonic. "I've got sunshine on a cloudy day", which is the vocal line that follows, is also in the pentatonic scale. Another Chubby Checker example is *Let's Twist Again*.

Those of us who are captivated by the way in which Vaughan Williams weaves the old modes and the pentatonic scale with today's tonal system can imagine it may interest other composers both of classical and popular music and perhaps cause the latter to write in that genre also.

Does this make some tunes of The Beatles and Chubby Checker and maybe other writers of pop music "banal and vulgar"? The result could be coincidental in some cases, or in others it may be a way of utilising classical music methods in popular music works with a respectful nod in the direction of Vaughan Williams and others like him.

Elizabeth Anne Webb,
Ealing, London, U.K.

MORE...

I was disappointed to see in Scott Aniol's otherwise interesting article, jazz and blues bundled together under the label of "pop" music, although I am not sure whether it was Mr. Aniol or Cecil Sharp who put them there.

Whoever did so displays, I'm afraid, little understanding of the origin and development of these forms, or indeed what jazz is. Shostakovich himself also displayed the same lack of understanding when he gave the title *Jazz Suite* to compositions with no more true jazz in them than all of Bruckner's symphonies put together. Milhaud knew better.

Jazz and blues, whatever they have now become (which certainly isn't "pop") quite clearly originated as the folk music of Negroes and Creoles in the southern United States and in the case of jazz

largely in urban areas. Furthermore, again disproving Sharp's criteria for folk music, jazz was (and is) almost wholly harmonic. Incidentally this also applies to much eastern European and Jewish folk music.

Jazz subsequently developed, thanks initially to Duke Ellington, into something which could arguably be called "art" music. BBC Radio 3 seems to have recognised as much.

I know this has little to do with Vaughan Williams (although I recollect he said somewhere – probably on his visit to the USA – that jazz was America's folk music), but as one who used long ago to play trumpet in a New Orleans style band, I felt I must put matters straight. By the way the type of music our band played was certainly neither "pop" nor "art" music. There was little art in it and it wasn't too popular with the neighbours.

*Mike Gainsford
Burbage, Leicestershire, U.K.*

LETTER TO URSULA

I thought this might be of interest in light of the upcoming October 2008 issue of the Journal which will concentrate on Ursula Vaughan Williams. I wrote the following letter to her after I found a copy of her book in a used book shop in NY. I believe the letter is self-explanatory.

August 24, 2006

*Dear Mrs. Vaughan Williams,
Recently I was browsing in a second hand bookshop in NYC when I came on a copy of Paradise Remembered. I read your book RVW some years ago and enjoyed it immensely so I was very excited to find a copy of your autobiography. Opening the book I found a note from you tipped into the front cover, a very special discovery. It was addressed to someone named Ed and it was only after I got home and started looking through the book that I found the envelope (dated Sept 21, 2001) and realized it was addressed to Edward Jablonski. This made it doubly special as I have been a follower of his writings on George Gershwin ever since I bought his first Gershwin book in the early fifties. I called him a few years ago to tell him how much his work had meant to me and we had a nice talk about Gershwin and his music. I'm sorry I didn't get to talk to him further about his other musical interests as I'm sure now that Ralph's name would have come up.*

I also discovered a card in the back of the book indicating that it was a Christmas gift from his children in 2002 and must have been part of his estate which eventually found its way into this shop. I feel privileged to be able to add your book, with its note, to my collection of Vaughan Williams books. I also want to tell you how much I enjoyed reading it, with its insights into your life with RVW. Coincidentally, all of this occurred a short time after I finished reading the biography of Bernard Herrmann, whom I found had a special connection to you both.

*Sincerely,
Richard Lewis*

I think the note to Edward Jablonski must have been in response to the 9/11 attacks on NY as it read "Dearest Ed, I do hope you are fine – I think & hope best - please write and tell me. Much blessing to you, from Ursula" and was postmarked 21 Sept 2001.

I received a very nice response from her companion, Judy Stead, who said that Ursula had been deeply touched by my note. In addition, Ursula had added an additional note in her own hand thanking me for my letter.

*Richard Lewis,
Hopewell Junction, New York, U.S.A.*

A NEW BIOGRAPHY?

I have recently watched the BBC4 film *The Passions of Vaughan Williams*. I have to say the title rather filled me with foreboding and I rather anticipated a Ken Russell type of film (except of course that Ken Russell's *South Bank Show* film of many years ago was actually rather good – I still have it on tape) but in fact the film was really excellent. I thought the portrait of Vaughan Williams that John Bridcut created was very warm and intimate. Yes, we got to see some of the passions and emotions that drove the man but it wasn't remotely tacky and I thought it was all entirely relevant to understanding the man and his music.

Which leads me to the principal point of this letter: surely the time has come for a new definitive biography of Vaughan Williams? There is currently only the one full biography and that is the one written by Ursula Vaughan Williams. That is an excellent book but it is many years now since it was originally published and it must have been apparent to anyone watching the BBC4 film that Ursula's book inevitably does not tell the full story. I think she could hardly say too much about Adeline Vaughan Williams, nor too much about her own affair with Vaughan Williams, and yet the film clearly showed that his relationships with those women had a huge effect on his music.

Many of the people who knew Vaughan Williams are alive and well and able to tell their stories, but that will not be the case for ever and the time has surely come for a new and fuller biography, something perhaps on the lines of Jerrold Northrop Moore's biography of Elgar, that sort of level of detail.

Of course there is really only one man who can write such a biography and that is Michael Kennedy. He knew the composer, he will know Vaughan Williams' surviving friends and acquaintances, and he is a hugely experienced biographer. Surely the hour has come for him to take up his biographer's pen again and produce the definitive RVW biography, a work that would be the jewel in the crown of his published work and a wonderful legacy for lovers of the music of Vaughan Williams.

What does Mr Kennedy think ?

*Alastair Brown
Warrington, Cheshire, U.K.*

A PERSONAL REACTION

I promise my comment on the Tony Palmer film is a short one but it is pertinent to the theme of my letter. I have to agree with recent negative comments on the film as I too was disappointed with the numerous and, in my opinion, unnecessary references to the World Wars and the assumption that they played such a pivotal role in RVW's music. What a missed opportunity, all in the name of cutting edge presentation and the current style of impact filming, when a fulfilled and full life story could have been portrayed based on captivating music from an accomplished musician brimming with originality.

However, what a breath of fresh air Emily Hogan's article was in the last issue referring to the effect the music had on her for personal reasons. This aspect I totally agree with and conversely struggle with the personality analysis that takes place between eminent musicologists in search of reasons behind each great work. Although, I do admit that healthy debate does enliven interest in the Journal and its readers and perhaps creates a personality picture of RVW for those without personal opinions, can we be sure the influences attributed to his musical output were real, as we will never know what was in his mind as the notes flowed onto the manuscript?

