

Journal of the  
**RVW**  
Society

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**In this issue...**

- Vaughan Williams and Literature  
*pages 6 - 14*
- Bernard Kane on the Suite for Viola  
*page 15*
- An RVW poem from Hubert Foss  
*page 24*

*and more . . .*

## From the Chairman

The year 2008 marked fifty years since the death of Ralph Vaughan Williams. We had anticipated some interesting events and renewed interest in his work, but we were not prepared for the staggering amount of music-making that took place, nor for the unprecedented amount of attention shown by the media, concert promoters, musicians, radio stations and audiences.

This level was sustained throughout the year, which commenced with the production of two films on the composer; saw a complete cycle of symphonies (and *Dona Nobis Pacem*) under the masterly baton of Richard Hickox; a thrilling Fourth with Paul Daniel; performances of many Vaughan Williams works, including *Job* and the Ninth at the Proms, *Sancta Civitas* with the Bach Choir, and concluded with Hilary Davan Wetton's *Hodie* at the Barbican.

Some of the operas – usually regrettably overlooked – saw the light of day: a deeply moving *Pilgrim's Progress* at Sadler's Wells, several productions of *Riders to the Sea*, including superb versions at Buxton and the English National Opera, and a splendid *Poisoned Kiss* with Ian Caddy and the New Sussex Opera. Other events included the Society's presentation of our third Medal of Honour to Sir David Willcocks at the Three Choirs Festival, an International Conference in New York, a Vaughan Williams Festival in Cambridge, "Valiant Voices" – the International Day of Vaughan Williams on 12th October, when the Archbishop of Canterbury exhorted churches world-wide to feature his hymns, and the joint Elgar and RVW Societies' Symposium "Let Beauty Awake" at the British Library, where leading authorities gave talks and engaged in discussions of both erudition and wit.

Our record label, Albion, continued its success. Our first disc, *The Sky shall be our Roof*, was an Editor's Choice in the *Gramophone*, and we brought out three more discs during the year, *Kissing her Hair*, *Music in the Heart* and, most recently, *Where Hope is Shining*, a collection of choral songs, many of them premiere recordings.

Although the year has been a good one for Vaughan Williams, it has also been a sorrowful one for English music, following the deaths of Vernon Handley and Richard Hickox, both great champions of British composers, and of Lady Bliss, the indomitable widow of Sir Arthur, who passed away at the ripe old age of 104. All three will be sorely missed, both by those who knew them personally and all who were aware of their unstinting efforts to further the cause of English music. 2009, in comparison, can be nothing but a quiet year, yet I hope that it will be a year of reflection and consolidation, of building upon the solid foundations that have been laid during the course of 2008. As a society we need to take stock of where we are and of what, now, we can best do to further the promotion of Ralph Vaughan Williams and to fortify our position as his ambassador. In the meantime, we shall continue to promote and support events and to give you, our members, the opportunity to discover more about this wonderful man and his music.

*Em Marshall*

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# From the Editor



When Stephen Connock handed over the responsibility for the Journal at the end of 2004, he probably didn't know that what worried me most was the thought that there might not be enough material to fill it. Issue 32, my first, came to twenty-eight pages, pretty much following the pattern of previous years, the average number of pages having risen slowly from the first issue's sixteen. Two big pieces appear in this issue, from Bernard Kane and Robert Shave, and in spite of the fact that both were held over from last time because of shortage of space, it was with that issue, No. 43, that we hit forty pages for the first time. Members will be aware, then, that I no longer worry about not having enough to publish! Printing and postage costs rise in line with the number of pages, so it may seem perverse to choose this moment to encourage members anew to send in contributions. But a healthy Journal is a sign of a healthy Society, and if the main problem facing the Editor is an abundance of material he will smile and cope.

One of the Society's major events in 2008 was "Let Beauty Awake", the symposium organised with the Elgar Society to explore each composer's response to poetry. There is a report in this issue, as well as contributions from members on the theme of "Vaughan Williams and Literature in English". There is obviously much more to this subject than a simple study of the texts he chose to set to music. Vaughan Williams was extremely widely read. He evoked Shakespeare in relation to the Sixth Symphony, and Hardy, of course, is important in the Ninth. Even the *London Symphony* has literary origins, H G Wells' novel *Tono-Bungay*. I hope that one of our members will send in an article exploring this link in time to appear in the June 2009 Journal, whose theme will be "Vaughan Williams and London". Robert Shave, elsewhere in this issue, shares some thoughts on the original and revised versions of the *London Symphony*, a subject which has received surprisingly little attention in these pages. Others may also wish to do so. We know that Vaughan Williams loved London – "Symphony by a Londoner", he called it – and other influences of

that great city will surely be found in his work if we look carefully enough.

The July edition of the Journal carried a letter from Edward Westhead, wondering if Albion Records might consider reissuing the old EMI LP *As I Walked Out*. His plea was then seconded in the following issue by Canadian member David Clunie. As it turns out, EMI themselves have now issued the disc on CD: John Tebbit was the first to send in this information, and he contributes a short review in this issue. One result of all this was that I bought the disc myself, not having heard it for many years. One of the songs Robert Tear performs is *Bushes and Briars*. When Charles Potiphar sang this song to Vaughan Williams in December 1903 at Ingrave in Essex, it was for the composer a defining moment. It was music he "felt...he had known all his life." He was composing *In the Fen Country* at the time and so struck was he by the tune of *Bushes and Briars* that he incorporated it into the orchestral piece. *The Captain's Apprentice*, a song of quite extraordinary expressive force, also appears on the disc, as does *The Truth Sent from Above* and, of course, the heartrending *How cold the wind doth blow*, otherwise known as *The Unquiet Grave*. Ten years have passed since the Journal last addressed the subject of folk song, so I should like to invite members to reflect on this subject for the October 2009 issue. The story of how Vaughan Williams came to folk song has been well covered – see the review of Sue Cubbin's excellent short book elsewhere in this issue – so we might profitably avoid that, perhaps concentrating on how folk song style influenced the composer in his original compositions. The link he established between folk melodies and hymns would also make a profitable study. Journals 13 and 14 dealt with folk song, so a glance at those will avoid unnecessary duplication. And in any event, given the depressingly short time that recordings stay in the catalogue these days, I can only urge readers to acquire the EMI reissue. It really is a jewel.

William Hedley

# *Go Forth Upon Thy Journey . . .*

## Stephen Connock Remembers

### Richard Hickox



*Richard Hickox, with Stephen Connock at the RVW/Elgar Society Symposium, November 22 2008*

The loss of a close friend on Sunday 23 November 2008, who also happened to be one of the leading champions of English music, was devastating. Richard Hickox was in fine form when I interviewed him at the joint Elgar/RVW Society Symposium just the night before. He was, as always, engaging, funny, uplifting, energetic and disarmingly open. Looking much younger than his sixty years, he appreciated the special warmth that the audience showed to him for his remarkable achievements in Elgar, Vaughan Williams and others. Yet the next day he was gone. The shock was felt world-wide. The obituaries were generous, perhaps more appreciative than many tributes he had received in his life.

And what a full life it was! He had founded the City of London Sinfonia in 1971 and remained its Music Director at the time of his premature death. He was Artistic Director for the Northern Sinfonia from 1982 to 1990. He set up and was devoted to his St. Endellion Festival in that part of North Cornwall he had made his home and loved the most. From 1976 he had worked very closely with the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus and was Principal Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales from 2000 to 2006. In recent times he had developed a close rapport with the Philharmonia. He was Music Director of Opera Australia in Sydney and performed regularly with the Royal Opera, English National Opera, Vienna State Opera and Washington Opera. He seemed to be a guest conductor for orchestras across every continent. His exclusive Chandos contract produced an astonishing 280 records alongside his work for Decca (including a lovely *In terra pax*), EMI and Virgin. His achievements were recognised with a CBE in the Queen's Jubilee Honours List in 2002 and not the knighthood he might have deserved.

None of this was enough for a man with such drive, ambition and ability. The week before his death we were planning new projects, including *Hugh the Drover* for 2010 and *The Pilgrim's Progress* for 2011. Chandos had an immense number of outstanding recording projects – he was taken ill during the recording of the first movement of Holst's *Choral Symphony* in Swansea on 23 November. The night before he, mischievously, would not tell us what these recording plans were “in case Hyperion hear about it!” It was not in Richard's nature to sit back and reflect. He was a man of action; practical and focused. He recognised the importance of fund-raising to contemporary music-making and worked tirelessly to secure the funds to realise his artistic vision. Like Vaughan Williams, he was never patronising, never smug, never arrogant. Indeed, the hint of insecurity in him was endearing and accounted in part for the remarkable loyalty he inspired amongst musicians and other friends and colleagues.

Although Richard Hickox excelled in Handel, Haydn, Dvorak and others, his music-making reached new heights in Vaughan Williams, Elgar, Tippett and Britten. Why? He said he felt a special affinity for the English choral tradition. His father was a vicar, he had won an organ scholarship to Queen's College, Cambridge and he had studied under Boult and Willcocks. The colours, contours and atmosphere of English music were in his blood. In the Vaughan Williams anniversary of 2008, his *Pilgrim* at Sadler's Wells was a superb achievement whilst his symphony cycle at the Royal Festival Hall was unforgettable. The standing ovations he received at the end of the *Fifth Symphony* and the *Pastoral Symphony* seemed even to take Richard by surprise! Amongst his many recordings, the original version of *A London Symphony* will be a gramophone classic for all time.

As we remember these wonderful musical achievements, so we must not forget Richard Hickox, the man. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his devoted mother, Jean, to his wife Pamela Helen Stephen, with whom he shared so much musical glory, to his sons Tom and Adam and to his daughter Abby, who is just eight. His children were a source of immense pride and his eyes always lit up on mention of any of them.

Richard was due to conduct *Riders to the Sea* the week he died. Maurya's elegiac arioso towards the end of the opera perhaps sums up how we might approach the loss of such a commanding figure: “No man can live forever and we must be satisfied.” As Richard's son Tom put it so well at the funeral, “he was a force of nature” whose achievements were remarkable, deserving of celebration and gratitude rather than sadness.

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# Vernon Handley (1930-2008)

by Andrew Burn



Vernon Handley (right), February 1986, with Raphael Wallfisch and Joy Finzi

I met Tod, as he was universally known, when I was working for the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra from 1975 to 1992. I had known his name from my teens through his pioneering recordings of Bax and Finzi. On his first visit to Liverpool after I'd joined the organization I told him of my interest in British music, especially Finzi, and he promptly told me that I must meet the composer's widow, Joy, "a quite remarkable woman." His introduction began a friendship which lasted until her death in 1991 and I will always be grateful for this. During my time in Liverpool, Tod made one Finzi recording with the orchestra, the Cello Concerto with Raphael Wallfisch, coupled with Kenneth Leighton's early *Veris Gratia*. This recording was the result of a concert he had given at the second Weekend of English Music that Paul Spicer, Robert Gower and I masterminded under the auspices of the Finzi Trust in 1984. The programme was typical Handley fare: as well as Finzi there was Hadley, Moeran, Holst and Delius. With the RLPO, he also recorded works by Robert Simpson, Herbert Howells and Arthur Bliss. At the Bliss recordings, he introduced me to the composer's widow, Trudy, so bringing about another long-lasting friendship. His Elgar recordings began with the then little-known *King Olaf* and culminated in *The Dream of Gerontius*, which was compared favourably to the classic Barbirolli recording

At the heart of his recording achievement with the RLPO lie the Vaughan Williams symphonies for EMI Eminence, thanks to the imagination and perseverance of the then label manager, Patricia Byrne. The Fifth Symphony, coupled with *Flos Campi* was the first in 1986; it won an award which led to the next recording, *A Sea Symphony*. These successes resulted in Tod's appointment as Principal Guest Conductor. Over the next eight years the other symphonies followed. Listening to the cycle again, I'm struck not only by the fresh, alert, dynamic quality of the RLPO's playing, but also by Tod's no-nonsense approach to the music – he lets it speak for itself. The recordings were lovingly prepared by prior performances and I recall the sessions as stress-free. In this Tod was helped by the brilliant production duo of Andrew Keener and Mike Clements. Listen, for instance, to the sheer vigour and rumbustiousness of Handley's Fourth Symphony, a wonderfully elegiac, poetic *Pastoral* and the awesome grandeur of *Sinfonia Antartica*. I was privileged to write the notes for these recordings when originally issued and the discussions I had with Tod about

the music were a revelation. What was the essence of Handley's music-making? Primarily, I think, it was his understanding of structure. Then there was his straightforward approach to conducting a work – follow the composer's directions, observe the dynamics, let the musical skills of the players come to the fore, especially solos, and above all, don't get in the way. Some of these skills he learnt from his mentor, Adrian Boult, but he made them his own. He understood the psychology of musicians instinctively, he knew their Christian names, and would cause waves of amusement by his very dry humour. Not the most charismatic of conductors, perhaps, but he gained the players' admiration and respect. So what of the man? His warmth, his passion for the music he believed in and his selfless

help to younger people were great traits. He had no pretensions, none of the ego evident in some conductors. He was difficult to get to know well. I didn't, as with other conductors, spend hours driving him from concert to concert. He invariably wanted to drive himself, and preferred the long journey back to his home in Gwent rather than stay overnight, so lengthy discussions were rare.

Tod's propensity to cancel concerts meant that in the last decade of his life orchestral planners were wary about booking him. He came only a few times to the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra after I joined them in 1993, for example, despite having conducted them regularly in the seventies and eighties. Some people thought his illnesses were all in his head, but I once witnessed one of his attacks from kidney stones and there was nothing false about it. In fact it was unnerving to behold. I hoped that we might work together again through the Chester Summer Music Festival when I was its Artistic Director and he had accepted my invitation to conduct on two occasions. He cancelled the first time on the second day of rehearsals, leaving Rumon Gamba to step in heroically. After that it took a lot of persuasion to get my directors to agree to invite him in 2007 for what was my own swansong at the Festival. With Tod's staunch supporter, his agent Nicholas Curry, we planned an all-Elgar programme. Alas, three weeks before the concert, came the phone call I had been dreading, and I so regret we didn't have this final chance to meet again.

During my Liverpool Phil years, a recurring topic was Tod's fervent wish to record the symphonies of Bax. My former colleague at Liverpool, the enterprising Brian Pidgeon, once he'd moved to the BBC Philharmonic, was to realise the dream. Surely these, and the Bantock recordings he made for Hyperion and Chandos, are the crowning glory of his career. Just listen to the epilogue of Bax's Third Symphony: heavens, didn't he totally understand this glorious music! What a pity that public recognition in terms of the knighthood many felt he deserved eluded him. Yet I, for one, am grateful that even though he is no longer with us, there is a treasure store of recordings to remember him by.

Andrew Burn is Head of Education and Ensembles at the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra.

# MICHAEL KENNEDY

## remembers URSULA



The Journal has already printed many moving tributes to Ursula by her friends and the Editor has asked me to add mine. I knew her from 1951 as a friend, collaborator in Ralph's biography (a book apiece) and in my role as a member and later chairman of the RVW Trust and of RVW Ltd. Living in Manchester, I did not see her on a daily basis but our correspondence and telephone calls were voluminous. Staying with her at Hanover Terrace and at 69 and 66 in Gloucester Crescent was always a joy. She was a wonderful hostess, thoughtful to the last degree, and she had a flair for choosing perfect presents, even at Christmas which she hated.

Inevitably her life is indelibly associated with Ralph's. Those who did not see them together knew only a shadow of Ursula. The twenty years from 1938 to 1958 constituted her life. Her first twenty-seven years were a prologue to something she knew would happen. A few days before she was due to meet Vaughan Williams for the first time, she wrote a poem containing the lines "Loves predestined by some choice made with both mind and voice but blindly..." The last forty-nine years were a slow epilogue, an epilogue filled with laughter and the love of friends, it is true, but a life deprived of its epicentre. She continued, not in any aggressive way, to work for his music and for his musical ideals. Hence her membership of many committees where she felt she could be helpful. As a member of the RVW Trust, which exists to help other musicians and, by his expressed dictat, not his own music, she had an instinctive sense of what he would have approved (or disapproved). She could also be delightfully and maddeningly quixotic in some of her choices for grants. The chairman and administrator had to devise Byzantine ways by which her wishes could be adjusted to the Trust's policies. Or sometimes we just had to say "No". "Oh well" was her usual response. Until almost the end, the meetings were held in her dining-room followed by lunch. This engendered the informal and friendly atmosphere which made the meetings so pleasant.

She liked to say that because of her peripatetic existence as an army officer's child she had no education. Be that as it may, her autobiography *Paradise Remembered* reveals her voracious appetite for literature. This, plus the time she spent as an actress at Lilian Baylis's Old Vic just before her marriage to Michael Wood, provided experiences which were to intensify her appeal to Ralph when they met and fell in love with an incandescence that could be felt by all who knew them, a union of body, mind and spirit. Their five years of marriage were, to quote her, "of quite extraordinary bliss". Their travels at home and abroad repaid him for all those years when he barely left England. Yet, much fun as they crammed into what they knew – if they thought about it at all – could only be a short time, she knew she was cherishing a great

composer. The list of his works from 1953 to 1958, including three symphonies and an opera, shows how well she arranged his time to accommodate the creative artist. And in spite of the constant visits to concerts, operas, plays, exhibitions and films, in spite of his composing and her poetry, there were evenings at home in Hanover Terrace with friends. I remember an evening when we just read aloud and he read "Assemble all ye maidens", which Holst had set.

Ralph left Ursula and me with the daunting task of writing his biography, she the personal life and I the musical and public. We realised this would mean two books, not an awkwardly constructed one volume. Oxford University Press agreed and before we started writing Roy Douglas obligingly played through all the unpublished and withdrawn works. Throughout the five years during which we worked, I cannot recall a single disagreement over distribution of material and we followed Vaughan Williams' and Holst's system of reading and criticising each other's drafts. In later years we would say we didn't know how we did it!



Rightly one remembers the post-1958 Ursula for her love of parties and for her tireless activity. She wrote novels, poetry and libretti. Her fabled generosity, especially to friends in need or in some domestic trouble, has been well chronicled in Journal 43 (October 2008). It scarcely needs reiterating. Sometimes, like us all, she could be duped by a phoney and had to be rescued. On the whole, though, she was clear-sighted and unsentimental about human nature. As Ralph would have wished, she led a full, rich and comfortable life. But I cannot help feeling that it was all a superhuman exercise in putting on a brave face. In 1965 she wrote to me: "Holidays are worst and going to parties and coming home from them – on one level I feel lost, bereft and furious – on another how can it matter when, having lived in joy, one is immortal... People ask me if I am not going to marry again. I thought I looked indissolubly married. I don't ever think of myself as either a widow – hateful dank word – or as eligible... I think I wanted Ralph's presence long before I met him." Thirty years later she said to my wife: "It has been thirty-eight years and every one of them has been as long as the first." She rarely missed a performance of his works, even in the last years when her mind was clouded. Mention of him could usually disperse the clouds, as could be seen and heard in the two television documentaries when she firmly declared "I adored him".

Her poetry and the music she inspired Ralph Vaughan Williams to compose will ensure that her memory stays green long after all who were privileged to know her have left the scene.

# Vaughan Williams, Shakespeare and *Sir John in Love*

By D. R. Thorpe

Shakespeare's works have inspired many composers. Bellini, Berlioz, Britten, Gounod, Prokofiev, and, above all, Verdi, spring to mind. If Vaughan Williams is not naturally thought of as being in this company, then it is time the position was redressed. Not only did Vaughan Williams compose one of the finest of all Shakespearean operas, but he also transformed a scene from *The Merchant of Venice* to magical effect in the *Serenade to Music*.

Shakespeare was also the inspiration for Vaughan Williams for a set of three songs, *Full Fathom Five* and *The Cloud-Capp'd Towers* (from *The Tempest*) and *Over Hill, Over Dale* from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, plus the single song, *Orpheus with his Lute* from *Henry VIII*. In addition, the suite *In Windsor Forest*, partly drawn from the Falstaff opera, but also with a setting of *Sigh no more, ladies* from *Much Ado about Nothing*, was created for the Surrey choirs of the Leith Hill Musical Festival, though Vaughan Williams regretfully noted that "all people want is the plums and no cake." Shakespeare was also one of Vaughan Williams' sources for the 1944 commemorative piece, *A Song of Thanksgiving*. So any doubts that Vaughan Williams was a Shakespearean can be truly laid to rest.

This article concentrates on Vaughan Williams' most substantial Shakespearian response, the opera, *Sir John in Love* of 1929, inspired by *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In the score's preface, Vaughan Williams admits that "to write yet another opera about Falstaff at this time of day may seem the height of impertinence, for one appears in so doing to be entering into competition with three great men – Shakespeare, Verdi and Holst." He could have added Otto Nicolai, whose *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* remained the Falstaff opera he most admired. "I think it is the best of the operas on the Falstaff saga", he wrote to Michael Kennedy in July 1956. Earlier he had admitted that Verdi's *Falstaff* was not his favourite opera. "I know it is very brilliant and skilful and that the basket scene ensemble is a miracle of stagecraft", he wrote in 1951. "After all, the real Verdi carried on his drama in terms of broad tune, but Boito's medicated Shakespeare hardly ever gives him a chance. Again and again the orchestra seems to be preparing us for something like the big tunes of his earlier operas, but they do not materialise." In short, Vaughan Williams thought that Verdi was hamstrung by his librettist – of how many operatic composers can that be said? – and what he called Arrigo Boito's "sham Shakespeare".

In his essay on *English Folk Songs* (1912) Vaughan Williams claimed that the greatest artists – he cites, among others, Shakespeare, Verdi and Walt Whitman – have had strong national roots. "Their appeal may be cosmopolitan, but the origin of their inspiration is national."

The essential Englishness of Shakespeare's Windsor is precisely what Vaughan Williams found wanting in Boito's *Falstaff* libretto, to the detriment ultimately of the opera. Only in the love scenes

between Anne Page and Fenton, in Vaughan Williams' opinion, did Verdi excel, "because there he was able to rejoice in good Italian slush about kissing!"

For his own opera on the Fat Knight (his original title), Vaughan Williams prepared the libretto, as Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears later did with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. For Vaughan Williams the right libretto was the essential foundation for a successful opera. "I recoil with horror from the hack librettist, however much he may know about stage business", he wrote to Stanford Robinson of the BBC in 1942. "Three of my operas have at all events good libretti", he added, including *Sir John in Love* in the list (but not *Hugh the Drover* or *The Poisoned Kiss*), without mentioning that the ordering of its libretto was his own work.

The first of some ten operatic versions of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was by the French composer M. Jean Papavoine in 1761, *Le Vieux Coquet*. Salieri, Balfe and Adam all produced a Falstaff (in 1799, 1838 and 1856 respectively.) Only Nicolai's opera of 1849 replicates the original title. Verdi's Italian masterpiece, his last opera, came in 1893. When Vaughan Williams' version was first performed in March 1929, under the baton of Malcolm Sargent at the Royal College of Music, it was only four years after Gustav Holst's "musical interlude in one act", *At the Boar's Head*, though this work was drawn from the Falstaff scenes in the two *Henry IV* plays, as Elgar's symphonic study *Falstaff* had been.

*The Merry Wives of Windsor* is the Shakespeare play most unlike all the others. Not only is it largely in prose, there are no emperors, kings or classical heroines. It is predominantly a bourgeois play, supposedly written in 1599 in a fortnight at the behest of Queen Elizabeth I, who, according to Nicholas Rowe in his 1709 edition, "was so well pleased with that admirable character of Falstaff, in the two parts of Henry the fourth, that she commanded him to continue it for one play more, and to shew him in love."

The chosen setting of Windsor, reflecting the royal commission, could in fact be any small English country town of the period, even *The Merry Wives of Stratford-upon-Avon*, evoking the small town hierarchies of the world in which Shakespeare grew up. Indeed the Stratford Shakespeare knew permeates the play, for Shakespeare, like Ford, had a daughter called Anne, who was courted by a doctor, and the character of Justice Shallow may well be modelled upon Sir Thomas Lucy of neighbouring Charlecote Park, who is supposed to have banished Shakespeare for stealing deer.