We are constantly reminded of his association with the two World Wars and how this must have influenced his music, and yes, there was carnage but as expressed by Rolf Jordan, editor of the Finzi anthology *The Clock of the Years* reviewed in the last Journal, for those who survived it was often regarded merely as an occupation, admittedly with some risk, but we can never know whether he was in truth traumatised by it or whether it was actually reflected in his music. What we may never know is what really influenced the mind of the great man and this applies to each and every one of us in our perception of his productive output. Consequently we can only appreciate the music for what it is and how it affects us individually.

RVW wrote the music in a style that pleased him and he often said so but he must also have been influenced by the burgeoning atonal style and a feeling that he needed to be contemporary. The fact is that he produced music that has touched and still is touching many hearts and souls whatever style you call it and whatever theory it has attributed to it.

I am by no means an accomplished musician but I know what music moves my soul and I know how attractive RVW's music is to me regardless of the attributed reasons behind it. RVW wrote good music and probably for the music's sake and without the influences we ascribe to its chronological output.

Cowpat is someone's interpretation but don't subject us all into believing that it is the received interpretation and if it happens to invoke the English countryside to anyone then so be it but as individuals we will all interpret it each in our own way and be moved by it personally for our own reasons.

I am led to believe he was a quiet and gentle man and I personally feel this is reflected in much of his music and the outcome is very pleasing for me. I find it can indeed be an emotional experience and I am privileged to have been able to experience it and to appreciate it. It will always be a personal experience for all of us and I hope, like me, a very pleasant one.

*Eric Hazelwood,
Great Glen, Leicestershire, U.K.*

ANOTHER PLEA

I heartily endorse the plea in July 2008 for a reissue of the CD *As I walked out* by Robert Tear and Phillip Ledger. *The Unquiet Grave*, with the violin obbligato played by Hugh Bean, is VW at his most heart melting and transcendent. Three wonderful carols are included on that disc, *Joseph and Mary*, *The Saviour's Love* and *The Truth Sent from Above*. Each is from *Twelve Traditional Carols from Herefordshire* published by Stainer and Bell in 1920. Not only these three but the whole dozen are wonderful examples of VW reminiscent of the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* which of

course opens with the orchestral version of *The Truth Sent from Above*. The music has each carol written for voice and piano (as Tear and Ledger perform them) but also includes a four-part unaccompanied setting for choir for each carol. I have had our parish choir sing a number of them to an always deeply appreciative reception.

So my plea is to have them sung and recorded by our greatest singers – the Albion crew – as well as have the choral versions done. Am I dreaming?

*Rev. David Clunie
Ottawa, Canada*

RVW and WBY: QUERY FROM A MEMBER

Ralph Vaughan Williams is my favorite composer, William Butler Yeats is my favorite poet, yet to my knowledge RVW never used WBY's poetry for songs or other works. This is lamentable, and somewhat surprising, considering that: 1) they both lived in and around London for many years, probably with overlaps; 2) they were contemporaries (Vaughan Williams was born in 1872, Yeats in 1865); 3) at various times (simultaneously? I don't know) they both lived at Cheyne Walk, London, at houses a few doors apart; 4) a biography of Yeats states that among the attendees in the early nineteen-thirties in Dublin at a celebration of Yeats' receiving the Nobel Award was Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Vaughan Williams set a lot of poetry to music – why not pieces by Yeats? Both of them were intrigued by and close to the Pre-Raphaelites and, of course, Vaughan Williams set a number of songs to poems by Christina Rossetti (*The House of Life*, *Silent Noon* – one of my favorite Vaughan Williams pieces.) It seems to me that there is much in common with the mood and sensibility of their art.

*Chris Moore
Belmont, Massachusetts, USA*

RVW and BBC RADIO

There is currently great interest to see how the fiftieth anniversary of Vaughan Williams's death is being commemorated by the BBC. It is instructive to look back just over sixty years to see how they celebrated his seventy-fifth birthday in 1947.

The *Radio Times* was then, like all newspapers and magazines, subject to severe restrictions in use of scarce paper resources. It was thus a slim publication of twenty-eight pages, containing few photographs, though often delightfully embellished by high quality original art work by such well-known names as Eric Fraser and Cecil Bacon. But in those days before the invention of "dumbing-down" a significant amount of space was devoted to features on the arts.

We thus find that the cover for the week of October 12 to 18 1947 featured a fine photograph of VW, amongst references to the week's programme highlights which ranged from Milton and Trollope to Wilfred Pickles and the Flyweight Boxing Championship. Inside, a whole page (of decidedly small print!) is devoted to comment on the week's music. This included Harold Rutland's Music Diary which gave the background to several concerts, commenting especially on works by Vaughan Williams,

and also mentioning Richard Strauss's *Macbeth* and *Ein Heldenleben*. But most of the page is devoted to an article by Herbert Howells, touching on the achievements of VW from *Toward the Unknown Region*, performed in 1907, to the Sixth Symphony ("finished, but as yet known only to a few.")

Perusal of the week's programmes shows several concerts and recitals including significant items by VW. Here is a selection:

- Sunday 3 p.m. October 12 1947 (Home Service): concert by LPO (Ansermet) including *Tallis Fantasia*.
- Sunday 6.30 p.m. (Third Programme): recital with René Soames (tenor), George Parker (baritone), Ernest Lush (piano) and the Aeolian String Quartet: settings of Herbert and Shove, *On Wenlock Edge*.
- Monday 8 p.m. (Third Programme): commemorative concert with BBCSO (Boult): *Flos Campi*; Four Hymns for tenor, viola and strings; *Sancta Civitas*.
- Wednesday 8 p.m. (Home Service): *London Symphony* (BBCSO conducted by the composer), plus Brahms's Violin Concerto – (Szigeti/Boult)
- Thursday 8 p.m. (Third Programme): *London Symphony* (further performance), plus Rubbra's *Festive Overture* and Bach's Concerto in A – (Fischer/Boult)

Lest it be thought that the week discussed above represented a special cultural effort by the BBC, it is instructive to turn to another edition of Radio Times, that for the week of May 24 to 30 1953, the week preceding the Coronation of H.M. the Queen. The *Sea Symphony* formed the first half of the Wednesday evening concert on the Home Service, conducted by Sargent, the programme concluding with Walton's Viola Concerto and Holst's *Perfect Fool* suite. The commitment of the BBC to high culture was, by today's standards, quite amazing.

While the Home Service was broadcasting the *Sea Symphony*, the Third was broadcasting Virgil's *Aeneid* and the Light Programme (the forerunner of Radio 2!) was offering Shakespeare's Henry V. During the rest of the week the Third offered, *inter alia*, a series of recitals of Bach's suites for unaccompanied cello, Paul Schofield in André Obey's *Lazarus*, Berg's *Wozzeck*, Elgar's *Falstaff*, Dvorak's rare First Symphony, two concerts of choral music by Handel, and the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, as well as countless talks ranging from *The Fall of Byzantium* to *Freedom and its Betrayal* – the latter given by Isaiah Berlin.

By this time television was broadcasting from 8 pm until about 10.30 each evening. Programmes all went out live, and it is worth noticing that Sunday evening, May 24 1953 was devoted almost entirely to Clemence Dane's *Will Shakespeare* with music by Richard Addinsell: the performance was repeated (live, again) on Thursday, when it was followed by *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?* chaired by Dr Glyn Daniel.

We are nowadays resigned to the fact that life has lost the intellectual rigour of years gone by. Vaughan Williams was early in objecting to the gradual withering away of the Third Programme. In 1957 he was a co-signatory of a letter to *The Times* protesting at proposed cuts. Other signatories included Bliss, Boult, T.S. Eliot, E.M. Forster, Sir John Gielgud and Bertrand Russell. Later, a delegation including Eliot, Vaughan Williams, Tippett and Sir Laurence Olivier attended the BBC, subsequently adjourning to Vaughan Williams's house where they were photographed for *The Times*. The photograph is reproduced in *The*

Envy of the World by Humphrey Carpenter (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1996) and shows VW in characteristic pose, but with ear trumpet and what looks suspiciously like a black eye. One hopes he did not receive that from an exasperated Third Programme Controller!

Robert Darlaston,
Goostrey, Cheshire, U.K.

FROM FRANCE

I have read your article in Journal No. 41 (February 2008) and I agree with you when you say: "that the music of Vaughan Williams is almost never performed to French audiences". (That is the same in England I think – article of Ch Cope in No. 37 "British Music at the Proms".)

I am very fond of England, London, where I go sometime for a stay of two weeks. I am interested by London architecture and I wanted to know something about British music. In Nancy we have a good record dealer, but British music CDs are very few. I have to order them in England at Chandos, Priory etc. I receive my CD a week after my order. That is OK.

I was very surprised when at Lyon in 2005 was performed music of Vaughan Williams, Britten and Tippett. Consequently I have now about one hundred CDs of British music (Vaughan Williams, Elgar, Delius, Bax, Walton Stanford and others, plus *O Thou Transcendent*.)

Every morning, alone in my desk, with my headphones, I am in England, in London, in your country I love so much.

When I say to my friends that I like British music they look at me as if I was a Martian!

Excuse my bad English. I am 74 and always a beginner.

Jean-Paul Masson,
Nancy, France.

[Editor's note: Monsieur Masson's letter should have appeared in the last Journal but was omitted due to an editorial oversight.]

RVW, AMATEUR OPERA AND A FURNITURE PROBLEM

For my first post after University and the Royal College of Music I was appointed Assistant Director of Music at Berkhamsted School and Assistant Conductor of the local Operatic Society, of which the Conductor was Charles Farncombe and whose ambitious programme included *The Bartered Bride*, *The Beggar's Opera* and, in 1955, Vaughan Williams' *Hugh the Drover*.

John Kentish played the name part and I conducted the off-stage chorus. RVW and Ursula attended the Saturday matinee performance and came back-stage in the interval. RVW invited my wife to sit on his knee (shortage of chairs I hasten to add) and chatted to the cast quite freely. I thought this demonstrated his real interest in and encouragement of amateur opera, and was greatly appreciated.

Peter Stevenson,
North Walsham, Norfolk, U.K.

Concert Reviews

WINDSOR, MASSACHUSETTS

On Mother's Day (May 11 2008) I had the pleasure of seeing an all Vaughan Williams concert put on by the Masterworks Chorale in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This was a very special event and Maestro Steven Karidoyanes picked a wonderfully interesting and balanced program of Vaughan Williams works. It all started with what was most likely the Boston premiere of *Epithalamion*, followed by the *Fantasia on 'Greensleeves'* and finishing with *In Windsor Forest*. All of the offerings were presented with string orchestra, piano and flute (as required) and the rather Tudor-like Sanders Theater at Harvard University was the perfect acoustic atmosphere for these smaller-scale romantic works. Baritone Andrew Garland was consummate in his solos in *Epithalamion*.

His artistry and noble chiaroscuro sound served the vocal lines with a genuinely intelligent and expressive delivery. Maestro Karidoyanes set a magical tone with his spot-on tempos and his Masterworks Chorale achieved a virtually authentic British choir sound both in timbre and enunciation. *Greensleeves*, while more familiar to American audiences, was conveyed freshly with deep, sensitive colors and the 'Sir John in Love' theme was continued with *In Windsor Forest*. The Maestro had introduced each work from the podium to the modest but enthusiastic audience with a good humor that served the great spirit of the final offering. The chorus picked up on his lead and really enjoyed themselves in the spirit of Sir John himself. To have the opportunity to see these works performed was a true gift. Maestro Karidoyanes should be praised for bringing the neglected works of Vaughan Williams back into the American musical conscious and even more so with style and flair.

Bravo to the Maestro and the Masterworks Chorale!

Marcus DeLoach

A WEEKEND FESTIVAL in HENDON

This year's celebrations marking the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Ralph Vaughan Williams are many and various, from the Proms – at which no fewer than five of his symphonies were heard, together with the Piano Concerto, *Job*, and several other works, including one concert devoted entirely to his music – to the many local churches where some of his hymn tunes will be sung.

Vaughan Williams would, I feel, have approved of this, and regarded each instance to be as worthy as any other. For he was nothing if not a composer for the people. As Richard Morrison has written, 'music should be a communal act that embraces everyone. That was Vaughan Williams's philosophy. In ordinary people, he glimpsed the divine.'

It is Richard Morrison, Chief Music Critic of *The Times*, who was the guiding light for a Vaughan Williams weekend from May 16 to 18 at the church of St Mary, Hendon, in north-west

London, where he is the organist and director of music. That increasingly rare phenomenon, a weekly choral evensong on Sundays, still survives there, and there is an ambitious programme of concerts, given by the church choir and by visiting artists. The choir is enviably talented, including Mr Morrison's opposite number from the *Daily Telegraph* among its members!

The festival began on the Friday evening with a performance by the Mellstock Band, whose inspiration derives from the novels of Thomas Hardy and his many references to music. Their programme, 'The Village Philharmonic', appropriately for the occasion, looks at the adaptation of traditional tunes by classical composers and, conversely, how rural tradition has reshaped music from the classical repertoire. I was unable to attend this event, but the audience was still talking about it at the concert the following evening!