*Merry Wives* has a fair claim to being the first, and best, of the English situation-comedies, with all the later conventions of mistaken identities, class tension, multiple wooings, cuckoldry and the broadly-based farce of a hero's humiliations. The distinct layers of the Windsor (or Stratford) community give ample

opportunity for satire. The English society portrayed by Shakespeare is one in transition from the medieval dependency on land to the new world of trade and mercantile expansion. Page and Ford are very much of this “new rich” world. Anne Page’s dowry is reckoned at £1,400, a vast sum. These newly confident capitalists have the Welsh parson Sir Hugh Evans, who finds no place in Verdi’s *Falstaff*, to teach their offspring, which gives scope for linguistic misunderstandings with the French physician Dr Caius that would not be out of place in the television comedy *‘Allo ‘Allo!* One can also imagine Page and Ford as the much favoured banking customers of the local Captain Mainwaring from *Dad’s Army*, and Hyacinth Bucket from *Keeping Up Appearances* craving invitations to their social gatherings. Falstaff on the other hand, with his London cronies (“sharps” in Vaughan Williams’ stage direction), Bardolph, Pistol and Nym, has been ill served by the war-booty system (Pistol is to thrive more successfully, for a while, in *Henry V*). As Falstaff fails to gain the financial prize the sharps hope for, the cronies seek revenge and betray him to Ford.



Sir John Falstaff

Shakespearean critics have, by and large, not rated *Merry Wives* very highly in the canon, though a surprising enthusiast for the play was Friedrich Engels, who wrote to Karl Marx in 1873, “there is more life and reality in the first act of ‘The Merry Wives of Windsor’ alone than in all German literature.” Dr. Johnson thought the play “remarkable for the variety and number of the personages, who exhibit more characters appropriated and discriminated than perhaps can be found in any other play.” Indeed the fact that Vaughan Williams, unlike Verdi, retains most of these varied characters is one of the factors, not the quality of

its music, that militates against frequent performance. Just as Shakespeare’s comedy has, by and large, been underestimated, similarly, *Sir John in Love*, with its use of folk material, has been seen by some Vaughan Williams scholars, as a regressive work after the innovations of the oratorio *Sancta Civitas* (1926). However, as John Keats observed, the poetical character “has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen”. Keats knew that “the relish of the dark side” did not preclude “the taste for the bright one.” In fact, both *Merry Wives* and *Sir John in Love*, as with most successful comedies, have their serious, darker side, and both rarely fail in performance.

One of the characteristics of the most enduring Shakespeare dramas is the manner in which the leading characters are shown to be on a journey of self-discovery. The main difference between Shakespeare’s comedies, where “all’s well that ends well”, and tragedies, with “purposes mistook fallen on the inventors’ heads”, is not therefore that one ends with wedding bells, and the other with funeral bells. In a Shakespearean comedy the main characters find out the truth about themselves in time to profit from that knowledge; in a tragedy they find out the truth too late to do so. The real companion piece to *Merry Wives* is *Othello*. Not even with Leontes in *The Winter’s Tale* does Shakespeare examine so profoundly the effects of jealousy on a human soul than he does with Ford and Othello. Had Ford not discovered in time the “mistakes of a night” (as Oliver Goldsmith later put it in the subtitle of *She Stoops to Conquer*) then the consequences for him could have been as soul-destroying as those for Othello, after Iago’s falsehoods. The moving heart of *Merry Wives* is, therefore, not the rumbustiousness of the laundry basket scene, or the gathering at midnight around Herne’s Oak; it is the simple scene of Ford pleading for forgiveness from his wife for ever doubting her loyalty. Vaughan Williams shrewdly recognised this, and as we shall see, made that moment the true climax of his opera, and one of the most moving reconciliations in all music.

As sung text takes longer than spoken dialogue, cutting is essential. Britten and Pears cut half of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for their operatic version. In preparing his libretto, Vaughan Williams also wields the blue pencil to telling effect, though as has been noted, not in the number of characters. Verdi retained ten singing rôles; Vaughan Williams has twenty, including, appropriately, the trio of Gloucestershire characters, Cotsall coming to Windsor as it were, Justice Shallow, his bumpkin cousin Slender and his servant Peter Simple, none of whom appear in *Falstaff*. There are also opportunities in the Vaughan Williams, depending on the budget, for a large chorus of Citizens of Windsor, and lots of children to play the fairies, and page boys, what might be called the Leith Hill input.

Wisely, Vaughan Williams cuts Falstaff’s second humiliation – the old woman of Brainford episode – which Dr. Johnson thought the “grosser”, and most implausible, compared with the famous laundry basket scene. “It is very unlikely that Ford having been so deceived before”, Johnson wrote, “and knowing that he had been deceived, would suffer him [Falstaff] to escape in so slight a disguise.” Vaughan Williams’ purpose in his libretto is always to keep the story moving, and he takes considerable pains to work out the most effective way of surmounting potential difficulties in staging.

In 1933, when Vaughan Williams was working on some revisions in the light of the first performances in 1929, he paid particular attention to fluidity. “Am I right in supposing that you would then

be able to have a full stage for the Fenton-Anne scene, followed by a front scene for the Letter Scene during which the stage could be set for the interior of the 'Garter'?", he wrote to Jack Gordon in 1933. "This would have the additional advantage of letting the interview of Quickly & Falstaff follow immediately on the Letter Scene as it really should do."

Duets, as befits the operatic form, were given a central place, notably those between the young lovers, Fenton and Anne Page, between Mistress Page and Mistress Ford in their famous letter scene, and above all the duet between Ford and his wife at the beginning of Act 4. Much of the music has a lyrical, autumnal quality, particularly in Vaughan Williams' use of the oboe, with its underlying melancholy, especially in Anne Page's *Weep eyes, break heart*. In *Falstaff*, Verdi made sparkling use of the piccolo, above all in Falstaff's "Honour" monologue, drawn from the first part of *Henry IV*. Cuckoo and cuckold give Vaughan Williams ample opportunities for musical onomatopoeia. He also has great fun with the instruction to Falstaff after the delivery of identical love letters to Mistress Ford and Mistress Page that he should call "between ten and eleven".

Boito changes this, for linguistic reasons, in his libretto for Verdi, to "dalle due alle tre" (from two until three) which, though different from the Shakespearean original, perhaps better suits the idea that Falstaff is not naturally a morning person. The distinctive aspect of Vaughan Williams' version of the Falstaff story is that he transcends the popular conception of Falstaff as a coarse buffoon, and gives him a wounded dignity, that makes the portrait the more compelling, and the nearest to Dr. Johnson's view of Falstaff as "compound of sense and vice; of sense which may be admired but not esteemed, of vice which may be despised, but hardly detested."

In 1913, Vaughan Williams had been the musical director at Frank Benson's Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, composing music for four plays, including *Merry Wives*, the genesis of the idea that he would one day compose an opera on the Falstaff story. When he came to prepare his libretto a decade later, Vaughan Williams interwove texts from several contemporary poets and dramatists, including Marlowe, Middleton, Jonson, Campion, and the song *When daisies pied* from *Love's Labour's Lost*, which gave great scope for the use of folk tunes. As in his Stratford music of 1913, Vaughan Williams drew on one of the greatest of folk tunes, *Greensleeves*, both for Mistress Ford's lute song and for the transitional music leading from Ford's reconciliation to the final scene in Windsor Great Park.

Those who think such additions unauthentic should note that *Greensleeves* is actually mentioned by Shakespeare in his play. Reading Falstaff's letter, with its declarations of seemingly heart-felt love, Mistress Ford says that his words "do no more adhere and keep place together than the Hundredth Psalm to the tune of Greensleeves." Vaughan Williams was, of course, to compose memorable variants of both pieces, and, as in the *Tallis Fantasia*, demonstrated his deep understanding of the Elizabethan sensibility.

Shakespeare loved dances – *Much Ado about Nothing* and *As You Like It* both end with a general dance – and dances play a significant part in *Sir John in Love*. Vaughan Williams took great care over the staging of these dances, writing detailed letters to Penelope Spencer, Ballet Mistress at the Royal College, who was in charge of the dances for the first performances, regarding their staging. He wanted everyone to join in the final country dance

(*Half Hannikin*), and he was especially attentive to the potential difficulties for the boys playing the "Fairy in Green" and the "Fairy in White", so important for the unravelling of the complications of the last act. His innate theatricality is also shown in his helpful stage directions in the score, specifying at the end "General reconciliation and hand-shaking", which avoids the underlying cruelty of the Herne's Oak scene in *Falstaff* before Verdi's final C major fugue, based on *All the world's a stage* from *As You Like It*.

For all its sublime comedy, *Sir John in Love* is an opera about reconciliation, about finding the truth about oneself and finding a better way forward on life's journey. It has its F minor moments, as well as its C major. As such the emotional core of the opera, introduced by a haunting pre-echo of the Fifth Symphony, is the scene where Ford begs forgiveness from his wife for ever doubting her truthfulness. If only Othello could have done the same with Desdemona.

*Pardon me, wife, henceforth do what thou wilt.  
I rather will suspect the sun with cold  
Than thee with wantonness.  
Pardon me, wife, now doth thine honour stand  
In him that was of late an heretic,  
As firm as faith.*

Into this declaration of regret, Vaughan Williams weaves the lines from the contemporary poet Richard Edwards, tenderly sung by Mistress Ford, "The falling out of friends, renewal is of love." The *Greensleeves* entr'acte, reprising Mistress Ford's earlier singing of the folk tune to lute accompaniment (an influence on Essex's lute song in Britten's *Gloriana*?) shortly afterwards bears us into Windsor Great Park for the denouement. One can never hear Ford's plea for forgiveness without the heart-stopping realisation that an experienced theatrical craftsman is at work and the delicate passage is one of the supreme highlights in Vaughan Williams' output.

Verdi's *Falstaff* is a quicksilver masterpiece of the operatic repertoire, an astonishing achievement for an octogenarian, and is frequently performed. By comparison, the versions by Nicolai and Vaughan Williams are rarely staged. The performances in 2006 of *Sir John in Love* at English National Opera proved a revelatory occasion, and not just for Vaughan Williams enthusiasts. What an interesting exercise it would be for an enterprising company to produce the Nicolai and the Vaughan Williams versions in successive seasons, and with the same sets and costumes.

Vaughan Williams said that his main object in the opera had been "to fit this wonderful comedy with, I trust, not unpleasant music." In this he has abundantly succeeded. Despite the claims of *Riders to the Sea* and *The Pilgrim's Progress*, unusual, unique, even idiosyncratic, works, *Sir John in Love* is Vaughan Williams' mainstream operatic masterpiece, and one of the most under-rated of all his works.

When Shakespeare obeyed his monarch's wish to write a play about the Fat Knight in love, little could he have realised what a wonderful catalyst his modest comedy would prove for so many, who in the years to come would be inspired to produce, in a wonderful variety of responses, their own individual visions of Albion in the midst of one of its most glorious eras. I suspect he would have found *Sir John in Love* the most faithful response of them all.

# Vaughan Williams, Stevenson, and *Songs of Travel*

by Eric Hazelwood



Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894)

I am normally loath to reveal my favourite piece of music, something I vowed I would never do because it is coloured by a variety of English compositions across centuries and I don't want to be unfaithful to any of them. Also, the depth of music tradition in England presents an almost inexhaustible wealth of new discoveries still to be made and these could yet have a greater influence on my judgement. However, I have to confess that I am drawn to Ralph Vaughan Williams' settings of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Songs of Travel*. Whilst the musical setting of the literary work is particularly enthralling, this aspect is equally complemented by the words and consequently there is a dual reason for my attraction to the work, appreciating both music and poetry in almost equal terms.

Poetry makes a significant contribution to our classical music tradition. Timeless, when you consider the folk song tradition that Vaughan Williams attempted to capture and through the hymns within the established church where poetry is heavily represented. Most of this tradition was established in the era before television when there was a greater emphasis on literature, Vaughan Williams himself choosing to read aloud to his wife during more relaxed moments, much of which included poetry. Gerald Finzi

was smitten by the same addiction for poetry and set a great deal to music. He even wrote "The first and last thing is that a composer is moved by a poem and wishes to identify himself with it and share it. I don't think everyone realises the difference between choosing a text and being chosen by one." But herein lies the tradition of setting words to music and principally from the popular poets, often contemporary and sometimes commissioned. For instance, Vaughan Williams chose the poetry of his wife Ursula and another close female friend, Fredegond Shove, who had been Ralph and Adeline's bridesmaid, to set to music. What inspired him to choose particular works, poets and their poetry, may remain a mystery but it was indeed an inspiration and the outcome can be inspirational for us also. Indeed, is this part of the attraction of the man, his music and the literature he chose to set to music? I can confess it is for me and believe it adds depth to the experience.

I am aware that this is a personal appreciation and may not be to everyone's taste, indeed it has to be recognised that the perception of the subject and the setting is a very personal experience, but there is a distinct poignancy in both the words and music that can touch the heart and challenge the emotions.

*Songs of Travel* is a collection of poems Stevenson was preparing for publication at the time of his death in December 1894 and they were published not long after. Ralph Vaughan Williams was twenty-two at the time and he must have acquired a copy quite quickly following their publication. Apart from recollections of places and people from Stevenson's youth in Scotland, they reflect equally the events he experienced in the Pacific Islands, a part of the world he loved, perhaps out of necessity because of his pulmonary illness which wasn't sustainable in the "driech" land of his birth but was more tolerable in the warmer climate. He also enjoyed travelling, however, and this location may just have been a coincidence, but he did write in a poem called *Travel* (from *A Child's Garden of Verses*) which commences:

*I should like to rise and go  
Where the golden apples grow;  
Where below another sky  
Parrot islands anchored lie.*

But they also reflect an emotional longing for home, tinged with resignation and written from the other side of the world although written as if still resident in Scotland, and referring to days of old as though much time had passed, except that he died a relatively young man at forty-four.

They are more poignant when you realise that, for his health's sake, he felt compelled to stay in a warm climate and even considered himself an exile. There is no real narrative thread from one poem to the next and this applies to the whole series, rather a set of different circumstances on which the poet comments. And the poems explore life and death issues in the widest terms from a

man personally acquainted with the fragility of life. In the first version of *Youth and Love*, not selected by Vaughan Williams, he writes:

*I fling my soul and body down  
For God to plough them under.*

This may be reflective of his identity with death but also resignation born of depression, although this wasn't necessarily evident in his lifestyle.

There is a preoccupation with what has been left behind, and the poems reflect a simple lifestyle, a window on man's former primitive exposure to basic existence without responsibilities, a free agent. But they also express a profound melancholic loneliness, a longing to return to what might have been and a realisation of how he would have liked it to remain, as well as a reconciliation with what has now passed and the changes which that must inevitably bring. There is a profound sensitivity in those recollections and his words have an easiness on the ear and scan effortlessly, having a formal metre, but with deep poignancy.

Was he reflecting on a life he would have preferred albeit in a capricious mood, a life of loneliness to pursue his own desires? This would be difficult to reconcile with the author who wrote of adventure and discovery, often with a children's theme.

Within the following literary description of the poems is an insight into the mind of the Traveller Poet whose wanderings, longings and reminiscences are opened up for us in this travelogue.

*The Vagabond* is true to its name, reflecting the life of loneliness for the wayfarer who has shunned both friendship and possessions and who calls home the open country familiar to nature's inhabitants whose existence is rooted in the countryside. There can be no greater contrast in the next poem, *Let Beauty Awake*, where he returns to friendship of the tenderest kind where love is reawakened and shared. Now returning to the original theme, *The Roadside Fire* expresses a longing for the simplest of lives shared with nature and reflecting its beauty but shared with a solitary companion. There is a return also to the need for travel even if in the simplest of terms. *Youth and Love* is reminiscent of the journey of life and moving onward, the transience of life and love without the chance to look back.

It also exemplifies the theme of the cycle by posing the question of choice and preference, love and an established existence or loneliness and the freedom to roam and be independent. Reflective of this poem is the next, *In Dreams*, emphasizing the ephemeral nature of our passage through time. *The Infinite Shining Heavens* has a melancholic tone, full of sorrow and of death experiences but with hope of ultimate peace. This sinks further into despondency in the following poem, *Whither Must I Wander*, which is very reminiscent of the home of his childhood and life as it used to be, a reflection on things past, home and family, tinged with a reconciliation that they will never return and questioning the way into an unknown future.

Moving towards the culmination of this cycle, *Bright is the Ring of Words* is a statement on the enduring nature of the artists' work in words and music and which shall remain as a testament of their work, something that cannot be taken away after death. And summing up the whole theme, *I have trod the upward and the downward slope*: here we have a finality to this short series,

expressing the fullness of life but again in a forlorn tone and disconsolate attitude with a death and life beyond the grave scenario to close.

Of the forty-four poems there are very many and varied themes. Vaughan Williams only selected nine, but why did he choose the ones he did? Many have melancholic overtones, a longing for a life of solitude or of lost love but considering that this is a pre-war composition, not reflecting the experiences and trauma of carnage supposedly influencing some of his later music, the theme of the music is nonetheless melancholic, providing an emotional cohesion with the verses. What attracted him to the *Songs of Travel* in the first place, and why such haunting music? They are both attractive to me and they are proof that they could touch the soul but was it *de rigueur* for that period in our history, even though they have proved to be enduring?

Vaughan Williams wrote the cycle between 1901 and 1904, not many years after encountering the poems, and it was his first major attempt at song writing albeit a very worthy one in my opinion. This was a time of the development of the English song as having a more profound impact on the classical music tradition as opposed to the popular songs of the period, a style of which we see much less in these modern times except in popular music and modern hymn writing. His setting of Stevenson's poems was beloved of Sir Arthur Bliss and his contemporaries at Cambridge and was perceived as being very modern for its time.

Many of the *Songs of Travel* poems do indeed have a song-like quality, with a measured metre, strophic in some cases, that makes them readily adaptable to music. Vaughan Williams juxtaposes music and words quite cleverly and thoughtfully, evoking the countryside and its sounds, or the mood of the characters very expressively, the heavy tread of *The Vagabond*, for example, or the more lyrical notes depicting rural scenes.

Poetry is indeed an essential aspect of the presentation of music in an attractive form that gives the listener a double reason for being involved and heightening the experience. Vaughan Williams was of course a great advocate of setting words in English for his native English audience and it was natural to choose narrative from the native or American tongue.

Both Vaughan Williams and Stevenson were attracted by the American poet Walt Whitman. Stevenson discovered the poet in the early 1870s and some of his first publications were essays on Whitman, but it wasn't until 1903, when he began work on *A Sea Symphony*, that Vaughan Williams started to set Whitman to music. He had been setting the *Songs of Travel* since 1901, and one can imagine that Stevenson's attraction to Walt Whitman must have influenced him and may therefore not have been just coincidence. Perhaps he even saw Stevenson's essays!

Ultimately, the literary aspect of Vaughan Williams' compositions, principally in poetical terms, has been largely well chosen albeit that this is always a personal experience, as is the musical setting. His choice was far more contemporary than we would view it now, of course, although the poets remain icons of English literature to this day. He has complemented the verse well, adding the musical intonation to reflect the metre of the verse and bringing out the mood of the subject matter. We have been fortunate to have experienced the great man and his music but doubly blessed by his choice of literature, a truly great artist.

# “LOVE TO THE MISSUS...”

Having acquired what remained of Vaughan Williams’ library after Ursula’s death **Stephen Connock** glimpses at the composer’s literary interests

What does your book collection tell of your interests? Quite a bit: given that you have made the effort to retain certain books it can be reasonably assumed that these have some relevance to you. This relevance could be a family connection – perhaps the books were gifts and have been retained for sentimental reasons. Your books could reflect your professional interests. More deeply, your books might show your lifelong preoccupations. Look at my own collection and you will find music, railways, cricket and Tottenham Hotspur. For Vaughan Williams it was literature in general and English poetry in particular. No Chelsea Football Club (his local team whilst at Cheyne Walk), no Surrey Cricket Club, absolutely no politics. Of course, having a book on your shelves does not mean you have read it. Margin comments and markings can indicate interest but even here we must tread carefully. It was more common in the late Victorian period and early twentieth century to mark books. Today we hardly ever put our name in the front of books, let alone scribble all over them.

Having acquired Ursula’s library of over 1500 books after her death, contained within this remarkable collection were around 120 books demonstrably belonging to the composer. These are clearly signed or marked in some way with his distinctive handwriting. There may be many others but if they are not signed or marked I have not included them in this brief analysis. Ursula bequeathed most of the musical manuscripts in her collection to the British Library and officials from the Library were also invited to take those books from her collection that they found of national interest. Many others were given to friends. Oliver Neighbour has written of these bequests (see *Brio*, Volume 45, No 1). One day a full catalogue of Vaughan Williams’ collection at his death will be possible. For now, I concentrate on those books that were not deemed of sufficient interest to grace the national collection or the shelves of close friends. Yet, as we will see, the collection that remained is still of some interest.

The family links are noticeable in the collection. There are F.W. Maitland’s *Collected Papers*, edited by H.A.L. Fisher, Adeline’s brother. Maitland’s monumental *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* is there – Leslie Stephen had married Adeline’s Aunt Julia and was the father of Virginia Stephen (later Woolf). There are other books by Adeline’s brother, HAL (as he was always called in the family), including *Pages from the Past* (1939). Fredgond Shove’s biography of Christina Rossetti (1931) remains. Books from Vaughan Williams’ friends are there, too: *Spider Boy* by Carl van Vechten (1928) probably had little intrinsic interest to Vaughan Williams, but he would have kept it for the inscription by his great friend Gustav Holst which reads:

*For Ralph if he likes it or for whoever he passes it on to if he doesn’t, with birthday greetings and best wishes for life in the White Gates and love to the missus from Gustav*

There are books capturing Ralph and Ursula’s travels in the 1950s,

including *The Cathedrals of Chartres* (1952) and *Greece Invites* (1953 and 1955). From earlier folksong collecting years there is *Somerset – A Handbook for Travellers* (1899) signed by Vaughan Williams in 1907 with his address of 10, Barton Street written on the accompanying map. Christmas presents are included such as *Dictionary of Slang* (1953) marked “RVW from Ursula, Christmas, 1956”. Desmond McCarthy’s *Humanities* (1953) has this somewhat cryptic note in the composer’s handwriting: “for Ursula, wedding anniversary, February 7th, 1954 – not to think and repeat”.

The great majority of Vaughan Williams’ books concern literature. They can be divided into two categories – novels and plays, and poetry. I take each in turn.

## Novels and plays

Not surprisingly given the setting of *The Wasps* in 1909, there is *The Comedies of Aristophanes* (1905 edition). There is also Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* in a copy owned by Vaughan Williams’ mother Margaret which was given to her, or previously owned by, Erasmus Darwin. Hermann Melville’s *Moby Dick* is signed RVW, Christmas, 1924. There are Tennyson’s *Becket* (1894) and *Harold* (1877). Dickens’ *The Old Curiosity Shop* is marked ‘RVW, 1957’. There are, more surprisingly, eight volumes of Turgenev’s novels.

## Poetry

These represent the heart of RVW’s collection and they are listed here in no particular order:

- Robert Herrick, *Works* (1898)
- George Meredith, *Poems and Lyrics* (1894) which includes *The Lark Ascending*
- William Barnes, *Poems of Rural Life* (1879) signed ‘from M.J.V.W, October 9th, 1904’. Vaughan Williams had already set Barnes in his *Linden Lea* (1901), *Blackmores by the Stour* (1902) and *The Winter’s Willow* (1903) so this gift from his mother was of a poet she knew her son appreciated.
- Shelley, *Poetical Works* (1892)
- George Herbert, *Poetical Works* (1858)
- Tennyson, *Works* (1892) signed ‘RVW, from his mother, November, 1892’. Vaughan Williams set one of the poems in this book, *Claribel*, in 1896.
- Chaucer, *Works* (1908)
- *Poetical Works of Robert Bridges* (1913)
- Robert Bridges, *The Testament of Beauty* with many markings
- *Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne* (1932)
- *Lyric Poems of Thomas Campion*
- *Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold*
- *Collected Works of D.G. Rossetti*
- Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1891) used by Vaughan Williams when composing *A Sea Symphony* from 1903 to 1910
- Charles Calverly, *Verses and Fly Leaves* (1887)

- Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads* (1893). Vaughan Williams set Swinburne's *Rondel (Kissing her hair)* between 1895 and 1896
- Robert Louis Stevenson, *Poems* (1909)
- Robert Browning, *Poetical Works* (1881)
- *Poetical Works of Ben Jonson*. This book is signed by Catherine Darwin
- *Love Poems of John Donne* (1937)
- *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear*. It was Ursula who had introduced Ralph to the poetry of Edward Lear, which she said he loved

### Poetry Collections

- (ed) Norman Ault *Elizabethan Lyrics* (1925)
- (ed) J.C. Squire *Selections from Modern Poets* (1921)
- (ed) Gerald Bullitt *The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems* (1933)
- *Oxford Book of English Verse 1250 – 1918*. Signed by RVW, August 1955
- *Georgian Poetry in Four Volumes*, 1911-12, 1916-17, 1917, 1918-19
- *A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry* (1943) marked 'Ursula from RVW, Xmas, 1948'

Clearly this collection of poetry has been seriously reduced over the years. His Shakespeare and Housman volumes, for example, have gone to the British Library. Nevertheless these books that remain tell us of Vaughan Williams' interests, especially where "settable" poems were found in the volumes noted above.