At lunchtime on Saturday there was a programme of British wind band music – from Vaughan Williams' *English Folk Song Suite* to the theme music from *Wallace and Gromit* – played by pupils from Queen Elizabeth's School, Barnet. Then in the evening came the centrepiece of this little festival, a concert by the Fitzwilliam String Quartet with the tenor James Gilchrist and the pianist Anna Tilbrook. In each half of the programme the major works were Vaughan Williams' Second String Quartet and the song cycle, *On Wenlock Edge*, each preceded by a selection of songs for voice and piano, introduced by Mr Gilchrist.

On Wenlock Edge is heard often enough, but the Second String Quartet is something of a rarity – the Fitzwilliams were playing it in public for the first time. The dedication is 'For Jean on her birthday', and Vaughan Williams regarded this as a subtitle which must always be printed on programmes when the work is played. 'Jean' was Jean Stewart (1914-2002), the viola player in the Menges Quartet, who gave the first performance at the National Gallery in October 1944, and one of the most distinguished British viola players of her generation. The viola begins each of the four movements unaccompanied and takes the lead melodically for much of the time, and it was a joy to hear Alan George's wonderful playing of this inherently English instrument for which Vaughan Williams always writes such grateful music, as it was to read his perceptive programme notes for this work.

All the performers came together for *On Wenlock Edge*, a work they recorded last year, 'a wonderfully imaginative account', according to one reviewer. James Gilchrist's fervent approach certainly serves this work well, with *Bredon Hill* particularly evocative. Here, and in the other items on the programme, the work of the exceptional pianist Anna Tilbrook was a major contribution – so alert and responsive to every nuance of singer and string players.

The concert ended with a world premiere: an arrangement for string quartet of *Rhosymedre*, second of the *Three Preludes for organ, founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes*. While they played, Mr

Gilchrist sang the words to J. D. Edwards's original tune (*English Hymnal*, no. 303). It works – now will Mr Morrison please give us *Bryn Calfaria* and *Hyfrydol*?

The festival ended on Sunday evening with performances by the church choir of the *Mass in G minor* – with poems by Hopkins, Eliot, Hardy and Binyon read between each of the sections – and the cantata *In Windsor Forest*, interspersed with extracts from Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. This concert opened with another rarity, Maurice Jacobson's arrangement for two pianos of the *Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis*, played by Anna Tilbrook and Richard Morrison.

With comparatively modest means, and within a short time-span, the quintessential Englishness of this human and humane composer was defined perhaps more accurately than by the handful of familiar works by which he is more often and more narrowly judged. Congratulations to all concerned.

(This review first appeared in the Church Times on May 30 2008.)

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A TRIUMPH!

The Pilgrim's Progress was performed at the Sadler's Wells Theatre on 20 and 22 June 2008, with Roderick Williams (Pilgrim), Neal Davies (John Bunyan), the Philharmonia Chorus and Orchestra conducted by Richard Hickox. Stage direction was by David Edwards.

Warm congratulations are due to the Philharmonia Orchestra and its Chief Executive, David Whelton, for having the courage to promote these superb performances. With almost a full house on both nights, their faith was justified, as all those who love this work knew it would be.

For all the glories of the Philharmonia under Richard Hickox' inspired direction, the night belonged to Roderick Williams. Over ten years ago at the Barbican he sang the role of the Watchman. We felt then he had the beauty of tone, sense of nobility and intelligent phrasing to make a great Pilgrim. As we know from his recordings with Albion Records he has remarkable empathy for Vaughan Williams. In these performances, he comes of age – a great baritone whose best years are still to come.

With the chorus and orchestra on the stage, there was little room for action but imaginative use was made of the hall itself. The Voice of the Bird rang out from the balcony and Pilgrim first entered the stage from the stalls, weighed down by his huge burden. The chorus often joined in the action, fists pumping in Vanity Fair and outstretched palms at the final moving Alleluias.

The director, David Edwards, kept it simple with the performers mixing both Biblical robes with modern suits. The modern touches worked well in Vanity Fair, even if this scene lacked colour and sleaziness. Gidon Saks was a commanding Apollyon, with the fight a symbolic struggle between Pilgrim and three evil characters, all black, for mastery of the Tree of Life. This worked well, as did Pilgrim's crossing of the river to reach the Celestial City. The constant touching of outstretched palms was

another imaginative feature, used movingly at the end as Pilgrim touches the palms of all those on the stage who have journeyed with him. Richard Hickox conjured wonderfully expressive playing from the Philharmonia, especially in the prison scene and in the evocative narrative as the shepherds contemplate the Delectable Mountains.

Other moments to savour were James Gilchrist's lyrical Interpreter and Andrew Kennedy's commanding Celestial Messenger. Indeed, the entire cast were impressive, including Adam Hickox, the conductor's son, as a fresh voiced and confident Woodcutter's Boy.

Another life-enhancing experience in this remarkable fiftieth anniversary year.

Stephen Connock

FAREWELL IAN PARTRIDGE

At what point should a musician retire? After sixty-five performances of *On Wenlock Edge* alone, Ian Partridge has decided to call it a day and this concert on July 3 at the Grove Park Music Festival in London, with the Alberni Quartet and Christopher Glynn at the piano, was his penultimate performance of a work he has made his own for more than 30 years. His recording for EMI dates from 1974 and a superb version it remains. A warm, rounded tone along with singing of real artistry and understanding always worked well in Vaughan Williams and members will also cherish Ian Partridge's recording of the role of Interpreter in Boult's *Pilgrim's Progress*. His recordings of Delius, Warlock and others are also memorable.

I was working on my speech to persuade him not to retire as the music began. The opening bars showed immediately that Ian Partridge's decision to retire was the right one. The voice was now more fragile and, sadly, lacking in warmth or volume. He was strained in the fortissimo gales of life passages. The artistry remained – his identification with every nuance of Housman's text was total – but, alas, the voice could not match it.

The singer confirmed to me after the concert that his voice was 'not 100% reliable' and that this could be disastrous. I did not try and persuade him otherwise. His has been a wonderful career and we salute him. The recordings remain and will enrich us forever.

Stephen Connock

PILGRIM'S JOURNEY, SALISBURY

Pride of place in this all-Vaughan Williams concert which took place on Saturday July 5 and was sponsored by the RVW Society was a rare performance of *The Pilgrim's Journey* as arranged by Roy Douglas. Albion Records has just issued a version with organ but it was refreshing here to listen to the work in its orchestral arrangement. The Salisbury Musical Society, including one of our Trustees Roy Bexon, did the work proud. The soprano, Emilia Hughes, was the pick of the three soloists with Ian Wicks, tenor and baritone Robert Evans, and the Salisbury Symphony Orchestra under David Halls were in fine form.

The first movement – *Cast thy burden upon the Lord* – is the most impressive with lovely passages linking the work to the Fifth Symphony. The beautiful movement *Unto him that overcometh* was very moving in this arrangement for chorus only. *Vanity Fair* worked less well in the sacred context of Salisbury Cathedral and the absence of any solo part for the soprano in this movement continues to surprise me.

The clarinet part in *He that is down* was very impressive and the *Alleluia* closing moments made their usual uplifting impression. When will we hear this work again?

This anniversary concert also included the *Tallis Fantasia*, *Serenade to Music* and *Toward the Unknown Region*. The *Serenade* was surprisingly arranged for three soloists leaving the excellent soprano to sing all the female parts, including those originally written for Astra Desmond and Mary Jarred! Her voice was closer to Isobel Baillie's so this was a tough call. *Toward the Unknown Region* made a stirring impression leaving a contented audience to master the dreadful weather of midsummer Salisbury.

Stephen Connock

RVW FESTIVAL in CUMBRIA

Only 500,000 people live in Cumbria, and they are mostly scattered in groups around the fringe of the County. Despite that, there is a huge amount of music-making going on, as evidenced by the 200 or so people who were involved in a great celebration of the life and music of Ralph Vaughan Williams on the second weekend in July in South Lakeland, plus another huge number who came to listen. The occasion was the 50th anniversary of Vaughan Williams' death.

The central events of the weekend were a concert in the vast space of Kendal Parish Church on the Saturday evening, and a Festival Mass at the equally impressive and inspiring Cartmel Priory on the Sunday. The Kendal concert featured the New Millennium Chorus and Orchestra, conducted by Ian Jones, in three major choral works as well as *The Lark Ascending*. The Chorus has a hundred and twenty members and the Orchestra sixty-six, nearly all of whom are locally based. All are amateurs, in the very best sense of the word, or semi-professional. Such a gathering would have delighted Vaughan Williams. He was always enthusiastic about amateur performances, and was himself involved in such gatherings all his life.

The concert began with the first performance of Ivor Gurney's *The Trumpet* in the version orchestrated by Philip Lancaster. This was received with enthusiasm by the audience. Gurney left only a version with piano accompaniment, but it seems likely that he intended it to be orchestrated. Philip Lancaster was present in the audience and seemed pleased with the results of his labours and with the performance the piece received. Gurney was one of Vaughan Williams' contemporaries who, like Vaughan Williams, was much affected by the Great War.

After *The Trumpet* came William Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, a story set at the time of the Israelites' exile in Babylon, telling of the downfall of Belshazzar. This was written in 1930, contemporary with Vaughan Williams. A thrilling performance was given, notable for the clear depiction in the percussion

section of gold, silver, iron, wood, stone and brass. These were the gods which Belshazzar tried to get the Israelites to worship, even as he sacrilegiously drank from the cups which his father, Nebuchadnezzar, had looted from their temple.

After the interval came *The Lark Ascending*. The programme notes drew attention to the subdued bugle calls in the orchestration. Throughout the weekend we were reminded that the icowpat/pastoral image from which Vaughan Williams has suffered for so many years was now being re-assessed, and we were discovering that he was a man with a full gamut of emotions, much affected by his wartime experiences. Thus one wonders whether it should really be 'The Lark Ascending Over the Battlefield', far from some supposed wistful scene in Gloucestershire. The soloist was Roland Fudge, a notable local violin teacher and leader of the orchestra. His performance was given a rousing reception by audience and orchestra alike. The orchestra refused to stand to take the applause: it was all to be for the soloist.

The final choral item was Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem*. As Benjamin Britten was to do in the 1960s, Vaughan Williams interleaved poetry with sacred texts to create a powerful plea for peace. Whitman was writing at the time of the American Civil War, and in so many ways anticipates Wilfred Owen's war poetry which Britten was to set. This was given a commanding performance, ending on a note of hope: "Peace, goodwill to men Dona Nobis Pacem." This was a statement of the composer's hopes for peace in 1936. These hopes were to be shattered in 1939. In fact, Hubert Foss, in his biography of Vaughan Williams published in 1951, repeatedly refers to the "30 Years War". He recognised no peace between 1919 and 1939.

Throughout the concert, notable solo performances came from Julie Leavett, one of our local amateurs, and from John Lofthouse, who is originally from the Kendal area. The conductor, Ian Jones, who had also trained the choir, clearly knew his scores throughout, and knew what he wanted from them. One can only admire the skill and organisation necessary to rehearse the choir in three different major works, and to bring them together with the orchestra for this occasion.

The following Sunday morning found us all at Cartmel Priory for a Eucharist which included Levens Choir singing the *Mass in G minor*. The service was conducted by the Team Vicar, the Reverend Canon Robert Bailey, and the organist was the Priory Assistant Organist, John Shippen. A large congregation was much moved and uplifted by the service. Hubert Foss observes that this Mass should be attempted only by a hand-picked choir. Levens Choir, conducted by Ian Jones, and with soloists drawn from the choir, proved fully up to the occasion. The service also included Byrd's *Sing Joyfully* and William Harris' *Faire is the Heaven*, as well as hymn tunes by Vaughan Williams and his contemporaries. From the organ we heard the *Rhosymedre* and *Bryn Calfaria* preludes.

The weekend had begun in this same reverberant acoustic of Cartmel Priory with a concert of choral music, sung by the Pro Nobis Singers, conducted by Clive Walkley; and instrumental music from the Stonebridge String Quartet, led by Julian Cann. Pro Nobis sang with great energy and enthusiasm throughout. It was noticeable from where your reviewer was sitting that the impact was very much greater in the second half, when they

stood to the west of the beautiful and elaborate dark oak rood screen.

Andrew Leavett joined the quartet and Rachel Moore (double bass) to play Walter Leigh's *Concertino for Harpsichord and Strings*. It must have given Andrew particular pleasure to play on an instrument he himself had built. There are practical difficulties in balancing modern strings with a lightly-voiced harpsichord, and the strings did in fact play lightly. An even better effect might have been achieved if the players had been elevated a little on stage blocks. How difficult it is to pick out highlights from a thoroughly enjoyable concert, but comment should be made on the choir's success in remaining in tune in a mass setting by William Mathias dating from 1984. The choir alternates with the organ in this setting, and each time the organ returns, there is a risk of discovering that the choir has drifted! The quartet gave a stunning performance of Vaughan Williams' *String Quartet No. 2*. Vaughan Williams had a particular fascination for the viola, and this shows in the dark colourings of this piece. Perhaps also the darkness reflects the time the quartet was written, 1942. Later in the concert came *Silence and Music*, a setting of words by Ursula Vaughan Williams. This includes the wonderful line 'So near to comprehension do we stand. How often in our spiritual lives this line applies!