For example, the composer's markings in the Norman Ault book are profuse and show the lyrics he was considering for his Falstaff opera *Sir John in Love*. He was looking at Watson's *With fragrant flowers we strew the way* (1591) for the Prologue as well as a number of choral options and songs for Anne as follows:

### Choral options:

- *A Roundelay* (Spenser, 1579)
- *A Jig* (Greene, 1589)
- *Hexametra Alexis in laudem Rosemundi* (Greene, 1590)
- *What thing is love?* (Peele, 1591)
- *A description of love* (Raleigh, 1593)
- *Midnight* (Middleton, 1602)
- *Cupid* (anon)

### Options for Anne:

- *Love cannot live* (anon)
- *My only star* (F. Davison, 1602)
- *Song* (Marston, 1605)
- *Parting* (Middleton, 1630)

Whilst *Parting* did make its way into the final score in Anne's lovely setting of *Weep eyes, break heart* in Act 1, it is a pity that Marston's lyrical *Song* did not get included:

*O love, how strangely sweet  
Are thy weak passions  
That love and joy should meet  
In self-same fashions!  
Oh, who can tell  
The cause why this should move?  
But only this,  
No reason ask of Love.*

What is clear in reviewing Vaughan Williams' library at his death is his abiding interest in English literature, an interest clearly nurtured by the gifts from his mother in those early years. Meeting Ursula Wood in 1938 added to the literary impulse. Of the 1500 books in her collection, over two-thirds are poetry showing a remarkable overlap with the interests of RVW. This was a match made in heaven.

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# Let Beauty Awake:

## a symposium to consider the influences of literature and poetry on Edward Elgar and Ralph Vaughan Williams

Roderick Williams and Iain Burnside



The symposium took place at the British Library, London, on 22-23 November 2008 and was jointly presented by the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society and the Elgar Society. Organised by the previous Chairmen of the Societies, **Stephen Connock** and **Andrew Neill**, this was the fourth Elgar/RVW Society collaboration, and despite the bitterly cold and miserable weather, the event was well attended, with audience participation split more or less equally between the two societies.

**Em Marshall** hosted the first day, as Chairman of the RVW Society, and **Steven Halls**, the new Chairman of the Elgar Society, hosted the second day.

After coffee and registration, Em opened proceedings by welcoming audience members and introducing the Symposium, explaining that, despite the obvious import and influence of literature and poetry on the two composers (demonstrated not only by the number of songs, operas and oratorios that they had written, but also by their great knowledge of authors and poets), this theme had never been discussed in relation to both of them before.

In this Symposium, distinguished speakers would examine these literary influences on both composers and their music. She reminded us that the event formed part of the celebrations marking the fiftieth anniversary of Vaughan Williams' death, one of the highlights in a year full of concerts, lectures, films and recitals (and which followed on from the celebration of the 150th since Elgar's birth in 2007). She welcomed the fact that Vaughan Williams is today being recognised as a truly international composer of stature and integrity, saying that she had been struck by the fact that almost all the concerts she had attended during the anniversary year had been given to full houses. This could mean only one thing – that clearly there was a huge and growing audience for this music, and for English music in general – which was great news!

We are grateful to Steven Halls for allowing us to publish his summary of the Symposium sessions:

**HUGH COBBE:** *The full-juiced apple: literary furniture revealed in Vaughan Williams' letters*

**ROGER SAVAGE:** *Whilst the moon shines gold: RVW and literature, an overview*

Hugh Cobbe's *full-juiced apple* and Roger Savage's funny and frenetically full fruit bowl illustrated for us the sheer range of Vaughan Williams' literary influences, especially the Bible, Shakespeare and the Tudors, Blake and, indeed, Ursula. Roger's careful ordering of the telephone directory of writers into three circles of influence, his consequent identification of the writers of 1890 to 1905 who chiefly engaged Vaughan Williams' imagination, and his acute observation of how the figures of the traveller, the wordsmith and their consequent books led to Vaughan Williams' synthesis of, and equipoise between, Voice and Verse, was particularly helpful.

**STEPHEN JOHNSON:** *Music and Moonlight: Elgar and literature, an overview*

Stephen Johnson, in his enthusiastic erudition, described how Elgar, in contrast to Vaughan Williams, chose verse in which he could (as he did in the *Violin Concerto*) "show himself". Such verse was so often, at generous best second rate, but Stephen then illustrated how Elgar could add to it and transform words and music into great art. **Juliette Pochin** neatly reinforced the example of *Sea Pictures* later, during the splendid concert.

*During the lunch-hour we had the opportunity to view part of the Vaughan Williams manuscript collection in the British Library archive.*

**ANDREW NEILL, with ANNA NEILL:** *There is music in the midst of desolation: Vaughan Williams, Elgar and the poetry of war and peace*

Andrew Neill, with Anna Neill and the recorded voice of Laurence Binyon, reminded us of the poignancy of Elgar's and Vaughan Williams' response to the World Wars. The example of what I term "literature under pressure" in *The Spirit of England* showed Elgar, in my opinion, on top form. Meanwhile, the trumpet solo over hushed strings sounding the *Last Post for the Dead* in the Trenches in the *Pastoral Symphony* amply illustrated Michael Kennedy's description of Vaughan Williams' "humanity, curiosity and ability to affect all he met."

**BYRON ADAMS:** *Music at the Close: The Musical Realms of Shakespeare and Vaughan Williams*

Byron Adams then concentrated on Vaughan Williams and Shakespeare, providing us with *aperçus* such as Vaughan Williams' hatred of "Merrie England". (I could not help thinking of Jim Dixon's lecture of the same name in Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, where his drunken debunkings in a range of inappropriate accents put paid to Merrie England and his own

career.) I particularly liked Byron's illustration of the paradox of music pervading and civilising all strata of Renaissance Italian and English society in the midst of amazing cruelty, and also showing us how Vaughan Williams transformed Shakespeare just as Shakespeare transformed his own sources.

*And following our tea break:*

**MICHAEL POPE:** *Parry, Elgar & Vaughan Williams: Influences and aspirations*

Michael Pope performed the feat of neatly linking Walt Whitman with the differing generations of Stanford and Parry, and Elgar and Vaughan Williams. Beginning with Parry's view of "the artist's loyalty to his art", Michael drew together Parry's fusing of the spiritual with the secular, Stanford's setting of Whitman in his *Elegiac Ode* of 1884, the poet's underlying theme of democracy, Parry's notion that one "cannot prolong a man's life but one can widen and deepen it through art", and his influence by Elgar's music and on Vaughan Williams' thinking.

After wine, refreshments and the opportunity to meet with other members, we re-convened, prior to the evening concert, to hear Stephen Connock in a relaxed interview with **Richard Hickox**, who entertained us with good-humoured reflections on a lifetime of conducting across a whole range of musical interests. I particularly liked his comment, having studied the score of Elgar's *Third Symphony*, that he subsequently found that all the bits he thought were by Anthony Payne were by Elgar, and all the bits by Elgar were by Anthony Payne! Little did we know that this was the last time we would see Richard, as he left us smiling, to travel to Cardiff for a recording of Holst. He died the following evening leaving the recording incomplete, his many friends and colleagues in shock and the world of English music with a void it will be difficult to fill. The day was brought to a close with **Roderick Williams**, baritone and **Iain Burnside**, piano, performing *Songs of Travel*, amongst other songs by Vaughan Williams, as well as Elgar songs, including *Sea Pictures*, sung by mezzo-soprano, Juliette Pochin.

*Sunday morning began with coffee after which we resumed our seats for:*

**PHILIP LANCASTER:** *They tolled the one bell only: The remarkable influence of A. E. Housman*

Philip Lancaster talked of A. E. Housman's influence on Vaughan Williams and added new insights to familiar material that amply confirmed the view that, early in his career, the composer was raised to genuine inspiration in setting Housman's verse (despite the poet's disapproval of the cuts made!) On questioning the erudite audience, I was relieved to find that I was not the only person not to know *Along the Field*, Vaughan Williams' 1927 cycle for voice and violin, and the brief extract played convinced me I should get better acquainted with it.

**DAVID OWEN NORRIS:** *Character as Form: Elgar's Falstaff*. David Owen Norris, in characteristically witty and erudite style, took us first through the approach to making playable and more effective the Karg-Elert transcription of *Falstaff*. There followed a fascinating exposition of the debate between abstract and programme music, with the penetrating observation that the latter might invoke *characters*, but all music should achieve *character*. Clearly there were three masterly musicians to admire in the talk, Karg-Elert, Elgar and David himself.

**ALAIN FROGLEY:** *O farther sail: Whitman and Vaughan Williams*

Alain Frogley took up one of the themes of the previous day and examined further the influence Walt Whitman had on Vaughan Williams, arguing that the poet had a more wide-ranging influence on him than on any other composer. Certainly the compositions and sketches covered in the talk added weight to the view that the optimistic, inspirational Whitman opened Vaughan Williams' creative floodgates, even if he ended after World War I more in sympathy with Thomas Hardy than Whitman.

With these visionary and mystical thoughts in mind, we broke for lunch before the final part of the Symposium which began with **John Bridcut**'s introduction to the screening of his BBC film on Vaughan Williams. Any reservations that those who had seen it before might be disappointed by its repetition were swept away by the power and dignified emotion of the film, leaving the whole room visibly moved. This mood persisted with the Keynote Address:

**MICHAEL KENNEDY:** *The light we sought is shining still: Elgar, Vaughan Williams, and the inspiration of literature*

We had seen in the film the young Kennedy with his friend Ralph Vaughan Williams, and there he was before us, the living link between then and now; the critic who had done so much to further scholarship and appreciation of so many aspects of twentieth-century music. On top of the content of his talk, who better than he to chart for us the changes in reputation of two of our greatest composers, having lived through the years since their deaths? Like we, he had been moved by the film and the memories it evoked, and I was struck as his talk progressed by the humanity and wisdom he clearly shared with Vaughan Williams.

Finally, Michael Kennedy was joined on the stage by Philip Lancaster, Alain Frogley and Byron Adams for a panel discussion that brought questions and comment over a wide range of topics, and the whole was fittingly concluded with Byron Adams' moving salute to Michael Kennedy's lifetime devotion to music and his expert preparation of the ground for subsequent scholars both of Elgar and Vaughan Williams. A spontaneous and noisy wave of agreement, affection, respect and gratitude swept over the auditorium. As the event drew to a close, Steven Halls summed up proceedings by thanking both Stephen Connock and Andrew Neill for organising such an inspiring programme, the speakers and performers themselves, and finally the team at the British Library for their assistance. Steven went on to join Em Marshall in thanking both societies for their support and looked forward to future meetings of mutual interest.



(l-r) Michael Kennedy, Byron Adams, Alain Frogley, Philip Lancaster, Steven Halls

# Lionel Tertis' 1936 Edition of Vaughan Williams' *Suite for Viola and Small Orchestra*

*by Bernard Kane*

I fell in love with the music of Vaughan Williams during my first year as a viola student at the Royal College of Music in London. On the concert hall walls of this world-famous college hang many paintings of the great musicians who studied there; one of these is a large portrait of Vaughan Williams in his latter years. First-year students were obliged to sing in the RCM chorus, and the featured work back in the autumn of 1991 was *A Sea Symphony*. A combination of nerves, anticipation, excitement and awe made the occasion absolutely magical, and as for Vaughan Williams music, there was no looking back.

One of the major fascinations I have with Vaughan Williams' music is the way in which he uses the viola: whether he writes for viola as a solo instrument, in chamber music or within the texture of his orchestral works, it struck me that here was a composer who actually *knew* how to write for the viola and one who obviously loved the instrument. When I was faced with writing my Doctor of Musical Arts dissertation, there was only one composer on whom I wished to write. But what could I say that had not already been said regarding Vaughan Williams' use of the viola in his compositions? So much had already been written about that great work for viola, chorus and orchestra, *Flos Campi*, not to mention the various other works that he wrote which employed the viola.

Then it struck me how fascinating it was that hardly anything existed in connection with his other great work for solo viola, the *Suite for Viola and Small Orchestra*. So I decided to investigate in the hope that I might discover something new about the piece. One of the main parts of the DMA degree at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver is writing a dissertation on your major study. In addition to writing an original document, the other major aspect is a lecture recital on the subject. This meant that I would have to perform the work in its entirety at the end of my tenure at the university. I must admit that performing this great, and quite neglected, work by Vaughan Williams was one of the highlights of my performing career thus far.

The *Suite for Viola and Small Orchestra* was commissioned by and dedicated to the British violist, Lionel Tertis. The premiere took place on 12 November 1934; Tertis was the soloist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Sir Malcolm Sargent. The work was first published by Oxford University Press in 1936 in an edition for viola and piano. In this edition, the viola part contains many inconsistencies with the manuscript, which is held at the British Library. Between the first performance in 1934 and the publication of the *Suite* in 1936, Tertis made considerable editorial changes to the viola part. These changes involve fingerings, bowings, phrasing, articulation, and dynamics; at times the notational substance is altered as well.

## **Lionel Tertis and the viola**

Lionel Tertis (1876-1975) has long been recognised as one of the greatest violists of all time. The promotion of the viola as a solo instrument was his lifelong aim and his eventual achievement. Michael Kennedy, in the liner notes to an EMI Tertis collection, described his importance for the world of the viola in the following words:

*Surely it is the most extraordinary coincidence in the history of music that Pablo Casals and Lionel Tertis were born on the same day, 29 December 1876? Each was destined, by artistry and virtuosity, to give his chosen stringed instrument a higher place than it hitherto occupied. There were great cellists before Casals, but Tertis was the first virtuoso of the viola and remains the greatest. He did more than play the instrument marvellously; he put it on the map. True, there were always viola players in orchestras and string quartets (and, after all, Mozart played it) but they were rarely either good or distinguished performers – obviously there must have been some exceptions – and the beautiful sound one now expects to hear from viola sections was unimaginable until the results of Tertis's teachings and examples became evident. His life has been a campaign dedicated to the instrument he loves and has championed for over seventy years.*

In his lifetime, which spanned almost one hundred years, Tertis was to promote the viola from the ranks of “Cinderella of the string family” to virtuoso status. In his autobiography *My Viola and I*, Tertis paints a vivid description of how the viola was viewed at the beginning of the twentieth century:

*When I first began to play the viola as a solo instrument, prejudice and storms of abuse were my lot. The consensus of opinion was that the viola had no right to be heard in solos, indeed the consideration of its place in the string family was of the scantiest...A wretchedly low standard of viola-playing was in fact accepted simply and solely because there was no alternative. A little old man, said to be a professional viola-player, was engaged by the Academy to take part twice a week in the orchestral practices. What a player he was! He used a very small instrument, not worthy of the name viola, and he produced from it as ugly a sound as a fiddle ever emitted – a bone-dry tone, absolutely devoid of vibrato, which made one's hair stand on end. I once enquired of Sir Alexander: “Could we not dispense with this horrible player?” His reply was, “No, he is a necessary evil.”*

Tertis stated in his autobiography that in 1897, when he borrowed a Guadagnini viola, he “resolved that my life's work should be the establishment of the viola's rights as a solo instrument.”

In 1901, Tertis was appointed full time professor at the Royal Academy of Music and also became member of the Wessely

String Quartet with his old violin teacher, Hans Wessely. Tertis then went on to join Henry Wood's Queen's Hall Orchestra playing at the back desk of the second violins. He then played the viola for Wood and immediately moved from back desk second violin to principal viola of the orchestra.

In 1904 there was a dispute between the players of the Queen's Hall Orchestra and the management. Members were told that they no longer were allowed the use of deputies. Using deputies allowed regular members of the orchestra to take on other, better-paid jobs while retaining their positions with the Queen's Hall Orchestra. The dispute led to forty of the members of the orchestra refusing to give up their privilege of being able to use deputies. These members decided to resign and create their own orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra. They asked Tertis to join them as their principal violist; he declined and states his reasons in the following way:

*I was invited to join them as their principal viola, but I declined and at the same time relinquished my position in the Queen's Hall Orchestra. Before this happened I had made up my mind to give up orchestral playing as soon as possible and devote all my time to solo work. The Queen's Hall crisis was my opportunity. On the one hand I was devoted to Henry Wood, and on the other was attached to my colleagues who had seceded. By renouncing orchestral playing altogether I hoped to avoid the feelings of either party.*

During his lifetime, many works for solo viola were written specifically for Tertis. These include: Benjamin Dale's *Suite for Viola and Orchestra* (1911) and York Bowen's *Concerto for Viola and Orchestra* (1908), as well as several compositions by Arnold Bax: the *Sonata for Viola and Piano* (1922); the *Legend* for viola and piano (1929); a *Trio for flute, viola and harp* (1927), the *Concerto for Viola and Orchestra* (1920), later called *Phantasy* and Gustav Holst's *Lyric Movement* (1934). All of these works are dedicated to Tertis.

A famous tale surrounding a work written for Tertis concerns the *Viola Concerto* (1927) by William Walton (1902–1983). Reminiscent of Nicolo Paganini's (1782–1840) initial refusal in 1834 to perform *Harold in Italy*, which he had commissioned from Hector Berlioz, Tertis declined to premiere the concerto that Sir Thomas Beecham had asked Walton to write for him, suggesting Paul Hindemith instead. Tertis thought the work "too modern." Just as Paganini eventually changed his opinion of Berlioz' music, Tertis also came to the realisation that the Walton *Viola Concerto* was a great work.

In addition to having works written for him and in an effort to expand the repertoire of the viola, Tertis also arranged many other works, including both of Brahms' sonatas for clarinet, Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto*, Bach's *Chaconne* (from the *Violin Partita in D minor BWV 1004*) and Sir Edward Elgar's *Cello Concerto*. Elgar must have been impressed with Tertis' arrangement, as the composer agreed to conduct the first performance on 21 March 1930 at the Queen's Hall in London.

In his autobiography Tertis describes how, in 1937, he was suffering from rheumatism which prevented him from playing staccato passages and which led him to take the decision to retire from the concert platform. A dinner was given in his honour on 13 June 1937, attended by many famous figures, including Sir Hugh Allen, Sir Adrian Boult, Eric Coates, Eugene Goossens, Beatrice

Harrison, Sir Malcolm Sargent, Bernard Shore, Solomon and Ralph Vaughan Williams:

*'Dr Vaughan Williams referred to the news of Tertis's retirement, due to his alleged inability to play spiccato. "I don't even know what spiccato is," he added. He spoke of the letter he had written to Tertis, promising that all those who tried to write works for him would guarantee to include no spiccato bowing. He said that although one had to respect the decision of so great an artist, he was sure that Tertis's second best was good enough for us.'*

It could be argued that many of Tertis' changes to the text of the *Suite* for the 1936 edition may have been made due to his problems with his bow arm. I do not believe this to be the case, as a man of Tertis' integrity would not have rewritten Vaughan Williams' music and then published it as a result of a problem with his bow arm. It is interesting to note that – even though we have no idea when Tertis used these parts – the additional changes he makes in his own copies of the *Suite* are entirely consistent with those he made in his 1936 edition. This would speak against the assertion that the changes were the product of a short-term physical illness.

Fortunately, Tertis' medical condition did not end his career; within two years he was back on the concert platform to great critical approval.

### **Lionel Tertis' Style**

*Probe into, using your musicality to the utmost, tone gradation, accents, rhythm, or even alteration of phrasing, etc., all of which will relieve monotony and lend colour and expressiveness to your efforts. Do not feel absolutely bound to abide by all the printed nuances you find in the work you are playing. An alteration here and there that really appeals to you is not a crime and will provide a change from other interpretations and show your own individuality.*

This statement from Tertis' treatise reveals his willingness to make changes to works by other composers, changes that reveal his own individuality and personal style of viola playing. Many of the differences that exist between the manuscript and Tertis 1936 edition of the *Suite* concern articulation and phrasing. We shall see in changes he makes in other arrangements that aspects of Tertis' "own individuality" can be described thus: in fuller, louder sections, he tends to manipulate the bow in order to create a bigger, fuller sound; in *cantabile*, quieter passages he uses a broad, sustained, connected bow-stroke which produces his beautifully warm tone. In the treatise, Tertis addresses the following: the left hand and intonation; vibrato and *portamento*; the right hand and bowing; and *cantabile* playing. *Portamento* concerns fingerings; the right hand involves the use of the bow, bowings, and articulation. Phrasing (bowing) and articulation are the two main areas of discrepancy between the manuscript and Tertis' 1936 edition of the *Suite*, as we shall see. It is the primary assertion of this thesis that the phrasing and articulation changes made between the manuscript and Tertis' 1936 edition are reflections of his personal style of viola playing.

In his edition of the *Suite* Tertis uses articulation, as well, in order to create a fuller, broader quality, one that is characteristic of the qualities Tertis used in his own playing. His addition of accents and *tenuto* markings in the louder sections of the *Suite* help the sound of the viola cut through the orchestral texture; there are even occasions when Tertis will add other indications – words like

“broad”, “whole bow” – in addition to adding accents and *tenuto* markings to aid the fuller sound he requires.

### **Ralph Vaughan Williams and the composition of the *Suite for Viola and Small Orchestra***

Now that we have summarized aspects of Lionel Tertis’ characteristic style, it is important to discuss his lengthy relationship with Ralph Vaughan Williams and its consequences for the *Suite for Viola and Orchestra*. The viola was dear to Vaughan Williams. He even contemplated playing the instrument professionally, but was discouraged from doing so by his family. It appears that the prejudices against the viola experienced by Tertis were the same that influenced Vaughan Williams’ decision not to play the instrument professionally. Ursula Vaughan Williams describes this life-changing decision in her biography of her husband:

*At this time Ralph felt he had the makings of a good string player; he had given up the violin for the viola, an instrument he loved, and would have dearly liked to become an orchestral player. But the whole weight of family opinion was against him. If he had to be a musician he must be an organist, which was a safe and respectable career.*

Vaughan Williams features the viola in many of his compositions, reflecting his deep affection for the instrument. Before writing the *Suite* in 1934, he composed the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (1910). In this great work, the viola plays a haunting solo that exploits the melancholic timbre of the instrument, similar to the later *Flos Campi* (see below). Other works that feature the viola are the *Phantasy Quintet* involving two violas (1912); *Four Hymns for tenor, piano, and viola obbligato* (1914); *A London Symphony* (1914) featuring a viola solo in the slow movement; and *Flos Campi* (1925) for viola, chorus, and orchestra.

Ursula Vaughan Williams refers to the neglect of the viola by other composers. Discussing the origins of *Flos Campi*, she writes:

*Ralph had two works for strings in hand, a violin concerto for Jelly d’Aranyi, and a viola piece to add to the very limited repertory that existed for the instrument. He had taken a literary idea on which to build his musical thought in The Lark Ascending and made the violin become the bird’s song and its flight being, rather than illustrating, the poem from which the title was taken. So, in Flos Campi, words were the starting point, episodes from the Song of Songs. The viola with its capability of warmth and its glowing quality was the instrument he knew best.*

*Flos Campi* is a suite for solo viola, small mixed chorus and small orchestra. It was first performed, with Tertis as soloist, at the Queen’s Hall in London on 10 October 1925 with the Queen’s Hall Orchestra conducted by Sir Henry Wood. The work is unique in the composer’s output, as it is the only time he wrote for such a combination. It is a choral-fantasy in six movements, all connected; a solo viola plays throughout as if the work were a concerto. Each of the movements has a quotation in Latin from the *Song of Solomon*. The solo viola writing throughout exploits the haunting characteristics of the instrument as it sings with both the orchestra and the choir. One of the most fascinating features of *Flos Campi* is the fact that the chorus is wordless throughout; the entire effect is a sonority which is simply glorious. Michael Kennedy, in his book on the music of Vaughan Williams, comments on the work in the following way:

*The solo instrument, while given a virtuoso part calling for musicianship as well as technique, is but one voice among the instrumentalists and his part is equalled in importance by that of the chorus. Of all the works by Vaughan Williams I think this is the most beautiful considered in terms only of sound. The juxtaposition of viola and oboe, the delicate use of the percussion and the imaginative use of the chorus give Flos Campi the quality of a mosaic. One hopes that Ravel heard and liked it.*

Although it was not written for Lionel Tertis, it is dedicated to him; the sonorous, *cantabile*, sustained viola writing is reflective of Tertis’ own style of viola playing.