The Saturday morning found us in the intimate and simple setting of Kendal Unitarian Chapel for a performance of early English music, so important to Vaughan Williams' musical development, given by a local vocal group, Pieces of Eight and the Consort of Four, who specialise in 16th-century instruments and music. Notable items on this occasion were two tunes by Thomas Tallis, the one which inspired Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia*, and the other the tune known as *Tallis' Canon*, in which singers and players joined together. A feature of this concert, consisting as it did of a number of shorter pieces, was the way the pieces were grouped and sequenced, often with no break at all. This was particularly effective as a means of presentation. A goodly number of people turned out on this Saturday morning and they were rewarded with a delightful and satisfying concert.

Later on the same day there were two lectures on Vaughan Williams by James Day. He was keen to dismiss the 'cowpat' image and stress the composer's 'passion and fierceness'. Hindsight will no doubt allow us to strike a balance in due course between these two extremes, but Mr. Day's talks, and the illustrations, were presented with great conviction and enthusiasm, and were clearly based on an intimate knowledge of his subject.

On the Sunday afternoon, to round off the weekend, we heard a recital of English song, in the ambience of the very modern theatre at the Brewery Arts Centre in Kendal. The singers were Rachel Little and Nicholas Hurndall Smith, both of whom have strong local connections and both of whom are known in a much wider area. The Stonebridge String Quartet, with Andrew Leavett on the piano, offered sensitive and supportive accompaniment. Once again, we have to say how difficult it is to find highlights in such a wide-ranging and interesting programme, but perhaps two things stick in the memory.

One is Andrew's piano accompaniments, never dominating, never flustered, always supporting and helpful. We hope that he

can take more time from his day job to do more of this! And the other highlight has to be *On Wenlock Edge*. Here, Nicholas Hurndall Smith with the Quartet and Andrew drew every ounce of passion and meaning from the verses. And there is no question of "soloist and accompaniment": all share an equal role in this setting. It is perhaps interesting to reflect on the particular verses from Housman which Vaughan Williams chose to set. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* is full of what has been described as "catastrophic despair". Vaughan Williams completed this cycle in 1909, and he chose (comparatively) cheerful parts of Housman. Had he been doing this after his wartime experiences, would he perhaps have chosen even grimmer verses to set? All the performers in this concert offered a very wide range of mood and expression, as befits the writing of Vaughan Williams, Gerald Finzi, Roger Quilter, Madeleine Dring, Ivor Gurney, Frank Bridge, Peter Warlock, Roger Cann (the late father of Julian Cann) and Richard Rodney Bennett.

With such a wealth of English 20th-century music presented in one weekend by so many very fine musicians, there can be no doubt that we have music which can compare with any in the world, and local performers who can give top-flight performances in our local venues, which must themselves be the envy of many another area. The Cumbria Choral Initiative, led by Ian Jones, is to be congratulated on yet another triumphant project. We look forward to the next!

David Jones

A LONDON in CARDIFF

I was fortunate enough to attend a quite superb concert at St. David's Hall, Cardiff on Thursday August 7 2008. The orchestra was the National Youth Orchestra of Wales and the conductor was Owain Arwel Hughes.

This concert was part of the National Eisteddfod of Wales. The first part of the concert consisted of *Welsh Dances* by William Matthias and Benjamin Britten's *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* with the narrator speaking in Welsh. Part two was a quite brilliant performance of Vaughan Williams' *London Symphony*. There was great subtlety and also great exuberance in the performance and the empathy and rapport between the teenagers and the conductor was obvious throughout. The explosion of applause at the end of the symphony was richly deserved and it was very gratifying that a large audience consisting of many young people were introduced to Vaughan Williams through one of his most accessible symphonies. Through the comments of many of the young people as I left the concert there were obviously many converts to the greatest British symphonist of the 20th century.

This most heart-warming evening convinced me that Vaughan Williams' music will continue to have a solid hold on the hearts and minds of future generations.

Robert J. Parry

CD Reviews

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Paavo Berglund. **Symphony No. 5 in D**, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Sir Alexander Gibson. **Symphony No. 6 in E minor; Oboe Concerto**, John Williams, oboe; Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra conducted by Paavo Berglund. **Overture, The Wasps; Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis**, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra conducted by Constantin Silvestri.

EMI BRITISH COMPOSERS (2 CDs) 2 16146 2

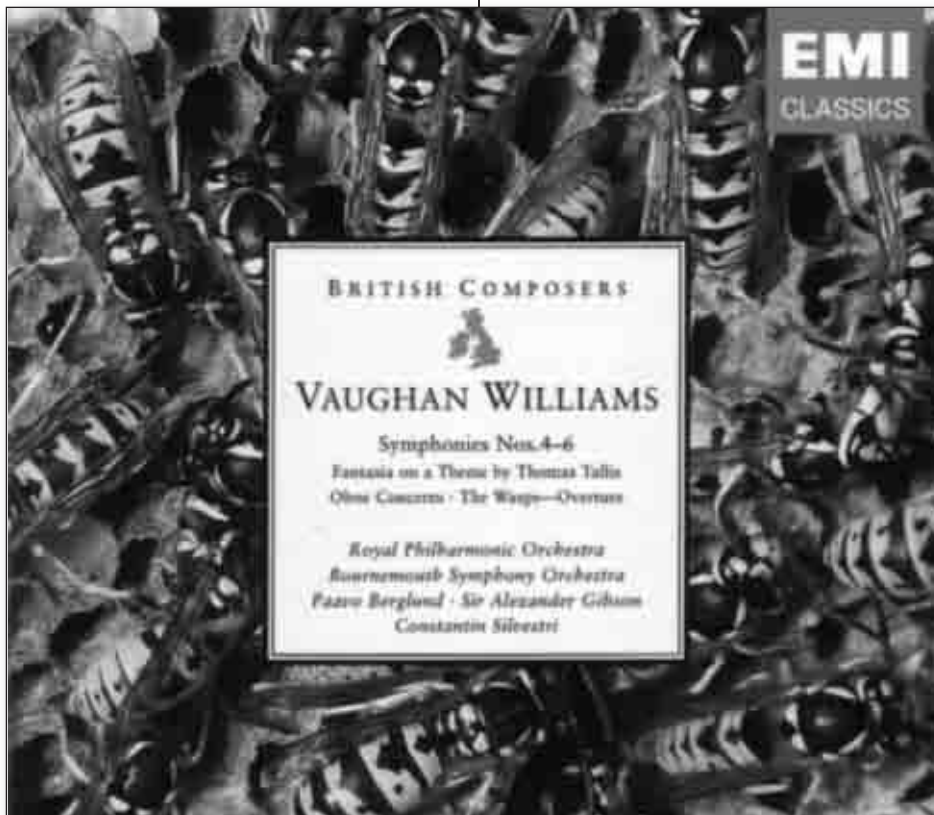
Symphony together with the Oboe Concerto is, of course, familiar through an earlier, single CD release in the EMI British Composers series, where it was coupled with Constantin Silvestri's eloquent recording of the *Tallis Fantasia*, atmospherically recorded in Winchester Cathedral, along with the ubiquitous *Wasps*. What we have here is a very welcome coupling of the older British Composers CD and the 1995 HMV release.