It is in *Flos Campi* that we first are exposed to the relationship between Lionel Tertis and Ralph Vaughan Williams, a relationship that would culminate in the 1934 *Suite* and would last for many years to come. Ursula Vaughan Williams, describing her husband’s feelings for Tertis’ viola playing, writes that the premiere of *Flos Campi* “bewildered a lot of people, but Ralph’s chief pleasure was in Lionel’s ravishing playing. He was also delighted to discover that the orchestra had nicknamed it ‘Camp Flossie’.”

According to his widow, for some reason Vaughan Williams appears to have had difficulty completing the *Suite*:

*In November [1934] he and Adeline stayed in London for one of what they called their “seasons” at the Eversleigh Court Hotel in Cromwell Road. The reason for this visit was the first performance of Ralph’s viola suite, written for Lionel Tertis and played by him at the Courtauld-Sargent concerts on 12 and 13 November, with the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Malcolm Sargent. It was a work he had found difficult to write; a year earlier he had written to Peter Montgomery – “my viola suite is not finished – I do not know if it ever will be” – but it had materialized at last.*

The premiere of the work, however, appears to have been a success. “The programme,” reported the *Times*, “has the distinction of introducing a new work by Vaughan Williams, a suite for viola and small orchestra written, it seems scarcely necessary to say, for Mr. Lionel Tertis, who in turning the viola into a virtuoso’s instrument has reconciled English composers to instrumental virtuosity.”

### **A brief musical description of the *Suite***

Group 1 of the *Suite* contains three movements that are all connected by one single theme, Christmas. In the C-major *Prelude* to Group 1, the listener is immediately offered an image of pealing Christmas bells. The arpeggiated, broad sixteenth notes in the viola conjure up the idea of church bells ringing in yuletide festivities. This grand, expansive 3/4 movement contains two 9/8 festive dance-like sections which are woven into the overall fabric. The second movement, *Carol* in E-flat major, continues the Christmas theme. It contains some of the most beautiful music written for viola, conjuring up an image of a picturesque, snow-landscaped Gloucestershire Christmas. Its simplicity is one of its great strengths. The third movement, an earthy G-major *Christmas Dance* (marked *pesante*), with its alternating 6/8 – 3/4 rhythm, creates a joyous, almost “tavern-like” robustness that brings to a close this Christmas spirit movement with crazy drunken quadruple-stopped chords falling toward the end.

Group 2 contains two movements, the *Ballad* in C major and the virtuosic *Moto Perpetuo* in C minor. The *Ballad* exploits the

sound world of muted strings which are at times written *divisi* in nine parts. This heavenly sound creates a bed of warmth on which the solo viola can sing. Again, as in the *Prelude*, there is a 6/8 dance-like interlude where the viola dances with the solo oboe (the same partner as in the opening of *Flos Campi*), after which the music returns to the opening atmosphere of celestial bliss. Virtuosity is an absolute must to be able to tackle the frenetic *Moto Perpetuo*. It is in this movement that we can see how Tertis' virtuosity must have compelled Vaughan Williams to write such a technically demanding movement; the viola does not stop for one moment, and the piece seems to be over before one is able to catch one's breath. Vaughan Williams' accents continually disrupt the prevailing metre.

Group 3 of the *Suite* contains three movements, *Musette*, *Polka Melancolique* and *Galop*. Vaughan Williams' orchestration in the *Musette* again is remarkable. Muted strings once more – this time with the solo viola muted as well – are joined by harp and celesta in this beautifully delicate movement. Six glorious bars of *forte* divide the two main sections which are dedicated to an almost seamless nocturnal lullaby. The movement ends with viola harmonics reaching heavenly heights. The *Polka Melancolique* is a quirky movement in D minor where the viola dances in an almost cumbersome manner. Curious key changes from D minor to B flat minor, C sharp minor, B major, D major and back to D minor underline the unusual feel of this movement.

In the *Galop* we are thrown into a frantic, foot-stomping dance. As with other movements in the *Suite*, two different time signatures play a part in this finale, 2/4 and 6/8. The 2/4 moments provide an opportunity once more for virtuosity in the solo part, while the orchestration of piccolo doubling the solo viola in one of the 6/8 interludes brings to mind a hearty sea-shanty. Frantic rhythmic changes herald a final virtuosic cadenza from the viola before it and orchestra end the *Suite* on a triumphant unison F sharp.

#### **Tertis as editor: the 1936 edition and the Trinity College parts**

The 1936 edition of the solo viola part to the *Suite* has no indication that Lionel Tertis was its editor. However, I have discovered a series of unpublished letters at the Music Department of Oxford University Press that show not only that Tertis was the original editor of the *Suite* in 1936, but also that when the *Suite* was revised in 1964, the editors at Oxford University Press agreed that Tertis' edition need not be revised; only the orchestral score was to be changed due to some inaccuracies. The following letter from Eric Gritton to Christopher Morris, both editors at Oxford University Press in 1936, is revealing: it demonstrates that Tertis was the original editor of the 1936 edition, and states quite clearly that the 1936 edition of the solo viola part is very different from that written in the manuscript:

*Many thanks for your letter. I have been through the score and marked obvious corrections and considered less obvious ones. Regarding notes, the printed piano version does not always tally with the M.S. score. The piano version is the more reliable, I feel. (I went through this work with V.W. + L.T. at V.W.'s Dorking house when it was prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> performance which L.T. + I gave at B in Dorset (R.V.W. being present). Regarding the viola part, it is a question of whether to keep the version given in the orchestral score which you sent or whether we scrap that and substitute the L.T. version already published by O.U.P. in the piano score. Bernard Shore and I can discuss this and then let you know what we think is best and leave it for your final decision.*

Eric Gritton's reply to this letter on 8 August 1959 indeed states

that Tertis' edition of the *Suite* was to be retained for the new 1964 edition:

*Bernard Shore and I had our tete-a-tete last Wednesday and came to the conclusion that the viola solo part as printed in the piano score is the authentic one and should be incorporated to replace the one that you have adopted from the M.S. score you sent me which is so completely different in bowing, phrasing and dynamics.*

*Are you making a new set of orchestral parts? You mentioned in a previous letter that you had a set of parts, should I wish to refer to them – but are these correct, I wonder?*

*I am so anxious to get everything as accurate as possible for you before handing the work back to you. You would probably like me to come in and see you about it all some time soon if you are not on holiday.*

The many differences which exist between the manuscript autograph (held at the British Library, Add. MS. 50, 386 A-C) of the *Suite* and Tertis' 1936 published version mainly concern his use of phrasing and articulation. We can follow a second, later editing process on the part of Tertis in two viola parts to the *Suite* that were actually used by him. One of these parts, housed in the Lionel Tertis Collection at Trinity College of Music in Greenwich, has the dedication written by hand on the front of the copy "Lionel, with much gratitude from R. Vaughan Williams".<sup>1</sup> In both parts, Tertis makes further emendations to the changes already made in his own 1936 edition of the *Suite*. Many of these changes can be linked with Tertis' idiosyncratic style of viola playing and are similar to the changes he made in his own transcriptions of other works for the viola. He writes in *My Viola and I*:

*Another vital necessity is to obtain this smoothness, evenness and continuity of sound at the actual moment of bowing from one string to another. While playing on one string you must, in preparation for crossing, get your bow as near as you dare to the string you are about to play upon; indeed the art lies in drawing the bow from one string to another with the crossing-over remaining absolutely imperceptible. The idea is to convey the impression that your instrument has one string only, not four. A further valuable acquirement for legato playing is to make your bow belong, so to speak, to the string. The bow should literally cling to it.*

As mentioned earlier, many of the differences which exist between the manuscript and Tertis' 1936 edition of the *Suite* concern articulation and phrasing. When such changes are made, they often reflect his idea that in quiet, *cantabile* passages he tends to use a broad, sustained, connected bow-stroke which produces his beautifully warm tone. The above quotation helps to explain some of these articulation changes, particularly in broad *legato* movements such as the *Prelude* where there are many string crossings. Tertis states that in passages involving string crossings the bow should "cling" to the string. In other words, in *legato* passages, Tertis calls for a broadening of phrases by means of a fuller, *tenuto* bow stroke. Another fundamental idea behind Tertis' articulation changes in the *Suite* reflects his idea of creating a bigger, fuller sound in louder passages. To do this, Tertis makes frequent additions of the accent (>) and the *tenuto* mark (–) throughout his 1936 edition of the *Suite*. Later emendations concerning articulation – particularly the accent and the *tenuto* mark – are revealed in his two personal copies of the *Suite* which

are held at Trinity College of Music, London (TC1 & TC2). Together, these changes in articulation reflect Tertis' personal style of viola playing. In this chapter we will systematically examine a series of articulation changes made by Tertis in the editing process.

The first change to be discussed occurs in bars 1–7 of the *Prelude*. A comparison of the manuscript with the 1936 edition follows in Examples 1a-b:

**Ex. 1a:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Prelude*, bars 1–7, manuscript:

Vaughan Williams indicates *tenuto* (–) for every note in bars 1 and 2 of this passage. Bars 3–5 have these articulations on the first and third beats, while bar 6 has them on the first, second and third beats. Tertis edits this passage in the following manner:

**Ex. 1b:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Prelude*, bars 1–7, Tertis 1936 edition:

As we can see, he continues the use of *tenuto* lines (–) on almost every sixteenth note in bars 3, 4, 5, and 6. Accents have now been added in bars 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. It is clear that Tertis wants a big, open sound here, one that is similar to the broad sound he produces in his recording of the first movement of the Brahms *Viola Sonata in F minor, op. 120* and to that prescribed in his arrangement of the Bach *Chaconne* (see below).

Tertis' demands for a bigger, broader sound can also be seen in the additional markings he makes in both TC1 and TC2 of the *Prelude*. Tertis firstly writes "broad" above the tempo indication *Allegro moderato*; also, throughout this opening movement in both copies, Tertis frequently adds words such as "on string," "broad" and "*sost*" [*sostenuto*]; additional accents and *tenuto* markings appear in these parts as well.

Another example of articulation changes can be seen in the following passage:

**Ex. 2a:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Prelude*, bars 26–32, manuscript:

Tertis edits this passage in the following way:

**Ex. 2b:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Prelude*, bars 26–32, Tertis 1936 edition:

Tertis creates very similar changes in this passage to the ones he made in Ex. 1b. It is interesting to note that he uses slurs in bar 31 that are not present in the manuscript. These added slurs, along with the *crescendo* that he marks in from bar 30 onward (one that is not marked in the manuscript until a bar later) would create a broader climax towards the *forte* in bar 32. The broader bow strokes, combined with the *crescendo* might imply a *poco ritardando* in bar 31, aiding this climax. This is actually confirmed in both TC1 and TC2 as "*poco rit*" is pencilled in by Tertis on the second beat of bar 31. In sum, both of these passages require string crossings quite regularly; these, combined with the added *tenuto* articulations, reflect Tertis' views on legato playing as quoted above, and are reflections of his characteristic approach.

In bars 15-28 of the *Christmas Dance*, Tertis makes several alterations to Vaughan Williams' articulations as indicated in the manuscript:

**Ex. 3a:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Christmas Dance*, bars 15–28, manuscript

In this passage, Vaughan Williams indicates an articulation known as "shoe-shine" bowing.<sup>2</sup> This type of bowing creates a dance-like effect, rather appropriate for a movement entitled *Christmas Dance*. Tertis changes the articulation in the following way:

**Ex. 3b:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Christmas Dance*, bars 15–28, Tertis 1936 edition:

There are several discrepancies here. Firstly, Tertis removes the *tenuto* articulation marks from bar 15, thus creating a smoother, more legato join between the second and third eighth-notes. He also expands the slur in bars 17 and 19 so that the entire bar is played in one bow stroke, not in two strokes as indicated in the manuscript; this evens out the articulation. He also adds octaves in bars 22 and 23. The "shoe-shine" bowing in bars 25–28 is now changed to a "hooked" bowing, in which the second note is rearticulated within the same bow stroke. It would appear, then, that Tertis has smoothed out this entire passage, reminiscent of his method in the *Prelude*.

Tertis made several articulation changes in the *Galop*. The first major change occurs in bar 12:

**Ex. 4a:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Galop*, bars 12-14, manuscript:



**Ex. 4b:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Galop*, bars 12-14, Tertis 1936 edition:



Tertis removes the original phrasings added on each sixteenth-note and adds *tenuto* markings, thus creating a broader stroke in this passage. Tertis also for some reason changes the pitches of beats two and three of bar 12 and beat one of bar 13. The same passage in TC1 and TC2 remains identical to the 1936 edition apart from the four sixteenth-notes in bar 14. In TC1 and TC2 they are all slurred together.

Another major difference between the manuscript and Tertis' 1936 edition of the *Suite* is the alteration of a *staccato* passage to a more legato stroke in the 1936 edition (bars 43–47):

**Ex. 5a:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Galop*, bars 43–47, manuscript:<sup>3</sup>



Note that the first three bars of this passage all have dots, while the fourth and fifth bars contain a hemiola that is difficult to produce with the indicated articulation. Tertis edits his version thus:

**Ex. 5b:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Galop*, bars 43-47, Tertis 1936 edition:



The dotted articulation of the first three bars of this passage has now been altered to *legato*, slurred in groups of four. The pitches in the third bar have also been changed.

Also note that the articulation in the fourth and fifth bars has also been re-articulated in order to ease the creation of the accents that mark the hemiola. With the added implied bowings, it is possible to see that the execution of example 5b would be more practical than that of example 5a.

Interestingly enough, Tertis smoothes out this passage even more in TC1 and TC2, showing his preference for a long-line cantabile in sections of a softer dynamic:

**Ex. 5c:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Galop*, bars 43-49, TC1 and TC2:



Tertis deletes all the accents in bar 50 and adds a slur over three beats between bar 50 and 51 and a slur over four beats between bar 51 and bar 53. He also delays the crescendo that starts on beat two of bar 51 in the 1936 edition; it is now moved a beat later to beat two of bar 53.

Another significant alteration occurs in bars 123–131:

**Ex. 6a:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Galop*, bars 123–131, manuscript:



**Ex. 6b:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Galop*, bars 123-131, Tertis 1936 edition:



Bars 123–125 (the fifth sixteenth-note) correspond exactly to bars 12–14 (see above ex. 4a) in both the manuscript and the Tertis versions of this passage. There is one difference in ex. 6b, in that all of the sixteenth-notes have dots added to them; in the corresponding passage in bars 12-14 (ex 4b) we have *tenuto* markings. I believe the *staccato* marks in the 1936 edition to have been a mistake, as TC1 and TC2 offer a different reading:

**Ex. 6c:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Galop*, bars 123-127, TC1 and TC2:



Tertis changes the first two bars of this passage making them identical to the passage early in the movement (ex. 4b) – it is, after all, the same music. Not only does Tertis write in the *tenuto* marks as he does in bars 123-124, he also writes in slurs in bars 125-131 which are reminiscent of his other alterations. The addition of the

*tenuto* marks indicates a broadening of the bow stroke while the addition of the slurs indicates a preference to a more *legato* playing in these passages. It is also interesting to note that Tertis has changed the dynamic from *forte* to *mezzo-piano*, an indication of his general preference for a smoother style in quieter passages.

#### Articulation in Tertis' arrangements of other music

In a review of Tertis' playing of his own arrangement of the *Chaconne* from the *Partita in D minor, BWV 1004* (originally for solo violin), we read a comment on the violist's broad style of playing:

*Lionel Tertis, for his solo, performed the amazing double feat of transferring Bach's Chaconne to the viola, note for note, and of restoring it, so far as possible, to the bowing and phrasing Bach himself must have known when he wrote it for the violin and out-curved bow of his own day. The experiment was a noble success. The broader, slower style fitted well with the dark vistas of viola tone, and the unbroken continuity of thought and beauty in the great work were clear to a singular degree.*<sup>4</sup>

In his recording of the *Chaconne*, Tertis actually broadens his tempo in certain sections, notably between bars 53 and 56. In his own transcription of the work, *all* the sixteenth-notes contained in these bars are given *tenuto* markings to produce the sustained sound also apparent in his recording. These indications call to mind those changes of articulation in passages where he wanted a more sustained sound in his 1936 edition of Vaughan Williams' *Suite*. A similar articulation is added at bars 15-20 of the slow movement of Tertis' transcription of Brahms F minor Clarinet Sonata, helping to broaden the existing *crescendo* marking. In his own edition of Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante for violin and viola, K. 364*, Tertis makes use of his characteristic *tenuto* markings in several passages, alters dynamic markings in order to create a contrast and even removes staccato markings, thus calling for a more connected bow stroke, one that clings to the string, recalling his admonition that "a further valuable acquirement for *legato* playing is to make your bow belong, so to speak, to the string. The bow should literally cling to it."

Generally speaking, Tertis makes use of the *tenuto* mark and the accent when he wishes to create a bigger, broader, fuller sound in his use of articulation in his arrangements of other music. His additions of such markings in the *Prelude* of Vaughan Williams' *Suite* are a good example of his wish to produce a broader more sustained sound in louder, fuller passages. His addition of such terms as "broad" and "*sost*" [*sostenuto*] in the 1936 edition and the Trinity College parts represent fundamental characteristics of his broader, fuller quality of playing. In passages where he prefers a more pure *legato*, Tertis alters the articulation in order to attain this: "The idea is to convey the impression that your instrument has one string only, not four." The changes in phrasing made between the manuscript and Tertis' 1936 edition of the *Suite* reflect Tertis' ideas concerning phrasing, involving the use of a fuller, broader sound in more bigger, louder passages and, to a lesser extent, smoother, more connected playing in quieter cantabile passages. The importance of a connected bow stroke may be seen clearly in *My Viola and I*:

*Another very necessary attainment is to conceal the changing of the bow from down to up or vice versa. There must be no sign of jerk or break; indeed it must sound as if the arm and bow were of unlimited length and never had to change, unless of course accents or any other effects are indicated.*

Of the 261 changes made by Tertis from Vaughan Williams' manuscript, 109 concern phrasing. Of these 109 changes of phrasing, twenty involve the replacement of a slur by an articulation marking (usually a *tenuto* mark) in louder passages; thirty-six involve the addition of slurs for a more *cantabile* feel in softer passages. In both instances, Tertis at times also alters dynamics, sometimes to a louder dynamic in fuller sections, or to a softer dynamic in quieter sections.

In Example 7, we can see how Tertis changes the phrasing – and the implied bowing – in order to create a more connected and at times bigger sound:

**Ex. 7a:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Prelude*, bars 10–17, manuscript:<sup>5</sup>

**Ex. 7b:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Prelude*, bars 10–17, Tertis 1936 edition:

Tertis removes the slur that was placed on the first two eighth notes in bar 10 and replaces them with two *tenuto* (–) marks, creating a broader, weightier impression. In bars 12, beat one to two; 13, beat two to three; 14, beat one to two, 15, beat three to down beat of bar 16, Tertis ties the sixteenth note with the quarter note. I have written in the implied bowings which result from this phrasing change in order to show how such "tying in" of notes would enable a player to use a more connected bow stroke.

Tertis makes further changes of this same passage in TC1 and TC2:

**Ex. 7c:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Prelude*, bars 10-17, TC1 and TC2:<sup>6</sup>

It is possible to see here that not only has Tertis "tied in" the second sixteenth of the third beat of bar 11, he also marks in indications such as "on string" (bar 11, TC2) and "more" (bar 15, TC2). On both occasions, Tertis' indicates directions that would produce a bigger, broader quality of sound.

Another instance where Tertis changes a phrase in order to create a "broader" line occurs in bars 38–46 in the *Christmas Dance*. In the manuscript, this passage is written in the following way:

**Ex. 8a:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Christmas Dance*, bars 38–46, manuscript:

**Ex. 8b:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Christmas Dance*, bars 38–46, Tertis 1936 edition:

Tertis changes the slurs in bar 38 and 39, calling for only one bow per bar instead of two. Tertis also adds a slur to bar 41 where there is none marked in the manuscript. It is as though Tertis wishes to avoid any slight accent that could be created on the third beats of bars 38, 39, 40, and 41 if one were to play the original bowing that is implied by the manuscript. Again, as in Example 8b, Tertis is aiming for a smoother phrase, one characteristic of his personal style. Tertis retains the same phrasing in both TC1 and TC2. An example of where Tertis changes a phrasing in order to create a bigger sound occurs in bars 104–107 of the *Ballad*. The manuscript transmits the following:

**Ex. 9a:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Ballad*, bars 104–107, manuscript:

**Ex. 9b:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Ballad*, bars 104–107, Tertis 1936 edition:

Tertis removes the slur that was placed on beat one of bar 104 in the manuscript. This creates two separate bows on the first two eighth-notes in bar 104. Tertis creates two broader strokes on the first beat as opposed to just one bow stroke; it helps create a bigger, heavier sound on the first beat of bar 104. Tertis also omits the *diminuendo* that is marked in bar 106 in the manuscript. He obviously wishes to retain the dramatic *fortissimo* for a few more bars, thus sustaining greater volume (he eventually adds a *diminuendo* on the third beat of bar 108). In addition to removing this *diminuendo* in bar 106, Tertis also removes the slurs that were placed on the second and third beats of bar 107. He directs that they should be played separate and adds the familiar (–) articulations which are so characteristic of the 1936 edition. This direction, in addition to the fingering that he adds – the consecutive 3/2, 3/2 fingerings require a change of position from third position to fourth position and back to third position, helping to exaggerate the *tenuto* articulation – creates more *rubato* to the *largamente* which has already been specified. In the last six bars of the *Ballad*, Tertis changes the bowings in order to end the movement with a slow bow, suggesting that “ethereal,” *pianissimo* quality prized in his treatise. The readings of bars 113–118 in the manuscript and 1936 edition follow:

**Ex. 10a:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Ballad*, bars 113–118, manuscript:

**Ex. 10b:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Ballad*, bars 113–118, Tertis 1936 edition:

Tertis changes the manuscript’s phrasing that suggests a hemiola pattern in bars 113–114. His new bowing, combined with the slight crescendo he indicates on the first beat of bar 115, shows that he is aiming to be at the heel of the bow on the second beat of bar 115 in order to have a very long, slow down-bow to close the movement. In TC1 and TC2 Tertis creates an even greater contrast to this particular phrase by changing the dynamic:

**Ex. 10c:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Ballad*, bars 113–118, TC1 & TC2 edition:

Tertis has changed the original dynamic from *pp* to *mf*, adding a *fp* in bar 115 with the indication W.B. (“whole bow”). One can almost imagine Tertis being at the heel of the bow on the second beat of bar 115 in order to be prepared for that characteristic *pianissimo* “slow clinging bow.”

At the end of the *Polka Melancolique*, Vaughan Williams writes in a *Cadenza* for the viola alone. In the manuscript this *Cadenza* is written in the following manner:

**Ex. 11a:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Polka Melancolique*, bars 96–100, manuscript:

The entire passage calls for rapid alternations of up- and down-bow throughout. Tertis adds bowings which connect these notes in the following way:

**Ex. 11b:** Vaughan Williams, *Viola Suite, Ballad*, bars 96–100, Tertis 1936 edition:

As has been demonstrated with all of these examples, the changes in phrasing made between the manuscript and Tertis’ 1936 edition of the *Suite* are due to Tertis’ ideas concerning phrasing, which in turn reflect his philosophy of a fuller, broader sound in more bigger, louder passages and of smoother, more connected playing in quiet cantabile passages.

### Bowing and phrasing in Tertis' arrangements of other music

Several examples of Tertis' use of bowings in order to create a bigger, broader sound can be seen in his transcription for viola of Brahms' *Clarinet Sonata op. 120, no. 1 in F minor*, and a revealing example of Tertis' philosophy of phrasing may be seen in his arrangement of Bach's Chaconne from the *Violin Partita in D minor BWV 1004*. Bach writes the following:

**Ex. 12a:** J.S. Bach, *Chaconne from Partita in D minor for Solo Violin BWV 1004*, manuscript, bars 33–36.



Tertis edits his arrangement as follows; note his use of articulation, phrasing and fingering:

**Ex. 12b:** J.S. Bach, *Chaconne from Partita in D minor for Solo Violin BWV 1004*, arr. Tertis, bars 33–36.



This example shows how meticulous Tertis was with his directions on how to play this particular passage. It also demonstrates exactly how much phrasing and use of the *tenuto* (–) mark Tertis adds to Bach's original manuscript. In addition, all dynamics markings were added by Tertis. The exclusive playing of the *pianissimo* sections on the D string in bars 33–35 employs Tertis' characteristic use of *portamento* as described above. This style would help emphasize the “question-answer” phrasing that Tertis creates between his *forte* and *pianissimo* markings. Also characteristic of Tertis' style is the huge leap from D (on the C string) to B-flat (on the G string) in bar 36.

In the introduction to his edition of this piece, Tertis describes the philosophy behind these editorial decisions:

*The out-curved bow, in use when Bach wrote the Chaconne, permitted of three or four strings being played simultaneously, therefore the endeavour should be to sustain as many parts going at once, without overshadowing the main theme. The chord playing should be with successive up and down bow strokes, thus avoiding the playing of the theme in fragments, so often heard with the conventional bowing. I also believe in the deletion of spiccato, for two reasons, (1) musically, legato playing appears to me not only preferable but essential to the interpretation of the Chaconne; (2) the out-curved bow did not permit of satisfactory spiccato or staccato bowing.*

The combination of two great British musicians in the 1930s, the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams and the violist Lionel Tertis, resulted in a work that is fresh, original and invigorating, the *Suite for Viola and Orchestra*.

Through examination of the manuscript, Tertis 1936 edition, Tertis' own copies of the *Suite*, and unpublished correspondence regarding the creation of the work, we have seen how the *Suite* changed from Vaughan Williams' original form into a composition which reflects aspects of Lionel Tertis idiosyncratic style of viola playing.

Through his addition of articulations and his employment of phrasing, Tertis breathes his own life into the soul of Vaughan Williams' work. General aspects of Tertis' style of viola playing – his use of articulation to create a bigger sound in passages of a louder dynamic and his connected, sustained cantabile phrasing in passages of a softer dynamic – manifest themselves clearly in his edition of the *Suite*.

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1 Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Suite for Viola and Orchestra (Piano)*, (Oxford University Press: London, 1936), Tertis copies no. 1 and 2, Bin no. 1, Lionel Tertis Collection, Trinity College of Music Library, Trinity College of Music, Greenwich, London. In this thesis these parts will henceforth be referred to as TC1 and TC2.

2 "Shoe-shine" bowing is a technique when one bows a passage – the example in this case being bars 25–28 – in such a way that the short note is played on a down-bow and the longer note is played on an up-bow. This technique makes the short note "snap", so to speak; it is also very similar to the "Scotch Snap." The resulting bowing is similar to the action made while shoe-shining.

3 In examples 5a and 5b, I have added the implied bowings.

4 "London Concerts, Chamber Music of the Month," *The Musical Times* 76, no. 1105 (March, 1935), 263.

5 In examples 7a, 7b, and 7c, the bowings marked in brackets are implied; those without are added by Tertis. Vaughan Williams marked explicit bowings on only three occasions.

6 The markings in TC1 and TC2 are for the most part identical; however, I have indicated in brackets where additional markings are shown in TC2 but not TC1.

[**Editor's note:** the original version of this important article has been condensed for publication in the Journal for reasons of space. A certain amount of biographical information on Lionel Tertis and further commentary on his editions of works by composers other than Vaughan Williams have been omitted. A particularly rich series of notes and references has also been severely pruned. Members wishing to have access to these are welcome to contact me. Members are also encouraged to visit Bernard Kane's website – [www.kaneviola.com](http://www.kaneviola.com) – where they will find written and aural documents to supplement this article.]

## To Ralph Vaughan Williams In homage on his eightieth birthday October 12<sup>th</sup> 1952

Music stands in the skies, stirring this strong  
Truth-seeking poet (broad frame and valiant heart)  
To English thoughts, uttered with sensitive art  
Now in the lark's, now in the angels' song.

Shakespeare and Blake, Herbert and Bunyan throng  
This stage, where ale-wife Elinor takes her part  
Next Pilgrim, Galanthus, cockney, Hugh from his cart  
And scholar from his Vulgate. Here is young

England's music. His quest has spanned the years  
And made sweet sounds of them. Here greatness lies.  
He will out-sing our wonders and our fears.  
England's beauty he found, in hymn, symphonies,  
A child's song or a man's. His outlines fold  
In mist of history. England, he is not old.

Hubert Foss

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### Crossword Solutions:

ACROSS: 1. Bridcut, 3. Elf, 9. Gielgud, 11. Norwich, 13. Oaf, 14. MD, 15. Go, 18. New,  
19. Dowland, 21. Bacchae, 22. Dal, 24. Echo's Lament.  
DOWN: 2. Oxford, 3. NB, 4. Reith, 5. Dale, 6. To Daffodils, 7. Dennis Noble, 10. Dim,  
12. CD, 15. Go, 17. Maiden, 19. Dyall, 20. Echo, 23. MM.

## In the second of our series of articles about other composer societies, **Rolf Jordan** introduces **FINZI FRIENDS**

Gerald Finzi's music has been widely recorded during the CD era. The great torrent of neglected English music brought before the public via Chandos, Hyperion and Naxos has seen almost all of his output recorded to acclaim from artists and public alike. Lyrita was there first, and one of the Finzi Trust's first objectives was to sponsor recordings from those who knew Finzi: Boult, Ferguson and John Carol Case (but also the young Yo-Yo Ma in his first recording), all happily available on CD.

Readers of the RVW Journal will not need any introduction to the composer. Vaughan Williams considered him one of his closest musical friends and heirs. Tragically, Finzi died at the age of fifty-five, two years before his mentor. He left concertos, poignant instrumental and choral works, and some of the finest songs in English.

Finzi Friends was officially launched by Finzi's indomitable wife, Joy, at the Hereford Three Choirs Festival in 1982. The Friends' primary intention was to assist the Finzi Trust (formed in 1969) in its aim to further the music, ideals and work of Gerald Finzi. The idea came from several young musicians who had been invited to join the Trust after their successful efforts to arrange a "Twenty-fifth Anniversary Celebration" in 1981 to commemorate the death of Finzi. Close ties with the Finzi Trust still exist, but in 2001, Finzi Friends became a separate charity. The Chairman is the composer and conductor Paul Spicer, and the committee is drawn from a very wide age range.

Members are now found worldwide, and total almost 400, a far cry from the earliest days when the Friends could almost be dismissed as an exclusive club centred around the M4 corridor. It's not all about promoting Finzi either: the Friends have tended to champion related figures in their concerts and Newsletter. Robin Milford, Kenneth Leighton, Ivor Gurney and Howard Ferguson have been focal points, while very recently composers like Hugh Wood and Ian Venables have received commissions. Joy Finzi was an artist in her own right, devoted to fostering talent in others, and the Friends and Trust owe as much to her vision than to any other.

The Friends have been responsible in recent years for the highly popular "Weekend of English Song" at Ludlow in Shropshire. Held triennially over a long weekend, the next is in June 2010. A constant figure through these has been Iain Burnside, who puts incredible energy into his role as Artistic Director. All three past festivals have been memorable: my personal highlights were of Howard Wong opening 2004 with Finzi's *The Clock of the Years*; Susan Bickley with Gurney's *By a bierside* in 2007, and two spine-tingling encores from 2001: Thomas Allen's *Linden Lea*, and Stephen Varcoe ending the festival poignantly with Butterworth's *The lads in their hundreds*.

There have been many shorter events over the years. Since the watershed Finzi Centenary in 2001, events have been held in Oxford, Northampton and Bromsgrove. An annual fixture is the Three Choirs lunch, open to all and a regular sell-out. 2009 will see two events in northern England: a choral workshop in

Harrogate, and a recital in Chester. Perhaps the most enduring and unique events of all are at Ashmansworth.

Kiffer and Hilary Finzi open up Church Farm, and friends are invited for lunch, talks and a concert. For many new members especially, the privately-held "Ashmansworth Day" is a key membership benefit. RVW Society members may be aware that Vaughan Williams himself wrote music there – Jeremy Dale Roberts recalls him "padding about upstairs" in the early hours to strum on the piano – and was a frequent guest even after Finzi's death. After a visit, it is difficult to hear Finzi's music in quite the same way again. The flint-walled garden and long modern house with its view over the South Downs, coupled with the ancient church opposite (with its Finzi Window by Whistler) are deeply evocative. The atmosphere is as rich as anything felt at Aldeburgh or Malvern.

The Finzi Friends Newsletter has just completed its twenty-fifth year, and is never short of new material. It was first produced on a typewriter by Finzi's biographer Diana McVeagh. Within two years Ann Warner-Casson took on the editorial role, and expanded it to include many valuable articles, supplemented by pictures from the Finzi family album. These formed the core of the book



*Ashmansworth Day, June 2008 (© Mike Rigby)*

*The Clock of the Years* [reviewed in Journal No. 42] which is available from Boydell.

I now edit the Newsletter myself, and RVW Society members can obtain a copy of the most recent issue direct from me: Rolf Jordan, 65 Coombe Road, Irby, Wirral CH61 4UW at the special price of £3.00 including postage, cheques payable to "Finzi Friends". Worldwide orders in sterling, please, or see the webpage below for Paypal details.

Membership currently costs £15.00 per year (£10.00 for students, £20.00 overseas). Enquiries can be made to the Hon. Treasurer, Emma Lowery, 38 Kennington Avenue, Bishopston, Bristol BS7 9ET. Payment or an email enquiry can be made via the website as follows: [www.chosen-arts.org.uk/finzifriends/index.htm](http://www.chosen-arts.org.uk/finzifriends/index.htm)

# APPASSIONATO: an RVW concert journey

by Robert Shave

Many concerts took place during 2008 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Ralph Vaughan Williams. I was lucky enough to be able to get to some of them, of which this article gives an account of four. It is not a scholarly article but rather tries to capture something of the setting of each concert and the experience of being there. Please forgive the occasional speculations which are just that and no more.

We start in the county of Vaughan Williams' birth.

## Gloucester's Tribute to RVW

Over the holiday weekend of May 3rd-5th the Gloucester Choral Society (GCS) staged their tribute "Vaughan Williams in Spring". It was the result of two years of planning and had necessitated the formation of an "RVW Committee" within the GCS to co-ordinate preparations. I had the chance to attend part of the event, the Saturday evening concert in Gloucester Cathedral. This included the *Tallis Fantasia* returning to its natural home, the *Sea Symphony* and the *Wasps* overture, of which more will be said later. May I first take the opportunity of congratulating the GCS's organising team, especially Dominic Lewen who headed up the RVW Committee. The Saturday evening was very well organised and was a thrill to attend. Also the GCS's programme for the event was lovingly and thoughtfully produced and certainly went beyond the call of duty. I particularly liked the comments from GCS members scattered throughout the programme under the heading "Vaughan Williams Memories", giving people's own personal thoughts on what Vaughan Williams meant to them.

## Pre-concert lecture, May 3rd

The evening began with a talk by Michael Kennedy entitled "Vaughan Williams – the Pioneer" in a packed St. Mary de Lode church, adjacent to the cathedral. Mr. Kennedy outlined how the composer's work developed between 1903 and 1910, the year which saw the first performances of both the *Tallis Fantasia* and the *Sea Symphony*. Excerpts were played from *In the Fen Country* (1903), the *Wasps* suite (1909), the *Tallis Fantasia* (the viola/violin solos) and parts of the *Sea Symphony*. We could see how "O vast rondure" from the *Sea Symphony* could have been inspired by Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*, a work which was of course conducted by Elgar in the same concert as the premiere of the *Tallis Fantasia* at Gloucester on September 6th 1910.

Mr. Kennedy rejected suggestions made in Tony Palmer's recent film that the *Tallis Fantasia* is "about death" or "about war". If anything, it is purely about Vaughan Williams' admiration of Tudor and Elizabethan composers and his respect for their spirituality and their musical skill. Mr. Kennedy's personal memories are not the least of his insights – when Vaughan Williams described to him how he was inspired by the poetry of Walt Whitman to use it in the *Sea Symphony*, he said, "I've never really got over Whitman". Another anecdote that Mr. Kennedy related was the reaction of the composer Herbert Howells, aged 18, to hearing the *Tallis Fantasia* in Gloucester Cathedral for the first time. After the concert he couldn't sleep and walked,

accompanied by Ivor Gurney, around the streets of Gloucester all night. An unexpected thrill for Howells (I'd read elsewhere) was that Vaughan Williams, after he had finished conducting the piece, sat down beside him and they both followed the same copy of the score of *Gerontius*. Did Vaughan Williams' and Elgar's paths cross much on that evening in 1910? We don't know. Elgar may have been making preparations for his performance of *Gerontius* later on and therefore not heard *Tallis*.

This was an enlightening and entertaining talk and it added to our anticipation of what was to come.

## Concert, May 3rd, Gloucester Cathedral

As the audience filed into the cathedral and took their seats, it was difficult to imagine that evening in the late summer of 1910 when Elgar, VW, Howells and others were all there as part of the Three Choirs Festival. Tonight, those of us new to the cathedral were to become acquainted with its acoustics, which I have seen described variously as "unique", "rich", "spacious" and "incomparable". What does all this mean? Does it mean "good"? We were about to find out.

Adrian Partington took to the rostrum, a man who is no stranger to the cathedral's acoustics, being the Director of Music there. Mr. Partington also has a good working relationship with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, so we were in good hands.

The concert began, and *The Wasps* started buzzing. This was a lively, fun piece with which to start the programme. I enjoyed it but the acoustic qualities of the space were already becoming apparent. The cavernous interior of the building was amplifying the bass notes at the expense of the treble end of the scale. Percussion sounded like thunder. Behind the orchestra the huge "quire" of the cathedral, its roof higher than that of the nave, was swallowing the sound then spilling it back out. Clearly this was an acoustic that would suit some pieces of music more than others, some instruments more than others. When Mr. Partington assuredly drew the music to a close, there was deserved applause. Conductor and orchestra had done a good job but the cathedral had given notice of how it could distort what was being played.

The wind and percussion players then left the stage and the string players forming the second orchestra for *Tallis* assembled over in the side aisle. We were about to hear *Tallis* as the composer had meant us to hear it.

As the warm, deep opening chords rose up from the orchestra they seemed to caress the ancient stones of the building. *Tallis*'s hymn was plucked on the lower strings and the building answered, like an extra instrument. Mr. Kennedy had said in his talk that this piece of music transports you back to the sixteenth century. He was wrong, it takes you back further than that. As the solo viola and violin weaved around each other, my eyes scanned along the Norman arches and beyond the organ into the darkness of the quire and the east window. The twenty-first century slipped away

and we were somehow connected to the deep past, to the roots of England. I recalled wandering around the cathedral earlier in the day, seeing the fan vaulting in the cloister, the acres of stained glass, the solid muscularity of the round columns, and the unexpected finds like the south chapel with its dazzling modern windows. The music was exploring each of these places, it was a living thing. This time the cathedral was working with the music, the basses sounding more sensuous, the cellos and violas also amazingly rich, with only possibly the solo violin not sounding better than normal.

Too soon, the piece had to draw to a close, its glow died away and there was silence. When the audience applauded, I wanted to stand, but shyness stopped me, I didn't want to be the only person in a packed cathedral to stand up. It didn't seem to be the done thing. This is England, after all.

The success of the performance was in no small measure due to Mr. Partington's control of pace which throughout was excellent. His skills were to be tested even more rigorously in the next piece, VW's *Sea Symphony*.

Earlier in the evening I had chatted briefly with a member of the choir, having heard them rehearsing in the afternoon. I commented on what a magnificent sound it had been. She thanked me but then said that it didn't sound so good from the choir, when you can't hear what you're singing due to the reverberation! Certainly, by my reckoning, there was at least four seconds' worth of echo when there was a pause in the music. We were about to see if this would have any effect on the performance.

When Vaughan Williams conducted the first performance of this symphony in Leeds, he said that the sound of the opening bars nearly blasted him off the rostrum. Well, Adrian Partington must have been strapped in, as after the initial fanfare a tidal wave of sound crashed over him and swept around the cathedral. He was steady at the helm and guided the choir into "A song for all seas, all ships". The choir were disciplined and did not seem perturbed by the acoustics. The cathedral is, after all, where the GCS give many of their concerts. Moreover the male and female voices seemed balanced and there was no loss of the higher-pitched voices.

When the time came for the soloists, Judith Howarth and David Stout, to perform, although they sang strongly I felt that they were struggling to project their voices into the void. The space was just too large. Perhaps I am expecting too much, sitting as I was, near the back.

The parts of the symphony which worked the best, I felt, were the quieter, more reflective sections, such as "On the beach at night, alone" and "O vast rondure", whose deep sound was suited to the acoustics. At the exquisite "Bathe me, O God, in thee" and "O thou transcendent", once again Mr. Partington gave a master class in pacing and was in full control of choir and orchestra. This part of the symphony was sublime. Did the soloists come in too early once or twice? If they did it didn't matter.

Mr. Kennedy had said in his talk that the *Sea Symphony* was his favourite piece by Vaughan Williams and the one that he couldn't bear hearing immediately after the composer's death. As the basses' last notes died away into the distance, it was easy to understand. This was a moving performance and full credit should be given to the GCS and their fellow choir members from Bristol Choral Society who swelled their numbers.

Herbert Howells, after the 1910 Three Choirs concert, spent the night wandering the streets of Gloucester in a daze after hearing *Tallis*. This time, faced with the hordes of drunken teenagers reeling around the town centre on a Saturday night, I decided to forego that pleasure. But looking back at the cathedral floodlit against the night sky, I was aware that I had witnessed a special night of music. Remember, if you ever hear your favourite piece of music performed in Gloucester Cathedral, that it will not sound as you expect. It might sound worse. But it might sound brilliant. Has a recording ever been made of the *Tallis Fantasia* in Gloucester Cathedral? If it has, it could be the definitive version. An interesting project for the RVW Society! Another thought: in 2010 the Three Choirs Festival will again be in Gloucester. Will a 100th-anniversary *Tallis* be performed? If it is, get there.

Let us now travel to the city which was Ralph Vaughan Williams' home for many years, London.

### **A River Runs Through It: London, May 31st**

During 2008 the complete Vaughan Williams symphony cycle was performed by the Philharmonia Orchestra in London, over four concerts. I went to the second of these, "Colour and Landscape", on May 31st. The concert featured the *8th Symphony*, *The Lark Ascending* and the *London Symphony* in its original version.

Vaughan Williams wrote of the scherzo of the *London Symphony*, "If the listener will imagine himself standing on Westminster Embankment at night, surrounded by the distant sounds of the Strand...with its crowded streets and flaring lights, it may serve as a mood in which to listen to this movement." For this concert the listener could do just that, as it was held at the Royal Festival Hall, just across the Thames from the Embankment. Of course if Vaughan Williams composed the *London Symphony* today he would have the added challenge of incorporating the thump of disco riverboats into the tapestry of sound. I have my own thoughts about the significance of the river in this work, but more of that later.

### **Concert, May 31st, Royal Festival Hall**

Inside, the auditorium was about ninety per cent full. I envied the members of the audience sitting in the choir seats behind the orchestra, as they seemed close enough to reach out and play the gong or tubular bells arranged for our first item.

To start the concert we were plunged into the strange sound-world of the *8th Symphony*. Written when Vaughan Williams was in his early eighties, I wonder to what extent he was expressing an awareness of his mortality in this piece. The first movement had an other-worldly quality about it under Mr. Hickox's bold and demonstrative guidance. Then we were into the second movement for wind and brass only, a movement I have seen described as "mischievous". Later on, during the calm dignity of the third movement, a thought occurred to me – could this symphony be autobiographical, in the same way as in Elgar's final *Enigma* variation? Was Vaughan Williams, near the end of his life, reflecting on himself, on his humour, his serenity, his musical adventures and on the proximity of the next world?

After the *8th* it was time for the *Lark*. Violin soloist Anthony Marwood strode on to the stage. It was his first performance of the *Lark* but he looked confident and focussed. A tall, lean figure, he holds the violin as though he is in love with it. The instrument was made by Carlo Bergonzi in 1736 so he probably is. He stood almost as still as a statue, and the lark's song rose. Just how do

they do that? How do violinists make sounds of such complexity and beauty while appearing to hardly move? The pure, bright sound of the violin in the perfect acoustics of the hall was a delight. In the second half of the piece Mr. Marwood became more animated in response to the folk song element. When finally Mr. Hickox brought the orchestra's part to an end, he waited with his head bowed while the lark's song disappeared into the distance, as though in awe of the sound.

After the interval we took our seats for the *London Symphony*. I had not realised when booking the concert that this was to be the original version. I prefer the revised version. No matter, I am all for both versions being performed. However I hope that the original version does not take over on the concert circuit and will not be promoted as the "true" version: it is no more than a snapshot of how Vaughan Williams wanted the symphony to be for a short time in 1913. That said, this was a fine performance. As the second movement got under way I remembered Vaughan Williams' explanation of this movement, that it evoked dusk falling in a Bloomsbury square on a November afternoon. Yes, I can sense the twilight, but this movement for me evokes the river at dusk, with its deep, dark currents. May I just indulge in an aside for a few moments. In the 1870s the American artist James McNeill Whistler painted scenes on the Thames near Battersea Bridge at twilight. There was an exhibition of his work at the Tate Gallery in 1912 while Vaughan Williams was writing the *London Symphony*. Could the composer have attended the exhibition and been influenced by the mood of Whistler's paintings? They did, after all, depict scenes within a mile of his home at Cheyne Walk, although Battersea Bridge had been rebuilt by Vaughan Williams' time. Curiously, some of Whistler's paintings had the word "Symphony" in the title, for example his painting *The White Girl* has the subtitle *Symphony in White no.1*. So Whistler painted symphonies. Perhaps Vaughan Williams created musical paintings?

The concert finished and outside the hall night had fallen. The river slid by quietly in the darkness, pools of reflected light dancing off its surface. Just three miles upstream Whistler had captured the mood of this river as darkness falls. Do the slower passages from the symphony draw on Whistler's images for their inspiration? Vaughan Williams never said so but his comments on what inspired his music were brief and grudging. Whatever his source was, let's be grateful for it.

The next concert was also to be beside a London river, this time the Fleet, now underground, the "River of Wells", famous in history for its healing properties.



Sadler's Wells Theatre, London

### **Thoroughly Modern Pilgrim: London, June 20th**

In 1683, Richard Sadler opened his original "musick house" near what was then the country village of Islington. By coincidence he also discovered that nearby was a medieval well. Before long visitors were coming, both for musical entertainment and to sample the waters, which gained a reputation for having miraculous medicinal properties. Many years later, in June 2008, the miracle being performed in the modern Sadler's Wells theatre was two performances of Vaughan Williams' rarely-seen opera, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Interestingly, Sadler and the book's author John Bunyan were contemporaries. By a curious fate, through these performances, the visions of these two very different men had come together.

### ***The Pilgrim's Progress*, June 20th, Sadler's Wells**

Of course I was looking forward to this performance but I had some doubts about whether it would work. Would it look dated and irrelevant to a modern audience? Would it convey Bunyan's message of a spiritual struggle? Would it work as dramatic narrative? The production was to be "semi-staged". What did this mean? Would it cut corners to save money?

On entering the auditorium we could see how the stage was arranged. The orchestra seats were ready on the stage as though for a concert, with the choir seats behind them. In front of the orchestra was an empty space – well, almost empty. A man was "asleep" on a bedroll in the front of the stage. This was Neal Davies playing John Bunyan. He was to be there for some time, waiting to wake up, as the start was delayed for twenty minutes – an announcement told us that the First Shining One was stuck in traffic. Eventually it was decided that an understudy would play this part and the show got under way. Mr. Hickox and the orchestra scurried on to the stage to no applause. They just wanted to get going. We all wanted them to get going too. After the delay, this had better be good. It was.

The hymn tune *York* sounded from the brass and John Bunyan slowly rose and folded up his bedroll. He was wearing clothes which could be modern prison clothes. Neal Davies, baritone, delivered Bunyan's opening address boldly, competing well with the orchestra's dramatic opening bars. From the other side of the stage came the anguished cry, "What shall I do?" and Roderick Williams as Pilgrim staggered up the steps onto the stage. Truly this was a man labouring under a huge weight. Wearing an overcoat and carrying a huge pack on his back, Mr. Williams' face looked in real pain. Within a few minutes of the start we had seen how the production would unfold – modern clothes, no scenery and an imaginative use of space. It wasn't what Vaughan Williams had visualised but it was new and exciting.