Paavo Berglund's recording of Symphony No. 6, made in Kingsway Hall, remains, in my view, one of the comparatively few

which makes this symphony one of the towering symphonic masterpieces of the twentieth century (or in my view of all centuries.) The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra plays with great virtuosity in the madcap Scherzo and, for once, the Epilogue is not rushed. Even though the playing might not always be quite hushed enough here, the tension is not relaxed for a moment, until those final repeating chords drift off into space (like an *Amen* which does not resolve itself, according to Stephen Johnson.) The digital transfer is excellent considering that the recording is almost 35 years old. The resonant acoustic of the Kingsway Hall fits in with Berglund's overall concept, making this a great success in every way.

Berglund's 1979 Royal Philharmonic Orchestra recording of Symphony No. 4 is my favourite version, even in preference to the composer's own recording, sacrilegious as I know it is to admit this! Sibelius again comes to mind in Berglund's conception. The second subject of the first movement is played at a slower tempo than usual, for example, but it works magnificently, bringing an epic quality unlike any other recording. Berglund's overall conception links the sound world of Symphony No. 4 closely to that of Symphony No. 6. The scherzo is especially effective, played with more gravitas than in many other recordings and briefly reminiscent of Copland. After a slower-than-usual pacing of the fugue section, the symphony ends with a terrific, declamatory thud.

Sir Alexander Gibson was an underrated conductor whose 1982 recording of Vaughan Williams' Fifth Symphony, also with the RPO, lends itself to repeated listening. Although largely unsung in its day, I regard it as one of the finest recordings of the Fifth, with an especially deeply felt and spiritually uplifting slow movement. The horn calls in the last movement are taken faster than usual, but it works, to very moving effect, in Gibson's overall conception. Gibson, like Berglund, was an eloquent champion of Sibelius and I was often reminded of the great Finn's Sixth Symphony while listening to this recording. Vaughan Williams' Fifth is, after all, dedicated 'without permission' to Sibelius.



In my comparative survey of recordings of Vaughan Williams' Sixth Symphony (RVW Society Journal, June 2003) I lamented the unavailability of Paavo Berglund's 1974 recording of what I consider to be the greatest of the nine. Now, here it is again, attractively packaged as part of a very desirable two-CD set from EMI.

In fact, Berglund's version of the Sixth Symphony and Sir Alexander Gibson's 1982 recording of the Fifth have only once been available on CD before, albeit rather briefly, coupled together on HMV 132 in 1995. Berglund's recording of the Fourth

successful recordings of this work. Berglund brings an epic, Sibelian ruggedness to this great score and although it might not quite rank alongside Boult's unsurpassable 1953 Decca recording (made with the composer in the studio), Berglund conducts an entirely convincing and eloquent account, and one which grips from the start. The turbulent opening movement displays enormous *Tapiola*-like slumbering power and the lowering threat of the menacing second movement is conveyed with great conviction, yet beneath the darkness Vaughan Williams' vision is shot through with a strange compassion. It is this strange juxtaposition,

As far as the other works are concerned, Constantin Silvestri's version of the *Tallis Fantasia*, recorded in Winchester Cathedral in 1967 (the earliest recording here) is another conspicuous success, one of the finest recordings of a much recorded work, preferable, I think, even to Barbirolli's legendary EMI reading. Silvestri steers a careful middle path between undue reticence and overt expressiveness, thus investing the work with enormous dignity and unforced eloquence. The cathedral acoustic adds enormously to this performance: another top recommendation.

In addition to the above, Neil Black gives an eloquent, warm-hearted performance of the charming Oboe Concerto (the companion to Berglund's recording of Vaughan Williams' Sixth Symphony in its original LP manifestation.)

The CD comes complete with a garish cover photograph of a wasp's nest, helpful notes from Michael Kennedy (who interestingly speculates that the Sixth Symphony might be a tribute to Vaughan Williams' old friend Gustav Holst) and a classic photograph of the composer.

In the plethora of new recordings and reissues, timed to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of Vaughan Williams' death, it would be easy to miss this release. My advice would be not to do so. It is one of the most important releases of this anniversary year.

Jeffrey Davis

Phantasy Quintet. String Quartet No. 1 in G minor. String Quartet No. 2 in A minor (For Jean on her Birthday). English String Quartet. ALTO ALC 1035

The earliest music on this disc is the String Quartet in G minor, one of two works on which Vaughan Williams set to work on his return from studying with Ravel in Paris in 1908. The other was *On Wenlock Edge*, and we are often encouraged to listen out for Gallic influences in both pieces. Ravel might have envied the evocation of the heat haze over the icoloured counties as seen from Bredon Hill, and in the first movement of the quartet, especially, there are elements of texture and harmony which might have come from a French pen. But I don't think we should make too much of this, as most of the musical material is pure Vaughan Williams, from the opening viola theme onwards. There follows a jaunty scherzo, a tender Andante

characteristically entitled *Romance* and an energetic finale leading to a surprisingly forceful close. There is nothing revolutionary about the language but even so the work seems to have mystified critics at its first performance. It then disappeared from view until 1921 when the composer revised it. It is a lovely work and Vaughan Williams enthusiasts will want to know it.