Evangelist sauntered on wearing a suit and open-necked shirt, walking through the orchestra with his hands in his pockets. Matthew Rose, bass, delivered the advice that Pilgrim needed, coolly and calmly. Yes, you would listen to this man for directions. At the House Beautiful there was no house, no cross and no wicket gate, but the manner in which the Shining Ones were introduced was brilliant. Their voices rang out and we all turned upward and to the left where they were spotlighted in a side balcony. Wearing long white dresses they gleamed against the dark background. Simple yet beautiful.

A wave of relief swept over Mr. Williams' face as the pack was lifted from his back. This was to be the pattern of the production – the drama of the moment expressed through Mr. Williams' face. In his new garb of long white shirt and white trousers, Pilgrim had

an almost Moslem appearance. Vaughan Williams would probably have approved of this, as he conceived his Pilgrim as a character who could be following any spiritual path. Throughout the production there was no explicit Christian imagery.

The herald appeared dressed in a suit and tie, carrying a clipboard, looking for all the world like a civil servant about to point out a list of regulations. Pilgrim's armour was represented by a quilted waistcoat. He was now ready for the fight with Apollyon. The lighting on stage changed to blood-red to evoke the Valley of Humiliation. What would Apollyon be like? The thorny problem of the stage appearance of the monster was solved simply and imaginatively – "Apollyon" was three hooded figures in black, side by side, carrying a wooden bar between them. They forced Pilgrim to the ground with the bar, he fought his way back up and they fled. Sorted.

The dramatic heart of the piece was arguably the Vanity Fair sequence, set in the town of sin where Pilgrim is threatened, imprisoned and nearly killed. The scene opened with the choir walking back to their seats after the interval, chattering and shouting, "Buy! Buy!" Constant movement and a dynamic energy were to be a characteristic of this scene. Madam Wanton and Madam Bubble, wearing long black dresses and lots of jewellery, were pestered by paparazzi taking photographs before they set about the attempted seduction of Pilgrim. His inner struggle was etched on his face as the lips of Madam Bubble (Pamela Helen Stephen) came within an inch of his. Later on in the scene when Pilgrim was arrested, there was a feeling of real menace and alarm when he was hooded and dragged away on a rope. After Pilgrim's escape from prison it was time for another star of the show to make an appearance – Adam Hickox, treble, son of the conductor, as the Woodcutter's Boy, already with an established singing career aged twelve. Do woodcutter's boys wear Manchester United soccer shirts and red woolly hats? This one did. On meeting Pilgrim he nonchalantly threw him a tennis ball to catch before pointing out the Delectable Mountains. Adam has the self-assurance on stage of someone who has been doing this for twenty years.

The relaxed mood continued with the appearance of Mister and Madam By-Ends (Richard Coxon and Andrea Baker), a delightful episode where Ms. Baker seemed to be doing her best to impersonate Hyacinth Bucket, the snobbish TV comedy character. The By-Ends couple left the stage muttering disapproval that Pilgrim obviously does not shop at Marks and Spencers.

We were in a meditative space for the scene with the shepherds. They walked slowly to the front of the stage from different directions, wearing fleeces, jeans and walking boots. Sitting on the floor they exuded a confident calmness.

At the end of the Delectable Mountains sequence, Pilgrim knows that he must enter the River of Death. The music entered a quiet passage and two hooded figures in black walked on slowly carrying a rolled-up blue fabric sheet. At the moment when there was a flourish from the orchestra, there was a flash of theatrical brilliance. The sheet was suddenly swept into the air and stretched across the stage, rippling from side to side. Instant river. Pilgrim gradually became entwined in the sheet and slowly sank to the ground where he eventually lay still, the sheet left on top of him.

The Celestial City was near. A distant trumpet sounded from the back of the auditorium. How would this be staged? Certainly no

golden gates as the composer had imagined it. Once again the solution was simple. Mr. Williams, the blue sheet having been lifted from him, slowly rose and, as throughout the whole performance, told the story with his face. As he realised that he had reached his destination, he grew in happiness and exaltation, seeming to rejoice that he had shaken off the pain and difficulty of the physical life. He was healed. The hymn tune *York* rang triumphantly out and members of the choir stepped slowly forward to stand either side of Mr. Williams. He rushed to greet them and clasped their hands as though he was meeting deceased friends and relatives. When Sarah Fox, soprano, sang out from a side balcony, "Blessing and glory...for ever and ever", it was a moment of great beauty and poignancy.

The music quietened and once again Neal Davies stepped on to the stage to deliver Bunyan's final address. As he offered his book to the audience at the end, all the cast members walked forward and extended an arm, and the lights slowly faded. It was over. When the applause started from the packed auditorium, cheers rang out as well. David Edwards, director, stepped onto the stage to deservedly take some of the credit. There were hugs, and there was applause for Roderick Williams from the other cast members. They were on a high, as well they might be. Vaughan Williams' creation had been brought into the twenty-first century while retaining the essence of his work.

I left the theatre in awe of modern theatrical skills and dedication. It was clear from this performance that *Pilgrim* is primarily a drama which needs to be performed to be fully appreciated. As recorded music it is fine, but you need to see people interacting with each other, telling the story. You need to see faces. The music is a vehicle to enhance the drama.

For our next and final concert we are once again in a cathedral city.



A musical angel, Salisbury Cathedral

If you stand inside Salisbury Cathedral under the spire and look upwards, you can see the columns of stone bending slightly under the huge weight above. From a distance, however, the building gives quite a different impression, seeming light and delicate, as though it is hanging in mid-air. The historian Sir Arthur Bryant noticed this, writing about a train journey he made in 1942 which passed through the town. He related how the sullen eyes of his fellow passengers turned to the carriage window on entering Salisbury, as though looking for something, and on seeing the cathedral spire seemed cheered and uplifted. Bryant described the cathedral's builders in this way:

*We are their masters in material and accomplishment, but they were our masters in spiritual comprehension. We could tell them more about this world than they even dimly guessed, yet they could teach us more about life itself. For their souls were at one with their existence, and ours are not. For all the harsh discomfort and squalor of their lives, theirs was a vitality and physical and spiritual awareness that still speak to us across time from the buildings they raised to commemorate their faith. [The Lion and the Unicorn]*

That they spoke to Vaughan Williams we can have no doubt. Here, in this concert, the *Tallis Fantasia* was once again to become incarnate in a cathedral, along with the *Pilgrim's Journey* cantata, *Serenade to Music* and *Toward the Unknown Region*.

The cathedral itself celebrated an anniversary in 2008, and one which made Ralph Vaughan Williams' death seem like yesterday – 750 years since the completion of the major part of the cathedral in 1258. Unknown to me previously, an original copy of Magna Carta from 1215 is kept on show in the cathedral's chapter house, one of only four in existence. It lies in a glass case, a sheet of parchment covered in an unintelligible Latin script, an unprepossessing document for something which marks the birth of human rights in the English-speaking world.

### **Concert, July 5th, Salisbury Cathedral**

After an introduction and welcome by the Dean who pointed out that actually there was nothing new in VW's music being heard in the cathedral, as his hymn tunes are sung there every week, the concert started. The *Pilgrim's Journey* cantata was first performed in 1963 at the Leith Hill Musical Festival, having been put together after the composer's death with Ursula Vaughan Williams' approval. It was thought that by this means, selected music from *The Pilgrim's Progress* could be performed without the need for a full-scale theatrical performance.

For me, this was bad timing. Only two weeks before I had seen *Pilgrim* performed on stage in its entirety. I was stunned by what I had seen at Sadler's Wells, and the Salisbury version, despite magnificent singing and playing, drew inevitable comparisons with the opera and it fell short. It became for me a sequence of disconnected choral pieces that had no context. How could the hymn tune *York* not be followed by Bunyan's prologue? How could the singing from *Vanity Fair* not have all the accompanying bustle and activity? And above all, how could it hang together without the character of *Pilgrim* conveying the story?

Having said all this, there was much of the cantata that I enjoyed. Highlights were baritone Robert Evans in "Into thy Hands, O Lord", with its almost monastic overtones in the cathedral setting; and the final "Alleluia" featuring all soloists and the chorus with Emilia Hughes, soprano, particularly excelling. It was sheer bad

luck that I saw this just after *Pilgrim* in London. I am sure I would have been more positive otherwise.

The first piece after the interval was to be something more familiar – the *Tallis Fantasia*. During the afternoon I had been lucky enough to hear this being rehearsed in the cathedral, along with parts of *Pilgrim*. Many visitors to the cathedral were sitting enjoying the music, and shortly after *Tallis* started, a party of students entered, and sat in a group to listen. I wondered where they were from and what they made of it. The conductor David Halls, Director of Music at the cathedral, was taking it slowly, which worked well for me. I was reminded of Steve Schwartz's very interesting article in the website [www.agentsmith.com](http://www.agentsmith.com) about the *Tallis Fantasia*, where he describes how disappointed he was initially not to find the marking *appassionato* on the score, only to be relieved later when he did find it, where the music builds to its climax. There was a quiet intensity in Mr. Halls' slow pace, so much easier to see at close quarters in the rehearsal than in the actual concert, that made the term *appassionato* quite apt.

The actual performance that evening lived up to expectations from the rehearsal. It was wonderful to once again hear this music in a cathedral. Unlike in Gloucester the performers were at the west end of the building, with a wall behind them. The audience in the nave were therefore facing "backwards" away from the altar. This arrangement, I thought, worked better than at Gloucester and seemed to improve the acoustics slightly, giving a cleaner sound. The pace was slow, as rehearsed earlier, as though Mr. Halls was savouring every note and didn't want it to end. We didn't either. End it did, though, and as the last note ebbed away and died, there was silence. You could have heard a pin drop at the other end of the cathedral. Somewhere behind me a voice whispered, "Gorgeous". There was warm applause from the nearly-full audience. It is difficult to know what to write sometimes about this music. Steve Schwartz's closing words after his analysis of the piece cannot be bettered: "Understanding the skeleton says very little about the miracle of its life."

Next was the *Serenade to Music*, a piece which I confess to thinking of rather dismissively in the past. I had found it to be sugary and soporific, to be taken before bedtime like a musical cup of Horlicks. This is rather unfair. Yes, the piece is sentimental, but it is Vaughan Williams' tribute to Sir Henry Wood, founder of the Proms concert series, who had done so much to promote music and make it accessible, ideas close to the composer's heart. The sentiment is genuine because it stems from real admiration. Shakespeare's words from *The Merchant of Venice* were sung by soprano, tenor, baritone and chorus. And yes, the beauty of the words was matched by the music. Who else but Shakespeare could describe the night sky like this?

*There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st  
But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins.*

So speaks Lorenzo to Jessica in the moonlight. Many composers would shy away from trying to enhance these words with music, but Vaughan Williams had the confidence and the ability. And *Serenade* isn't all sweetness, there is a darkness like a cloud passing over the moon –

*The man that has no music in himself,  
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds  
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;  
The motions of his spirit are dull as night...*

The orchestra and singers completely captured all the moods of this piece.

And so to *Toward the Unknown Region*. I will be honest here. I don't have anything to say about this piece. It is not one of my favourite Vaughan Williams works and it does not resonate with me. As the final work in this concert I was not particularly receptive to it – after the nobility of *Pilgrim*, the dark spirituality of *Tallis* and the prettiness of *Serenade*, I couldn't take any more in. I was overwhelmed.

Can I congratulate the Salisbury Symphony Orchestra and Salisbury Musical Society who gave us a wonderful evening's music. While not flawless, their performances captured the spirit of the music throughout. The soloists, as at Gloucester, seemed sometimes to be struggling to fill the space with their voices, but who wouldn't be? Thank you to all. My favourite *Tallis*? It has to be Gloucester for its ambience, although Salisbury was still magical.

## Conclusion

In concert halls and cathedrals throughout the year, Ralph Vaughan Williams was celebrated by musicians playing and singing before packed audiences. The performances were not just given out of duty, in order to tick off another composer's anniversary, but out of love and gratitude. Each of the concerts that I had the good fortune to attend seemed to tap in to some quality inherent in that place – the Norman roots of England at Gloucester; the River Thames with its dark dreams; a country lane leading to a healing well; and Salisbury's spire, like two hands held in prayer. Vaughan Williams' music has rung out across the land like church bells on a moonlit Christmas night, to touch our hearts and inspire us.

In Gloucester, Michael Kennedy had described how Vaughan Williams had never really got over the poetry of Walt Whitman. I'm glad to say, I have never really got over the music of Vaughan Williams.

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# The Anniversary Year – Rob Furneaux reports

Well, what a good year it's been for us Vaughan Williams types! For me, things kicked off with the St. Endellion series of concerts in North Cornwall. The concerts – conducted by Richard Hickox – were very much Vaughan Williams orientated, and included a wide span of his works including the rarely performed *Dona Nobis Pacem*. The closing concert in Truro Cathedral was exceptional. The *Sea Symphony* was the major work here, performed with great enthusiasm by the large assembled chorus and St. Endellion Orchestra. Hickox gave the wide expanses of the first movement room to breathe, and in the last movement brought out the wonderful contrasts between the quiet passages and the bursts of power which echoed round the cathedral. There wasn't a spare seat in the house, which is certainly saying something for such a large auditorium in such a sparsely populated area. It certainly highlighted the extent to which Vaughan Williams is admired in this part of the world these days. That said, there was another work in the concert which also made a great impression, the *Cornish Dances* by Malcolm Arnold. Here the orchestra was augmented by a veritable battery of percussion instruments and – as Arnold had arranged when it was played on this spot in the late nineteen-sixties – two town bands which joined in with impressive effect in the third dance. I was seated close to the percussion and I can certainly say that this was the loudest sound I have ever heard in a symphony concert. And, even though it virtually blew my head off, the whole experience was marvellous. My conversion to the rogue genius Malcolm Arnold is complete.

There were so many other highlights in this memorable year. Two Vaughan Williams documentaries were released, for example, both flawed, but nevertheless very welcome and containing some marvellous moments. The edition of *Songs of Praise* dedicated to Vaughan Williams' hymns was very well produced and showed that a potted history of the composer can be effectively accomplished in just half an hour.

Another outstanding highlight for me was the symphony series in the Festival Hall, again conducted by Richard Hickox. I attended 5, 6, and 9, almost too much to cope with in one concert! This was the first time I had encountered No. 6 live, and under Hickox's

spirited direction the central sections of the symphony really took off. The feel of momentum and power was more than impressive and I can well see why the symphony achieved a hundred performances in its first year. The Ninth was well played by the Philharmonia. This was the second time I had heard it live and I can't help feeling that had Vaughan Williams lived longer he would have "tinkered" with it. The celesta seemed superfluous and the efforts of the two harps were hardly heard, especially in the closing pages. As a point of interest, I later played the piece on CD to my companion at the concert, Graham Dawe, who did not know the work prior to the concert. He was astonished and thought they were two entirely different pieces, the harps and celesta, in a recording, inevitably being brought forward by the balance technician. Thus the conclusion must be reached that the Ninth, although a wonderful symphony, is, reluctantly, best encountered on record. But perhaps I shouldn't go too far: symphony subtitles – the *Pastoral*, the *London* – should definitely not be joined by the *Recording Studio*.

At the close of the concert the Fifth Symphony was wonderfully well handled by Hickox, and the Philharmonia responded with a passion. The dying notes of the last movement left a hushed auditorium followed by a standing ovation, a fitting end to a marvellous concert.

As I read through this piece and prepare to send it to the Journal I am shocked to hear of the death of Richard Hickox. His list of achievements, not least as a champion of English music, is inestimable. Others more worthy than I will undoubtedly detail his astonishing catalogue of accomplishments. As a humble listener I can only say what a great loss he will be in the recording studio, and as a West Country man I must add that his loss to the St. Endellion festival will be incalculable. Indeed, his production of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, performed at the Festival in 1997, remains the most atmospheric and moving classical music concert I have ever attended. Also, his recordings of the original version of the *London Symphony* and of Dyson's *Canterbury Pilgrims* are amongst the most treasured items in my CD collection. Following the loss of Vernon Handley just a few months ago, Richard Hickox's sudden death is nothing less than shattering.

# Letters

We are always pleased to receive contributions for this page

## BLACKMOOR VILLAGE CHURCH CELEBRATES RVW

The village of Selborne, with its Gilbert White associations, evokes an image of the English countryside quite in keeping with the Vision of Albion, and indeed, the Hampshire Hangars retain their rural charm to this day as they march northward between the South Downs at Petersfield and the North Downs at Farnham.

In 1865, Sir Roundall Palmer, M.P., later to be created 1st Earl of Selborne, bought land at Blackmoor, about three miles to the north-east of Selborne. He commissioned Alfred Waterhouse, architect of the Natural History Museum, to construct an "estate village". Church, vicarage, school and reading room, as well as workers' cottages were all built before 1870 to be followed by the imposing Blackmoor House, completed in 1872.

Unlike so many village churches, St. Matthew's thrives, with around a hundred names on the electoral roll, an active band of bell ringers and a four-part, robed choir. This is partly due to its Parish including parts of Bordon and Whitehill, both of which have seen extensive residential development in recent years. However, Blackmoor remains much as it was when built. A War Memorial was added in 1920 and there is now the processing and packing centre for the orchards of the Blackmoor Estate, with its well known and popular Apple Shop. There is no other modern building within sight of the church nestled within the surrounding trees. Had RVW come here at any time during his long life he would have seen no substantial change and, even today, that is largely true.

Blackmoor Estate is still in the hands of the Selborne family and John, the 4th Earl, is a well-respected horticultural scientist with a passion for apples which includes a fine collection of traditional English varieties. He is our Patron and an active member and supporter of our Parish life. Every year since 1969, on the 2nd Sunday in October, the "Apple Tasting" day attracts thousands of people to sample the produce and enjoy all the traditional country activities of the Craft Fair.

The church is heavily involved in the day, holding Harvest Festival and going to great lengths to decorate the building inside with fruit, flowers and all sorts of produce and supplying food and drink to visitors. The ringers open the tower and give demonstrations of change-ringing and the choir presents a concert of sacred music during the afternoon, which I, as choirmaster, have the task of organising. When I realised that the 2008 event would fall on RVW's birthday there was no question that this year's concert would be a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary!

Thus, the 9.45 Eucharist began with a solo soprano voice leading us into the entirely apt *O Taste and See* as the Introit. Complying with the Archbishop of Canterbury's request, *Come Down O Love Divine* featured alongside more usual harvest hymns. The Anthem provided a further opportunity, this being an arrangement of those two great RVW "finds" - Tallis' Third Mode Melody and *Dives and Lazarus*. As set in the New English Hymnal, the two sets of words complement each other perfectly, contrasting the majesty of God with the grace of Christ. Thus the four verses of the

former, sung in a chant like speech rhythm, alternate with the three verses of the latter in this arrangement.

As worshippers left after the service other visitors began entering to enjoy the decorated church and partake of coffee or a light lunch. Among the displays were RVW Society publications and information from the "Valiant Voices" website, and during the day two people who had met RVW came and spoke to me, one of whom was a treble at Christ's Hospital under C. S. Lang.

At around 1.45 the strains of the *Tallis Fantasia* began to filter through the church's sound system while the choir re-assembled for the afternoon's celebration concert. With the choir in place, Parish organist, Fiona Hall, launched proceedings, as per *Pilgrim's Progress*, with the hymn tune *York*, followed by a repeat of the morning's anthem.

The backbone of the concert was a performance of the *Five Mystical Songs*, accompanied by multi-talented FRCO organist, Graham Bint, at the piano and organ. Having sung tenor for the better part of forty-five years, I had never expected to perform these songs that I have loved since my teens. However, one of the consequences of advancing years has been the acquisition of a couple of notes at the bottom, so I decided that now was the time, with the choir doing its part in the earlier songs. *Antiphon*, so often done as an anthem in its own right, concluded the concert with full forces, Graham Bint once again showing his extraordinary ability to make our small organ sound like something much bigger!

Other music by RVW included *Linden Lea* – a secular song in exception to our normal rule, but given the co-incidence of two events, not to be left out. The hymns *Down Ampney* and *Sine Nomine* gave the audience a chance to join in the celebration. The Fifth Symphony is, of course, a long revered favourite, and, a dozen years ago, it struck me that the rhythm of the Romanza's lovely main theme suggested the opening words of the Nunc Dimittis. To my delight, I found that the whole text could be set to RVW's melody with a little adjustment and the addition of the "alleluia" from *Sine Nomine* which also occurs in the same movement. This was set for tenor and bass soloists and first given to mark the retirement of long-serving parish priest, Richard Inkpen. It gave me particular satisfaction to perform it again on this special day.

Vaughan Williams' music was set in the context of his forbears, teachers, contemporaries and those who came after. Thus we heard *If ye love me* (Tallis) performed one to a part, and the full choir sang Morley's *This is the Day* unaccompanied. Stanford was represented by his setting of Psalm 150 and Parry by *Jerusalem: Holst by O Sweet and Blessed Country*, Moeran by his Magnificat in D. Contemporary composers were represented by Jonathan Willcocks' Christmas anthem *Sing we now*.

I hope and believe RVW would have approved of our ambitious amateur music making, involved as he was with "grass roots" choral singing and I am extremely grateful to the choir and accompanists who brought this celebration to fruition. We have, I believe, truly marked the International Day of Vaughan Williams in a spirit in keeping with the great man's music making.

Robin Helliwell,  
Choirmaster,  
St. Matthew, Blackmoor and Whitehill, U.K

## RVW AND STAPLEFORD, WILTS

Rumour in Stapleford had it that Vaughan Williams stayed in the village in 1938 composing his Fifth Symphony. This was confirmed by Mrs. Ursula Vaughan Williams who wrote to me enclosing a copy of a letter from Dorking dated 21 July 1938, addressed to "R. Vaughan Williams, 'Rose Cottage', Stapleford, Salisbury". We now live in that cottage in Stapleford and Mrs. Vaughan Williams said in a letter to me that "Ralph stayed there in 1938 – he was working on his Fifth Symphony. He enjoyed walking to Salisbury and he met his friend the organist who played Bach with him in Salisbury Cathedral."

In 1938 the village thatcher and his wife lived in the cottage, now called Thatcher's Cottage. They were a Mr. and Mrs. Simper. Mrs. Simper kept a shop in a downstairs room and let a bedroom and a small upstairs sitting room. Mr. Simper was the thatcher but he was also an expert well-digger. He knew the country well and was a fine shot. He played the double bass sometimes in a village orchestra and also in the orchestra in St. Mary's Church just down the road from Rose Cottage. They were the sort of country people that Vaughan Williams liked.

In a memoir about Sir Walter Alcock, the cathedral organist referred to earlier, it is recorded that Vaughan Williams arrived "unexpectedly" in the cathedral, "exhausted and at a loss for inspiration". He asked Alcock to play for him when the cathedral was closed. Alcock played for two hours and Vaughan Williams went away "refreshed and restored". Perhaps this meeting took place when the composer was staying in Stapleford.

There are two puzzles. Why 1938 and why Stapleford? The war loomed in 1938. Vaughan Williams knew about war, serving in the trenches of France and Greece in the 1914-18 war. War horrified him and perhaps, before the deluge, he turned to the Wiltshire Downs for peace and inspiration to begin his Fifth Symphony. He implied this in a letter to Ursula: "I am on the Wiltshire Downs and the hermitage is succeeding..."

Why Stapleford? Perhaps on the recommendation of Longmans, the publishers who were friends and had a cottage in a nearby village which they used for the fishing season. Perhaps they knew about the Simperts' cottage in Stapleford. Another guess is that Vaughan Williams might have known or heard of the Stapleford vicar who ran the village orchestra and church band. A third guess is that in 1916 he was stationed in the army at Sutton Veny, a village not far from Stapleford, and on exercises on the Plain he might have passed through Stapleford and liked it.

All in all, it is no surprise that he chose the Salisbury area to stay in (Stapleford is seven miles from Salisbury). He knew it and it inspired him.

His stay with the Simperts throws light on his character. The Simperts were simple country people and here was this distinguished man, holding the most prestigious of honours, the O.M., sharing a bathroom and occupying a small bedroom and sitting room in a simple cottage. That says much for his character, brought up to accept people on their merits and not to bother about class or rank.

A bit of luck for Stapleford!

John Brierly,  
Stapleford, Wiltshire, U.K.

## LATE LOVE, LATE LIFE

In his letter in the October *Journal* Eric Hazelwood queries whether Vaughan Williams was traumatised by his war experiences. Well, I do not know whether "traumatised" is the correct term for it, but he was certainly deeply affected.

On July 19th 2008, BBC Radio 4 broadcast a thirty minute programme entitled *Late love, late life*. It was about the Ralph/Adeline/Ursula situation, and was presented by Julian Lloyd Webber. In the programme Ursula was reported as saying that Ralph used to have nightmares about the war and wake up screaming. That was over thirty years after Ralph's war service. I find it hard to believe that the majority of ex-servicemen considered it just as a dangerous job. You seldom found an ex-soldier who had been at the sharp end who liked to talk about his war service.

There were other things in the programme which shed more light on Ralph's relationship with his two wives, things missed out by Palmer and Bridcut and it is hoped that Society members managed to hear the programme. Luckily I was able to copy it to audio cassette.

Mike Gainsford  
Burbage, Leicestershire, U.K.

## FAO ALBION RECORDS

Every year, when the Christmas holiday rolls around, I sit and listen with great pleasure to *The First Nowell* in a version by Serenata of London, conducted by Bernard Keith. This I recorded on tape from the Toronto Radio Station CBL on December 14, 1973. Also, I have the concert version from a) The Amity Singers under John Washburn (also on tape); b) the Pro Musica of Calvary Church, Riverside, CA on a Musical Heritage Society disc; and c) The Joyful Company of Singers with the City of London Sinfonia under Richard Hickox on a Chandos disc from 2006 together with other Christmas music.

I have often wondered if the version that I heard, which surely must have emanated from the BBC, has been performed again, and also if the recording is still extant somewhere. It would make a great project for Albion Records if it is in the public domain.

Alan J. Hanks,  
Aurora, Ontario, Canada.

## MORE...

In his CD review in the October *Journal*, Jeffrey Davis refers to "a plethora of new recordings for the fiftieth anniversary". Perhaps I have missed something but I have failed to notice any such plethora. Apart from recycling old recordings (not to say that these are not welcome) the major record companies have done nothing new at all. I am writing this in October so I suppose there is still time, but I won't be holding my breath. There are many works still unrecorded and an opportunity has been missed. We should be really grateful to Stephen Connock and Albion Records for keeping the flag flying and unearthing gems amongst the composer's previously unrecorded compositions.

Mike Gainsford  
Burbage, Leicestershire, U.K.

## SOUL

I would like to correct the information given by Elizabeth Anne Webb in her letter ("POP" GOES THE MUSIC) in the October 2008 Journal.

Ernest Evans, better known as Chubby Checker, is not associated with the classic song *My Girl*, a Smokey Robinson/Ronald White composition that became a U.S. Number One hit for the Temptations in 1965. It is fairly doubtful that he even covered the song at the time. Chubby's *forte* was in performing the up-tempo dance craze hits that made him famous: *The Twist*, *Let's Twist Again*, *The Hucklebuck Pony Time*, *Limbo Rock* and so on.

However, I understand that Chubby's current stage show (unfortunately only to be seen in the U.S.A. in recent times) does feature some of the old Motown hits. Perhaps in his sixty-seventh year he requires a more reflective style of song to mix in with the novelty numbers.

It is possible that Elizabeth may have been thinking of the most famous recording by a solo artist of *My Girl*, that of the incomparable Otis Redding. Released in the U.K. in 1965, it eventually charted at Number 11.

*My Girl* is ranked at Number 88 in *Rolling Stone* magazine's list of the 500 greatest songs of all time. It has been recorded by many other artists, and used extensively in films and TV programmes.

For a stimulating article on the song by Kevin Fennell, Internet users might like to go to:  
[http://www.aestheticrealism.net/arfntennessee/My\\_Girl\\_KF.htm](http://www.aestheticrealism.net/arfntennessee/My_Girl_KF.htm)

It is interesting to be writing about the type of Rhythm and Blues that came to be known as Soul music in the Journal of the RVW Society. Soul, as an element of music, is almost impossible to define, but is remarkably easy to recognise. I cannot think of a classical music composer whose work has more of it than Vaughan Williams.

David Fisher,  
Barnsley, South Yorkshire, U.K.

## REMEMBRANCE DAY

I wonder whether any other Society members watched or listened to the Remembrance Day ceremony at the Cenotaph this November 11th, which was attended by the three surviving servicemen from the Great War. Immediately before the wreath laying ceremony the band of the Royal Marines played the Prelude from *49th Parallel*. I don't know whether this was because of the fiftieth anniversary of the composer's death, or to recognise his own service in the First World War. Whichever, it was an appropriate choice, and most moving.

Michael Gainsford  
Burbage, Leicestershire, U.K.

## ANOTHER NEW ENGLISH HYMNAL?

David Clunie's plea for more song arrangements to be available on CD has in part been answered – EMI has re-issued the LP of folksong arrangements including the beautiful *The Saviour's Love* and the searing *How cold the wind doth blow*. Albion's *Where hope is shining* is very welcome, but there is much other material that needs to be made available. Has there been a recent CD issue

of the male voices arrangement of *Dives and Lazarus*, for example? There is still much to be discovered amongst VW's arrangements. This is especially so in the case of hymns and carols. The three main popular sources of this material in England – the *English Hymnal*, *Songs of Praise* and *Oxford Book of Carols* have all been replaced by new editions that often ignore the distinctive contribution of VW. In the case of the *New English Hymnal* there has been a depressing reversion to some "customary" tunes (including those of the sort VW placed in his "chamber of horrors" of the original hymnbook). Coupled with the tendency of some hymn-book publishers to encourage arrangements of folk melodies which emulate the harmony of Victorian hymns, much is being lost. This is in contrast with the position in Scotland, where sensitive arrangements of Scottish traditional tunes are being used in contemporary hymnody by John Bell and others.

Would there be any support for the production of a modern hymn book or supplement that takes many of the inspiring musical arrangements of the three original books and marries them with contemporary words suitable for the theology of the age? Many of the words of the two earlier hymn books may now be out of date, but the musical idiom can reach across generations. There are many suitable modern hymns that would fit well with the tunes and harmonies. To them could be added some of the "timeless" carols with both their keyboard and choral versions, such as *The Saviour's Love*, which have not generally been published but deserve to be. If also incorporating the best of the new generation of worship material, both our services and our musical heritage could be enhanced.

John Hack,  
Woking, Surrey, U.K.

## LAND OF PROMISE

Members of the Society might be interested to know that the ten-minute documentary film from 1948, *The Dim Little Island*, directed by Humphrey Jennings, and to which Vaughan Williams was one of the four "voice-over" contributors – but see pp. 188-9 of Michael Kennedy's VW Catalogue for the composer's forgetting all about it – is now available on DVD. It's disc 3, track 4, of a 4-DVD compilation, *Land of Promise: The British Documentary Movement, 1930-1950*, issued by the British Film Institute (BFI) and comprising forty documentaries in all. Another of the documentaries is Jennings' *Listen to Britain*, which features the classic footage of Myra Hess playing a Mozart concerto at a wartime National Gallery concert. A full listing of the contents of *Land of Promise* can be found at <http://filmstore.bfi.org.uk>, subsection "DVDs" then "Documentary".

Roger Savage,  
Edinburgh, U.K.

## EMMA

I wonder if many members have read an excellent biography of Emma Darwin by Edna Healey (wife of the former Chancellor). As we all know, RVW was descended from the Darwins and the Wedgwoods on his mother's side, and there are some fascinating references to him in the book.

Roy Teed,  
Colchester, UK

## A CALL FOR MODERATION

I've been surprised and somewhat disappointed at the content of a number of reviews and letters in the Journal of late, notably the comments regarding the Vaughan Williams films released this year. I know they were both flawed in content, there were mistakes, comments were written against them and there was cause for complaint. But surely not the tirade of near abuse that resulted! I know some songs in the Palmer film were sung by a female instead of a male, and I understand the fire engines illustrating the *London Symphony* were actually from Oldham, but do these criticisms form the basis to condemn the whole thing without reservation? One correspondent, in the midst of a venomous attack, did not acknowledge that the reviews he was commenting on were far from unanimous in their praise. This letter then provoked a reply from another member. I have had the good fortune of having many articles included in the Journal in the last ten years or so, and have from time to time received some not entirely favourable responses. With titles such as *Vaughan Williams I Hate* I should perhaps expect some prickly responses, but I do think that some comments concerning reviews have tended to be vitriolic and vindictive.

To return to the Palmer film: Barbara Dickson is quite obviously not an opera singer, but in the eyes of the public she is a recognisable and well-regarded figure. Her presence in the film can only have enhanced the pleasure of many viewers, and I do

think it would be advantageous for members of the Society to try and temper their comments after consideration of the world outside our little Vaughan Williams "goldfish bowl". These documentaries, I suspect, will have done more to spread the word than a shelf-load of CDs. Of course, I am not saying that criticism should be stifled. Far from it: accurate and well-observed criticism should always have its place. But I think that those submitting articles might consider the sensibilities of other members a little more – less rubbing up and more cosying up! – and also, when appropriate, cast the net wider in considering the effect of releases – of whatever form – into the public domain.

Credit where it's due, then. We now have two complete films on Vaughan Williams in our libraries – not entirely accurate, it's true, and with some eccentric omissions or additions – but they were very effective vehicles in carrying the word to the general public. Several acquaintances have said to me that they had seen one of the documentaries and were very surprised and astonished at the quality of the music. Some of these were undoubtedly converts to the cause and as such illustrate how important these films are. Even the most sceptical members of the Society would surely warmly welcome this.

Rob Furneaux,  
Bere Ferrers, Devon, U.K

# Concert Reviews

## **THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS in MELBOURNE**

The fiftieth anniversary of Vaughan Williams' death has passed almost unnoticed in Melbourne, Australia. The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra did not include a single work in their programmes. Fortunately, two of our non-professional choirs went some way to restoring the balance. The Tudor Choristers included the *Five Mystical Songs* in one of their concerts in the version with organ accompaniment. I was unable to hear the performance but it attracted good notices.

On a much larger scale, on 28 September 2008, the Camberwell Chorale (now in its sixty-fifth year) and the Camerata Orchestra, with twenty-six soloists, were conducted by Douglas Heywood in a concert performance of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. This was a remarkable achievement from a choir which, I understand, does not audition its members.

Earlier in the year Richard Hickox conducted the work in Sydney with Alan Opie as Pilgrim and the Bach Choir joining the Australian Opera Chorus, and while, as one would expect, he achieved a degree of professional polish that was often lacking in Melbourne, I felt that the performance here came closer to the composer's vision. It was involving and, ultimately, deeply moving. Many of the soloists were students or recent music graduates but we were fortunate to have Robert Beasley singing Pilgrim. He has had considerable operatic experience with Australian opera companies and with Glyndebourne Touring Opera and was totally immersed in the role, as was Gary Rowley as Bunyan. He, too, has sung professionally for the major companies.

It is perhaps unfair to single out any of the other soloists. There was not a weakness among them, apart from occasional difficulty in being heard over the orchestra; but Bruce Raggatt stood out as an impressive Evangelist, and I was particularly moved by young schoolgirl Morgan Ferguson as the Woodcutter's Boy. What a wonderful moment this is in the opera: it is so utterly simple, in the manner of the coronation anthem *O taste and see*, and yet has the power to move the listener to tears.

I count myself fortunate in being able to hear two different performances of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the space of a few months, and although I would have loved to be at Sadler's Wells for the London airing, I'm sure that the two Australian concert versions were fully worthy to stand beside it.

Hector Walker

## **A LARK AND A SERENADE at PECKLETON**

On 19 October 2008 the Graff Orchestra of England, under Celia Davies, presented a concert at St Mary Magdalene Church, Peckleton, South Leicestershire, in partnership with Peckleton Arts, which organises concerts generally at rural venues in the area. This concert included two works by Vaughan Williams to mark the fiftieth anniversary. The theme running through the concert was nature, and in particular birds.

The Graff Orchestra is a premier chamber orchestra in the East Midlands. For the concert there were about twenty-five players,

augmented for the final item. Peckleton church is not a large building, and is situated in a very exposed position, and was battered by a very chill wind on the day. Its other disadvantage as a concert venue is that the nearest toilet is about half a mile across fields in the village hall. Despite this there was not an empty seat in the church, and something like two hundred people must have been packed in.

The concert opened with Haydn's Symphony No 83, *The Hen*, splendidly played, the tone colour in the trio of the third movement being especially good.

The second item on the programme was the ubiquitous *Lark Ascending*, the soloist being Joyce Fisher, leader of the orchestra. She was born locally and studied with Ralph Holmes and others. I found her rendition was at times a little uncertain, but improved as it went on. The orchestra played impeccably, although the single french horn could have been a bit more subdued (a common complaint of mine!)

Each item in the concert was given a short introduction by the conductor, and I'm afraid that the one to the *Lark* was somewhat misleading. It implied that the composer was largely unrecognised before he composed this work because he "hid himself in the country collecting folk songs".

The second half began with a spirited rendering of the *Storm at Sea* concerto by Vivaldi, followed by a work by another composer not among my favourites, Delius. To me his *On hearing the first cuckoo in Spring* sounded dreary, although I would not necessarily put that down to the standard of playing.

The following piece was just the thing to dispel the chromatic gloom, *Birds of the Vienna Woods* (*Im Krupfenwald*) by Johann Strauss, beautifully played, and accompanied by someone in a

giant feathered goose costume, who capered around in front of the orchestra. Perhaps something like this would be appropriate for the last night of the Proms. (Or penguin suits at performances of *Antartica*?) The final item I was looking forward to with some trepidation, bearing in mind the last live performance I had heard of *Serenade to Music* (see *Journal* No 42). This time it was given in the version with singers in the chorus taking the solos. But there were only eight in the chorus (SSAATTBB) and because of the limited space they were crammed into the foot of the bell tower behind the orchestra, with bell ropes dangling over their heads.

Sadly this seriously affected the balance and detracted from the performance. One could hardly hear the singers over the orchestra, although from what one could hear it seemed that they performed this difficult work well especially the bass singing about Erebus. This was a great pity because the orchestra performed very well indeed, the woodwind before the "the floor of heaven" passage being particularly good. Before the piece the conductor related that when a student she performed the piece under the baton of Reginald Jacques, with the composer listening in the front row. She described the composer as "a figure that would not look out of place in Melton Mowbray cattle market". During the rehearsal Jacques asked him how a certain passage should go, to receive the reply "Just as you wish, my boy." Celia Davies said jokingly that this gave her carte blanche to give her own rendition. She need not have worried. Orchestra and singers (what could be heard of them) all did well. It was the balance that spoilt it.

Mike Gainsford

#### RVW FEST at FITZWILLIAM COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

One of the many excellent contributions to Vaughan Williams' anniversary year was the Cambridge RVW Festival, held in Fitzwilliam College, an intimate and well-appointed college – if



At the RVW Fest: (l to r) Howard Wong, Kiffer Finzi, Diana McVeagh, Hilary Finzi

rather hard to find! – organised by baritone Howard Wong and Francis Knights (Director of Music at the College) and sponsored by the Society. The Festival started on the evening of Friday 31 October, with a recital by Howard himself. In a programme of *The House of Life*, *Four Poems*, and *Songs of Travel*, he presented the range of Vaughan Williams' song output, from his earliest to his latest works. These were complemented by Finzi – three songs from *Let Us Garlands Bring*. Howard has a powerful, rich, dark baritone, superb enunciation and an excellent understanding of, and ability to step into the persona of, these songs. Add to this his outstanding skills as a communicator and Philip Collin's sensitive accompaniment, and it results in a very enjoyable concert indeed (despite Howard's cold!).

Saturday morning opened with a talk by yours truly, entitled *Vaughan Williams, the Progressive* – a basic, introductory talk in which I attempted to show the breadth of his output and debunk the image of him as a "pastoral" composer. This was followed by a fascinating talk by Jeremy Dale Roberts, *Regeneration*, in which he explored Vaughan Williams' war years, and the effect these might have had on his music, using the letters of Ivor Gurney as an often contrasting backdrop. Deeply moving.

After a break for lunch, we were treated to a recital by Rupert Luck (violin) and Daniel Swain (piano), that included Vaughan Williams' dramatic Sonata in A minor, *Romance and Pastorale* and *Six Studies in English Folksongs*, with Holst's gorgeous *Five Pieces for Violin and Piano*, and Parry's impressive Sonata in D.

The performances were passionate and convincing – some splendid music-making. After an afternoon workshop, led by Howard, came Diana McVeagh's talk on *Man of his time; man of our Time*. This put Vaughan Williams and the reception and performance of his music in context by looking at contemporary musical developments, thus giving us another interesting insight. The evening concert featured the Fitzwilliam String Quartet, Christopher Langdown (piano) and Peter Wilman (tenor). The rather fascinating programme comprised Vaughan Williams' Second String Quartet, *Four Hymns*, and *On Wenlock Edge*, as well as a string quartet by the Cambridge professor Philip Radcliffe. The Fitzwilliam were on top form, and Langdown and Wilman also performed well.

The RVW celebrations this year have seen the production of two films about the composer, and, on the Sunday morning, John Bridcut gave an introduction to his excellent *The Passions of Vaughan Williams*, before the film was shown in full. A panel discussion followed, with the weekend's speakers all participating, and intelligent questions from, and ensuing discussions with, the audience. The weekend's events concluded with a concert given by the admirable Fitzwilliam College Choir. The powerful *Mass in G minor* was followed by the wonderful experience of seeing Kiffer Finzi (Christopher, Gerald's son) conduct the *Five Mystical Songs*, with Howard giving his heart and soul in the solo baritone part. A superb weekend, that leads one to very much hope that Howard will continue to organise such inspired events!

Em Marshall

#### **DONA NOBIS PACEM in LEICESTER**

On Saturday 8 November the Leicester Bach Choir, augmented by the Midlands Chorale, and accompanied by the Queen's Park Sinfonia conducted by Richard Laing, presented a concert of

music by Delius, Elgar, and Vaughan Williams. This took place at a wonderful venue, a large church in Romanesque style, built between 1899 and 1914, its design heavily influenced by the great cathedral of Torcello in the Venetian Lagoon. It is frequently used as a concert venue, the previous one which I attended being a performance by The Sixteen, and the church will later welcome The Tallis Scholars.

I had never heard of the Queen's Park Sinfonia (from Birmingham) before this concert, and they were a revelation to me, a chamber orchestra of real quality, as demonstrated by the opening item, *A walk to the Paradise Garden*, by Delius. I imagine that the piece may not be one of the easiest to bring off, being largely slow and contemplative. But the Queen's Park Orchestra played exquisitely and I found myself actually enjoying a piece of music by Bradford's famous son.

Following the Delius was Elgar's *Music Makers*, a piece with which I am familiar, although I have never heard it live before. I found the music very moving, once again excellently played and sung, the mezzo soprano soloist, Karen Wise being particularly good. This interesting piece incorporates snatches of many of Elgar's major works. The beauty of the orchestral and choral writing transcends the rather awful words by O'Shaughnessy. Surely the lines "With wonderful deathless ditties/We build up the world's great cities..." rival the equally horrible "The goal stands up, the keeper/Stand up to keep the goal..." which Vaughan Williams thankfully omitted from *On Wenlock Edge*, to the acute annoyance of A E Housman.

After the interval we had *Dona Nobis Pacem*. I had first heard this in Down Ampney Church in 1972, when I was absolutely knocked over by a performance far inferior to the one now reviewed. Perhaps because of this I was left strangely less moved than I had anticipated. The soprano soloist (the Swedish Sara Johnsson) sang immaculately, although I was somewhat less impressed by the baritone George von Bergen. But the whole thing seemed somewhat overpowering, and it was possibly the large size of the choir (over eighty) that led to it being at times difficult to hear the words clearly, particularly in the last movement, and *Dirge for Two Veterans*.

However my wife, who accompanied me, disagrees with my assessment. Perhaps the fault lies in the scoring, although I hesitate to suggest as much. Maybe it lost something by being hurried by the conductor, although I was not conscious of this until I checked the timing at the conclusion. It took just thirty minutes, although Kennedy's *Catalogue* says thirty-five, and my own recordings vary from thirty-five to thirty-six minutes, the recently released CD with the composer conducting taking the longest.

It is not my intention to be harsh on the performance and I would award a special bouquet to the orchestra. Both my wife and I thoroughly enjoyed the concert, despite our emerging from the church at the conclusion to a monsoon-like downpour and both stepping into a puddle well over the tops of our shoes!

Mike Gainsford

#### **THE FIFTH in TODMORDEN**

Todmorden Town Hall is a magnificent Victorian building which straddles the stream which was the Lancashire/Yorkshire boundary prior to 1888. Standing at the head of the Calder Valley,

where poet laureate Ted Hughes lived some decades ago, it hosted this well-attended concert in which two works by northern composers received their second performance, the first having taken place a few days previously at a Ted Hughes Festival lower down the valley amidst the moorland portrayed in the poet's *Remains of Elmet*.

First we enjoyed a bright and confident rendering of Holst's ballet suite *The Perfect Fool* (appropriately enough for my eighty-first birthday!) Then came John Reeman's *The Elmet Suite*, expressive of five Hughes poems. It was good to enjoy consonance in a twenty-first century composer, even though the football episode was more spirited than in the familiar Housman settings, and was firmly ended by the referee's whistle! Then came the interval, with tea and coffee at 50p which puts the south to shame; and then Lawrence Killian's *Ted Hughes Suite* describing Ted's life – childhood in the woods, romantic ups and downs, and professional acclaim. The first movement reminded me of Wagner's *Forest Murmurs*, but was vivacious rather than placid. It is heartening to know that English music has come through the twentieth century in good trim, at least when not engulfed by the pop plague!

But the piece de resistance, Vaughan Williams' Fifth Symphony, was a challenge well met by our amateur orchestra, among the best in our land, under conductor Nicholas Concannon Hodges. He confidently had the orchestra, and particularly the brass, play somewhat louder at the climaxes, especially in the finale, than is customary. I found this very pleasing in this great meditative symphony. The acoustics of the hall fall sort of its architectural splendour which nevertheless adds to the overall experience of a concert, being less than kind to the second movement scherzo and resulting in some blurring. The wide range of string tone at the slow ending of the work came through unimpaired, however, bringing an enjoyably challenging evening to a close.

*Frank McManus*

### **HODIE AT THE BARBICAN**

Following his acclaimed recording of *Hodie* on Naxos, Hilary Davan Wetton has continued to champion the piece, such as at his splendidly-programmed Barbican concert on 30 November last. Conducting the City of London Choir, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and The Boys Choir of Westminster Under School, Davan Wetton opened the concert with *Winter* from *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons*. In this, the final section of the five-part "Folk-song cantata", Vaughan Williams used four songs, *Children's Christmas Song*, *Wassail Song*, the folk carol *In Bethlehem City* and *God Bless the Master* from the *Sussex Mummers Carol*.

It is an utterly charming work, and the performance was top-rate. Two Finzi works formed the rest of the first half of the concert, the gorgeously lyrical *Fall of the Leaf*, of which Davan Wetton gave a suitably elegiac rendition, and *In Terra Pax*. Subtitled "A Christmas Scene", Finzi composed this, using words by Robert Bridges and from the gospel of St. Luke, for the locals to perform at a Christmas concert at Ashmansworth Church. Finzi magically depicts the bells that he heard ringing on Chosen Hill in Gloucestershire one Christmas Eve, and that magic was here brought to life in an evocative performance. Vaughan Williams' Christmas cantata, *Hodie*, comprised the second half of the concert. Dedicated to Howells, and first performed at the Three

Choirs in 1954, it was composed when Vaughan Williams was in his eighties, yet it is a remarkably youthful and exuberant work, and Davan Wetton brought out this sense of joy well. The three soloists, soprano Janice Watson, tenor Peter Hoare and baritone Stephen Gadd, were very good, and they were accompanied by singing and playing of the highest quality and great verve. The audience went home exhilarated and uplifted by some superb music.

*Em Marshall*

### **TUDOR PORTRAITS RETURNS TO NORWICH**

On Saturday 6 December 2008 there was a performance of Vaughan Williams' *Five Tudor Portraits* at St Andrew's Hall, Norwich. This work was the second part of a programme performed by the Norwich Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus, the first being Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 5. Two more contrasting works in one programme one could not wish to hear! The orchestra and chorus are amateur performers; however, the orchestra battled gamely through the Tchaikovsky.

Next, we came to the Vaughan Williams. The orchestra and chorus gave a much better account of themselves. Mezzo-soprano Kate Symonds-Joy had been due to perform but had to withdraw at the last moment due to ill health. Susanna Spicer, who proved to be an inspired replacement, took her place. Her performance of *Jane Scoop* (her lament for Philip Sparrow) was one of great humour and pathos. The baritone, Robert Rice, sang well if without a great deal of feeling. The chorus acquitted themselves fairly well but had difficulty with their tone quality at *piano* and only came into their own at *forte*.