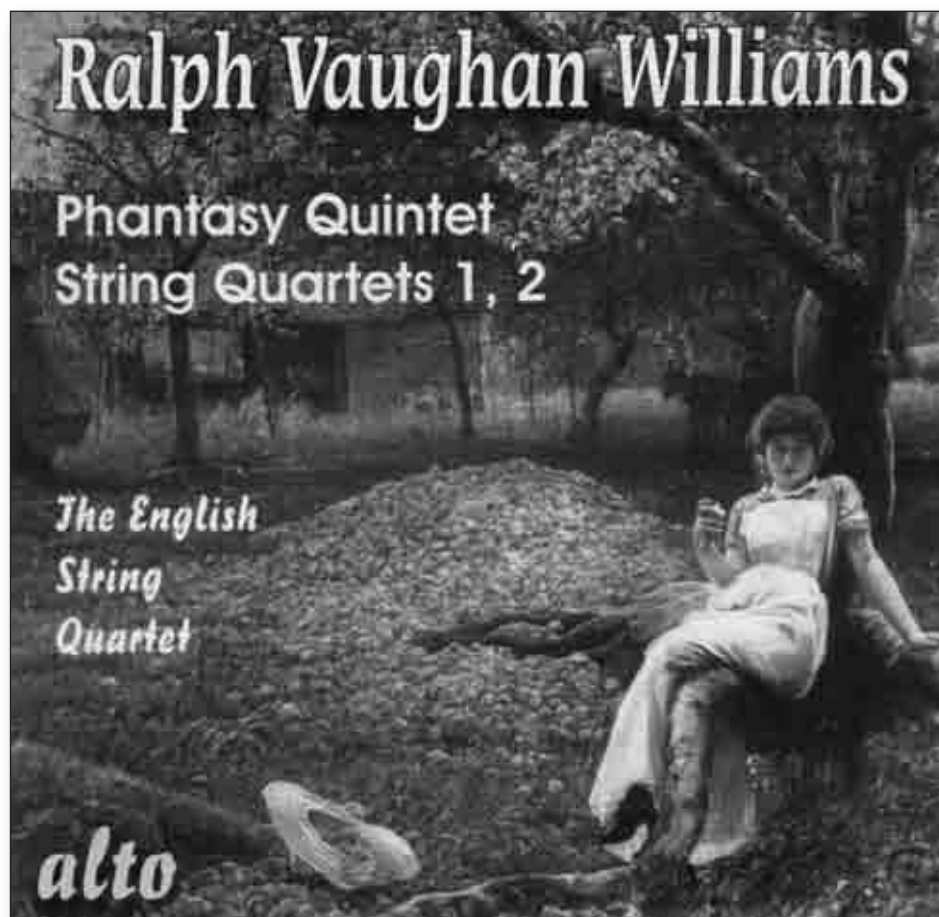
The *Phantasy Quintet* was composed in 1912 at the invitation of the music patron William W. Cobbett. He preferred the archaic spelling and Vaughan Williams will have been happy to retain it, given his passionate interest in Tudor music. Another lovely early work, the Quintet also opens with a theme announced by the viola. The slow movement is scored for only four instruments, the cello being silent, and, as Michael Kennedy has pointed out, the lark puts in an early appearance as the work nears its close. The viola plays an even more important role in the A minor Quartet, no doubt because the work was intended as a present to Jean Stewart, the violist of the Menges Quartet. The first two movements were ready for her birthday in 1943, but she had to wait until the following year before the work was completed. (The composer put a price on it: '1000 kisses'.) The opening movement is troubled and uneasy, not at first hearing particularly suitable as a birthday present, the third movement also. The heart of the work is perhaps the slow

movement, another *Romance*, by far the longest movement of the four and in which the players are instructed to refrain from using vibrato. A sound reminiscent of an Elizabethan consort of viols is the result. The work closes in the same world of serene contemplation as had the Fifth Symphony, completed the year before.

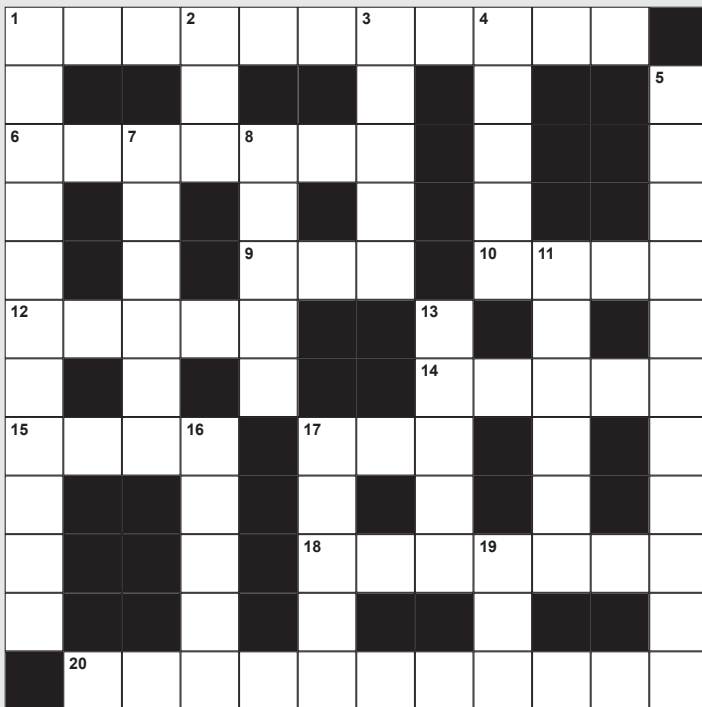
The three works on this disc were recorded in 1988 and issued on the Unicorn label. It is a pleasure to welcome them back to the catalogue as all three are most beautifully performed by the English String Quartet, joined in the *Phantasy Quintet* by violist Norbert Blume.

The disc is very inexpensive, but so also is the rival version on Naxos where an identical programme is given by the Maggini Quartet in their superb survey of English string quartets. Perhaps the Maggini Quartet's playing is more brilliant in the modern fashion, especially in the faster passages, but the playing and recorded sound on the present disc are both deeply satisfying making any recommendation of one over the other impossible. Perhaps the deciding factor should be the booklet notes included with the Alto disc, informative, reader-friendly, and written by RVW Society member and frequent contributor to the Journal, Jeffrey Davis.

William Hedley



RVW Crossword No. 28 by Michael Gainsford



Across

1. RVW wrote the music for this film, first shown in 1944 (7,4)
6. Maria Martin murdered here, according to the folk song (3,4)
9. Victoria de *** Angeles (3)
10. Rearranged mite becomes a thing (4)
12. Dennis, the seemingly elevated baritone at the first performance of England my England (5)
14. Eco - friendly sleeves in RVW's Fantasia? (5)
15. Tobacco's this from India an old song arranged by RVW in 1934 (4)
17. Britten or Nevis? (3)
18. Leslie who arranged Three Preludes for two pianos (7)
20. No 1 of Two Impressions of 1904 (7,4)

Down

1. The nativity play of 1958 completed by Roy Douglas (5,6)
2. Fairy queen who has a scherzo in a Berlioz work (3)
3. Treasure Island's Israel, goes with Eyes, & Heart (1955) (5)
4. Italian violin making family (5)
5. One of the bass singers in the first performance of Serenade to Music (6,5)
7. The Partita was originally this type of trio (6)
8. Stiles, soprano in the first performance of Serenade to Music (5)
11. Number of apostles in the traditional carol from Staffordshire, arranged by RVW in 1919, in Traditional English Carols (6)
13. Latin lamb in part V of Mass in G minor (5)
16. Beach in Kent, an early setting by RVW from 1899, since lost. Later set by Samuel Barber. Also birthplace of Elgar's dad. (5)
17. **** of the Saviour, a Derbyshire carol also in the 1919 RVW arrangement (5)
19. No thought of this nature occurs in Hodie (3)

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