As members know, this work was first performed in St Andrew's Hall on 25 September 1936. It had been commissioned by the Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Festival. As far as I can ascertain it has not been performed there since. On the evening of the performance I spoke to an elderly gentleman who had been attending concerts there for fifty years and he had no recollection of it ever being performed during that time.

St Andrew's Hall has a history of first performances, Elgar having premiered his *Sea Pictures* there on 5 October 1899. The piece was performed again exactly a hundred years later to great acclaim. Sadly this performance of *Five Tudor Portraits* did not receive such attention. Apart from some brief programme notes the audience were not given a full background to the work as they had when *Sea Pictures* was performed. The attendance was not great but I suppose that this work would be fairly unknown to most people.

It will be of interest to members to know that the Eastern Daily Press received a letter after the concert from a gentleman who had been at the first performance in 1936 as a twelve year-old schoolboy. He states that the audience were dressed in evening dress and Vaughan Williams made his entrance from the back of the hall, a man of considerable stature, walked the length of the hall before mounting the rostrum. As a schoolboy the earthiness was lost on him but he recalls Viscountess Albemarle, the President of the Triennial Festival, declaring that she would not listen to any more of such filth! The gentleman states that on hearing this Vaughan Williams complimented the chorus on their excellent diction!

*Clive Elgar*

# CD Reviews

## Ralph Vaughan Williams:

*Suite for Viola and Small Orchestra*  
(Group 1)

With **Howells:** *Elegy for Viola and Strings*; **Walton:** *Viola Concerto*; **York**

**Bowen:** *Viola Concerto in C minor*  
Helen Callus, viola

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra  
conducted by Marc Taddei  
ASV CD DCA 1181

## THE ELEGANT VIOLA

### Ralph Vaughan Williams:

*Suite for Viola and Small Orchestra*

With: **Bach, transcribed Kodály:**

*Fantasia Cromatica*; **Wilhelm**

**Friedemann Bach:** *Viola Sonata in C*  
*minor*; **Michael Colgrass:** *Variations for*

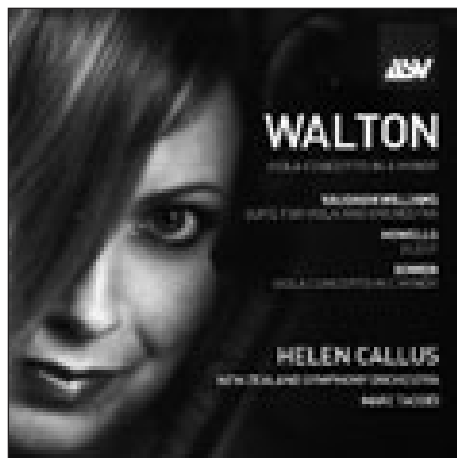
*Four Drums and Viola*

Yizhak Schotten, viola

Slovak Radio Orchestra conducted by  
Kirk Trevor; Carole Terry, harpsichord;

Frank Epstein, percussion

CRYSTAL RECORDS CD 837



Reading Bernard Kane's important article elsewhere in this issue prompted me into

buying these two recordings of the *Suite for Viola*, a work I had not previously heard. Both discs are outstanding in their way, but each has a disadvantage for Vaughan Williams enthusiasts, fatal, I fear, in the case of one of them.

Let's get this out of the way first. Vaughan Williams' *Suite* is made up of eight short movements arranged in three groups. Helen Callus plays only the first group, which is to say, three of the eight pieces. There is no indication of this on the front cover, and though it is clear enough on the back, only those who already knew the piece would, I think, realise that they were not going home with the whole work.

Lewis Foreman's notes tell us that the *Suite* "...can be played complete, or each group can be given as an entity, as here." Be that as it may, I feel misled and I think others might too. And it doesn't end there, unfortunately. Also on the disc is York Bowen's *Viola Concerto*, another work new to me, and a startlingly fine one which I cannot recommend strongly enough. But Edward Greenfield, writing in the *Gramophone*, suggests that the performers make a substantial cut in the finale. I am not able to verify this, not having seen the score, but the timing of Lawrence Power's reading on the Hyperion website shows twelve minutes against Helen Callus's eight, so the evidence is convincing.

As to the second disc, I think the programme – eclectic or cobbled together depending on your point of view – is likely to be the sticking point for most Society members. I have always found Bach's unaccompanied string music something of an ordeal – though I admit this is probably my loss – and Kodály's transcription for solo viola of a keyboard piece did nothing for me, I'm afraid.

The sonata by Johann Sebastian's eldest son is easier listening, leaving others to find more in it than I do. Contemporary American composer Michael Colgrass's piece is another matter, however. Surprisingly varied, given its scoring for solo viola and four small tuned drums, this is a challenging and compelling work which I'm sure will reward repeated hearings.

Both players are quite magnificent, exploiting a wider range of colour than we might expect from the instrument, and with spot-on tuning.

Helen Callus is superb in the Bowen, as she also is in Herbert Howells' moving and heartfelt *Elegy*. Walton's masterpiece is also very fine, though with some very slow speeds which hinder the music's forward movement, even, for this listener, to the point of self-indulgence. Yizhak Schotten is equally impressive, the two Bach pieces cleanly played, and the Colgrass a quite stunning virtuoso tour de force.

As to the Vaughan Williams, Helen Callus delivers an exquisite performance, long of line and with a wonderful, singing tone: one regrets all the more that the work is not given complete. Schotten, though, is just as fine.

In those movements where comparison is possible his playing is more robust and forthright, though there is no lack of tenderness when required. The heart of the work is surely *Ballad*, the first piece of Group 2, and here the Israeli violist, Slovak orchestra and English conductor do the composer proud. Both players are very well recorded, though I would have preferred the viola less forward in the sound picture on both discs. This was less troublesome on the Crystal disc.

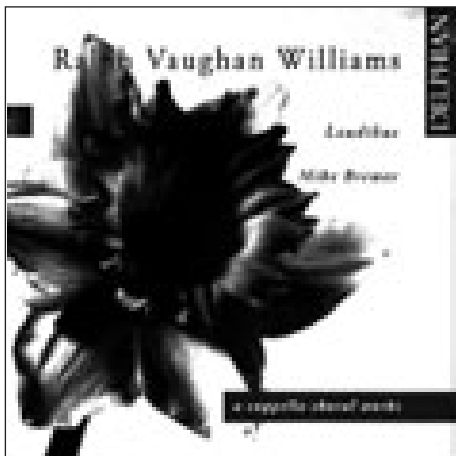
If the *Suite* is new to you, be prepared to be surprised. There are places where it doesn't really sound like Vaughan Williams – the *Polka Melancolique*, for example – and others where one is taken aback by the vehemence of the viola writing. It is a fine and compelling work, grander in scale than one imagines beforehand, and now destined, like much neglected Vaughan Williams, particularly amongst those works for solo instrument and orchestra, to become another of my firm favourites. For members wishing to discover this work, Yizhak Schotten's disc is an essential purchase.

William Hedley

**Ralph Vaughan Williams:**

*The Souls of the Righteous; Greensleeves; Three Shakespeare Songs; Prayer to the Father of Heaven; Mass in G minor; O vos omnes; Ca' the Yowes; Love is a Sickness; Three Elizabethan Part Songs; Silence and Music; Heart's Music*

Laudibus, conducted by Mike Brewer  
DELPHIAN DCD 34074



For those members of the Society who have not yet encountered this choir, I can do no better than to quote from the CD booklet: "Members of Laudibus are chosen by audition from the 140-strong National Youth Choir of Great Britain, and the unique blend and flexibility of this energetic ensemble is born of many years' intensive work by their director Mike Brewer."

The opening of the disc is arresting, a beautifully taken solo by soprano Quintilla Hughes in *The Souls of the Righteous*. *Greensleeves* follows, and this leads seamlessly into the treacherous Shakespeare settings. These are superbly sung, the choir's tuning spot-on: the sea-change has rarely sounded quite so rich and strange as here.

Sacred music takes over again with the marvellous, Parry-dedicated *Prayer to the Father in Heaven*, acting almost as a prelude to the main work on the disc, the *Mass in G minor*. Some years ago I reviewed Richard Hickox' performance of the *Mass* for the Journal, and listening to this disc prompted me to return to the earlier one, a poignant reminder of what the older conductor's death has taken from us. It is an exceptionally fine performance, but Laudibus and Mike Brewer by no means suffer by comparison: theirs is a beautiful and moving reading, and the soloists, in particular, acquit themselves better than some of the more illustrious competition. The only criticism which can be levelled against this choir as recorded here is an occasional shortage of real *pianissimo* singing. This is evident here

and there in the main work, as well as in the first of the Shakespeare settings, where the composer marks triple and even quadruple *piano*. (I have never heard a performance of the *Mass* where the final *diminuendo* recreated what I feel sure the composer had in his mind's ear. Not even Hickox achieves this.) This comment apart, Laudibus' performance is a total success and worthy to stand beside the finest available.

The rest of the disc is just as successful. The earliest music included is *Three Elizabethan Part Songs*. They are conventional, homophonic settings, and very beautiful, but demonstrating little of that remarkable insight into the text that the composer was to develop later in his career and which is blissfully evident in Shakespeare's *The Cloud Capp'd Towers* and Skelton's *Prayer to the Father in Heaven*, two examples of homophonic word setting to be found on the same disc. There is one remarkable foretaste of the composer to come, though, in his setting of the very last word, "endure", of the third song, *O Mistress Mine*. The disc is beautifully recorded in a church acoustic, and whilst members may not agree with everything Neil Butterworth writes in the booklet notes, his essay would serve as a really excellent introduction to the composer. The Journal gets a gratifying mention too!

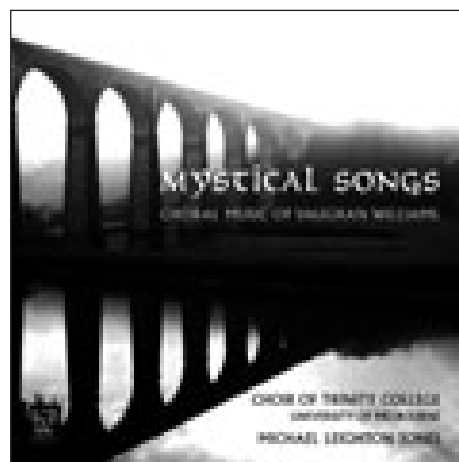
Members will be interested to know that the only music common to this anthology and Albion Records' recent disc *Where Hope is Shining* is the *Three Elizabethan Part Songs*. The Joyful Company of Singers, on Albion, are more restrained in these songs than is Mike Brewer's choir, but both views seem equally valid. In any event the Albion disc, featuring several lesser-known works, is obviously an essential purchase, as this superb Delphian disc also is.

William Hedley

**MYSTICAL SONGS**

**Ralph Vaughan Williams:**

*Mass in G minor; Five Mystical Songs; O Clap Your Hands; O Taste and See; Lord, Thou hast been our Refuge; O how amiable; Loch Lomond; Bushes and Briars; Orpheus with his Lute; Silent Noon* Choir of Trinity College, University of Melbourne; TinAlley String Quartet; Australian Chamber Brass Ensemble; Jonathan Bradley, organ and piano Michael Leighton Jones, baritone and director, ABC Classics 476 6906



The fiftieth anniversary of the death of Vaughan Williams has attracted little attention in Melbourne, so this collection, sung by one of the city's finest choirs, is indeed welcome.

The acoustics of the Trinity College Chapel are ideally suited to the composer's great *capella Mass in G minor*, his most profound choral tribute to his Tudor forbears. This is as fine a performance as one could wish to hear, scrupulous attention to the dynamic markings in the score constantly illuminating the theological content of the Latin text. It's hard to believe that the composer himself was not a believer. (How often have we heard that said!)

The other major work on the CD is the *Five Mystical Songs* with the accompaniment arranged, apparently by the composer himself, for piano quintet. I expected this to be no more than a curiosity. Far from it! Though one is inevitably reminded occasionally of *On Wenlock Edge*, the combination of piano and strings brings an entirely new dimension to the music. Yet seemingly it has never been recorded before. Only in the concluding *Antiphon* does it not quite work – the accompaniment sounds merely busy and lacks the body of sound to support the final exultant climax.

Oddly enough, the Chapel acoustic, which is so kind to the choir, is less so for their conductor, Michael Leighton Jones, as soloist in the first four of the songs. He sounds somewhat "bathroomy", a pity when he brings so much sensitivity to George Herbert's mystical poetry.

The remainder of the CD is made up of shorter works, most of them sacred in character, which makes the inclusion of *Loch Lomond, Bushes and Briars, Orpheus with his Lute* and *Silent Noon* seem rather out of place. At least the first two are Vaughan Williams' own

arrangements. The last two, arrangements by other hands, add nothing to the originals.

The accompaniments are splendid. The TinAlley String Quartet are young musicians who are already making their mark. They won the Australian Chamber Music Competition in 2005 and the Banff International String Quartet Competition in 2007. On the strength of their performance here, one hopes that they will add the Vaughan Williams string quartets to their repertoire. (TinAlley, incidentally, is a narrow thoroughfare which runs through the University of Melbourne.) Pianist Jonathan Bradley and the Australian Chamber Brass Ensemble are equally fine.

Admirers of Vaughan Williams will want this CD for the unusual scoring of the *Five Mystical Songs* and in spite of my reservations, they will not be disappointed. Lovers of choral music in general are in for a feast.

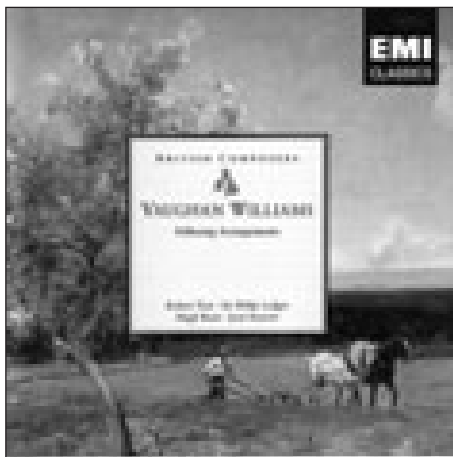
Hector Walker

#### AS I WALKED OUT

**Ralph Vaughan Williams:**

Twenty-one folk song arrangements, including *The Captain's Apprentice*,

*Bushes and Briars, The Truth Sent from Above, The Unquiet Grave; Six Studies in English Folk-Song* Robert Tear, tenor, with Sir Philip Ledger, piano; Jean Stewart, viola with Daphne Ibbott, piano, EMI British Composers 2 16156 2



I would like to draw members' attention, especially perhaps the two correspondents who are eagerly awaiting its resurrection, to the fact that the EMI LP *As I walked out* has now been issued on CD. It seems to have appeared during the summer without any publicity whatsoever, and I joyfully discovered a copy at HMV Oxford Street on a rainy morning in July last year. This secret treasure cost me £8. It has been retitled as *Vaughan Williams Folksong Arrangements*. It now has the added value

of including the *Six Studies in English Folk Song* played by Jean Stewart, bringing the disc's playing time to almost sixty-four minutes, superb value. The latter tracks are taken from a World Record Club LP, CM 46 issued in 1963, that also included some folk songs sung by Patrick Shuldham Shaw (baritone) and the Purcell Singers conducted by Imogen Holst.

Jean Stewart, who died in 2002 in her eighty-eighth year, was the dedicatee of Vaughan Williams' *Second String Quartet*. She gives a lovely performance of the *Six Studies*, ably accompanied by Daphne Ibbott.

Robert Tear's performances of the folk songs are perhaps too well known to need any comment from me. Some listeners have found his singing too sophisticated for this repertoire, but that must be a matter of personal taste. There can be no denying the power of these songs, however, most notably, perhaps, *The Unquiet Grave*, which Michael Kennedy, in the booklet notes, describes as "one of the greatest and most harrowing tunes in the world" and "Vaughan Williams's greatest work for voice and violin".

John Tebbit

# Book Reviews

#### *Music & Men: The Life and Loves of Harriet Cohen*

Helen Fry

The History Press, £15

Readers of the Journal will be relieved to know that from this disappointing book about the life and loves of the pianist Harriet Cohen, Ralph Vaughan Williams emerges with his reputation intact. He "became an intimate life-long friend", who sat in the front row at concerts "so that he could look at her lovely legs". The tone of his letters to her is reassuringly avuncular, with a hint of teasing. She was his "dearest Harriet", especially when she premiered the Piano Concerto in 1933, while in 1937, he wrote that she "played beautifully and looked beautiful".

Arnold Bax, whose correspondence with Harriet Cohen forms the core of the book, was less friendly. He wrote, "I have just returned from the VW concert at Queens Hall and was not much impressed except with the scope and line of his things, but he has no incandescence".

The book as a whole falls short on almost every level. One soon tires of the endless repetition of references to lips and breasts (were other body parts expurgated by the author?) and her references to musical matters and world events are strewn with errors, both factual and typographical. Gallipoli is in Greece (p42), Lyme Regis is on the South



Devon coast (p90) and Glencolumcille is in Scotland (p154, 182 & 221). The book's proof-readers were simply not up to the mark. Compostion (p25), foget (p27), Januray (p186) and calatogue (p292) stood out from the rest, but I particularly enjoyed Graz – Delius' home in France (p217), Chanton – Jane Austen's home in Hampshire (p76), Eward Elgar (p289) and my personal favourite, Malta QC (p258). Other readers might prefer the description of Max Beaverbrook as a newspaper magnet (p167).

The author's use of English veers from clumsy to over-heated. On p23, we are told that "Harriet's growing beauty would soon become her Achilles heel". On p32, we read that "the slow transition that had been taking place between their close friendship and lovers were emerging". On p40, "D H Lawrence...was soon counted as amongst one of her most ardent admirers", while on p46, "he (Bax) was one of the few millionaire composers able to afford a room for the afternoons of love making".

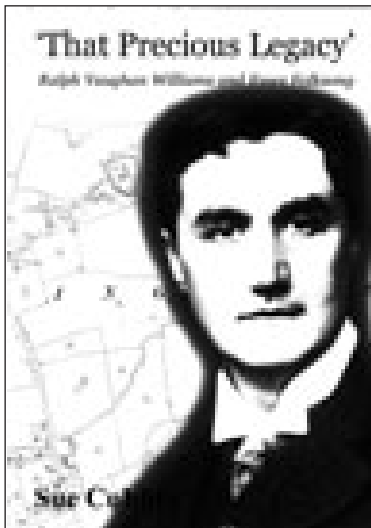
There is no doubt that Harriet Cohen was a very remarkable woman: beautiful (she was Albert Einstein's "beloved piano witch", and there are no less than 79 pictures of her in the National Portrait Gallery), talented (capable of interpreting the music of a very wide range of composers, most especially Bach) and in her later years a passionate Zionist, she undoubtedly bestrode the first half of the last century as a colossus of music. She deserves, and will one day be accorded, a serious biography, but this book falls sadly short. It largely ignores those periods of her life before and after her affair with Bax; her formative years are unconsidered, and her final decline is skimmed through. Journal readers would do better to obtain her autobiography from a second-hand bookshop or the internet – it is better written, and tells you more about the real Harriet Cohen.

Simon Coombs

***"That Precious Legacy": Ralph Vaughan Williams and Essex folksong***

Sue Cubbin

Essex Record Office, £5-99



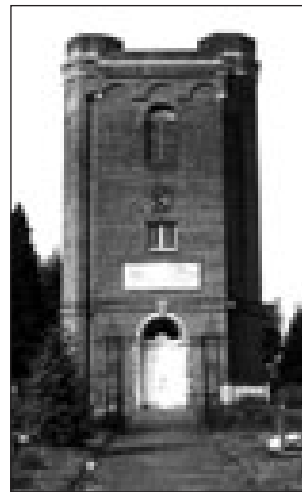
Many of the articles and films which saw the light of day in 2008 usefully served to contradict the image of Ralph Vaughan Williams as a composer concerned only with expressing his delight at the English countryside. No serious student of the composer could have held that view in any case, but others undoubtedly did, and his standing has suffered as a result. Many years were to pass before the true nature of the *Pastoral Symphony* began to reveal itself, and

this is surely one reason for misrepresenting its composer in this way. But another is certainly his interest in, or rather passion for, folksong, to the point of assimilating aspects of folksong style into his own, and even directly quoting folksong in many of his works.

Vaughan Williams' interest in folksong dates from very early in his career, but he began actively collecting folksong almost by chance in 1903, when he was introduced to a number of local singers whilst taking tea at the rectory at Ingrave in Essex. This short but important book tells the story of that meeting and the consequences for Vaughan Williams and the County of Essex, but it also does much more than that.

The book has been written by Sue Cubbin, who works at the Essex Sound and Video Archive. It is a model of its kind. In A4 format, like the Journal, its sixty-four pages might just squeeze into one of the Journal binders. The first half of the book is an admirably straightforward and readable account of how Vaughan Williams began collecting folksongs in Essex and of his working methods when doing so.

There is background information about Ingrave and the surrounding area, and also an interesting short chapter on others who have collected folksongs in the county. A chapter on the songs taught me several things I didn't know about where and how folksongs originate, as well as giving often quite touching summaries of the songs' subject matter. All this is illustrated by evocative black and white photographs and facsimile copies of extracts from local birth registers and from Vaughan Williams' own notebooks.



Ingrave Church

Many would think the book worth its modest asking price for this part alone. But the second half of the book might be even more valuable, especially to those wanting to study the subject in more detail. There is, first of all, a table of all the folksongs Vaughan Williams collected in Essex, of which there are well over a hundred. They are listed in chronological order of collection, and the names of the singers are given as well as other information gleaned from

the composer's notebooks. This table repays detailed study. There then follows a collection of thirty of the songs, of which *Bushes and Briars*, appropriately, is the first. The words of all the verses are given and the melodies are written in staff notation. Some of these songs are published here for the first time.

Vaughan Williams of course went on to collect folksongs elsewhere, an aspect of his work which is outside the remit of this book.

For those wishing to acquaint themselves – or reacquaint themselves – with the story of Vaughan Williams and folksong, and for those interested in encountering songs they almost certainly don't know, I cannot recommend this book too highly. It can be obtained from the Essex Record Office, Wharf Road, Chelmsford, CM2 6YT. Alternatively, telephone 01245 244640 or email the author on sue.cubbin@essexcc.gov.uk

William Hedley

# A New E-Bulletin Scheme introduced by Karen Fletcher

For those who don't know me, I am the RVW Society's new Publicity Officer. I have been a member of the Society since its formation and I run a small marketing company in West London, specialising in arts-based projects.

Please feel free to contact me with regard to publicity-related matters, and if you have any useful contacts that you are happy to pass onto me I will add them to our database. In this way, we can be more proactive in distributing information and raising awareness of Society activities, and hopefully outside organisations will start to send us information and promotional opportunities too.

The RVW Society has recently joined the EMF bi-monthly e-bulletin scheme, set up by the English Music Festival to promote and benefit British composer societies and trusts. Under this scheme, the Society will be able to disseminate information, such as Society news and any important composer-related events, through an email bulletin to members of music societies who join the scheme. Depending on the level of take-up by other societies and trusts, it is estimated that this could attract as many as 5,000 individual music lovers.

As an ancillary arrangement, the Society is also invited to add details of forthcoming concerts and events to the dedicated events calendar accessible through EMF's website, [www.englishmusicfestival.org.uk](http://www.englishmusicfestival.org.uk), which will be viewable by anyone, thus increasing the audience potential. If there are any events that you believe would be of interest to the Society both for our website and the EMF's online events calendar, please let me know.

If you want to receive the e-bulletin, as an RVW Society member you may opt in to receive it, free of charge, simply by emailing Roy Cheater at the English Music Festival at: [r.cheater@btinternet.com](mailto:r.cheater@btinternet.com) with your email address. You must request this individually to meet with data protection regulations. Once registered, you will receive all future issues until you opt out.

You may also receive the free English Music Festival newsletter, *Spirit of England*, which is sent out quarterly by post, with information about the next Festival and related news. Please send your name and address to Em Marshall, telephone 07808 473889, or by post to: The Red House, Lanchards Lane, Shillingstone, Dorset DT11 0QU. *(Please note that you will not receive this additional information unless you specifically request it.)*

We very much hope that you will see the potential of this scheme to all involved in promoting, performing and appreciating our home-grown composers and their music. In the meantime if you have any questions about the scheme, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

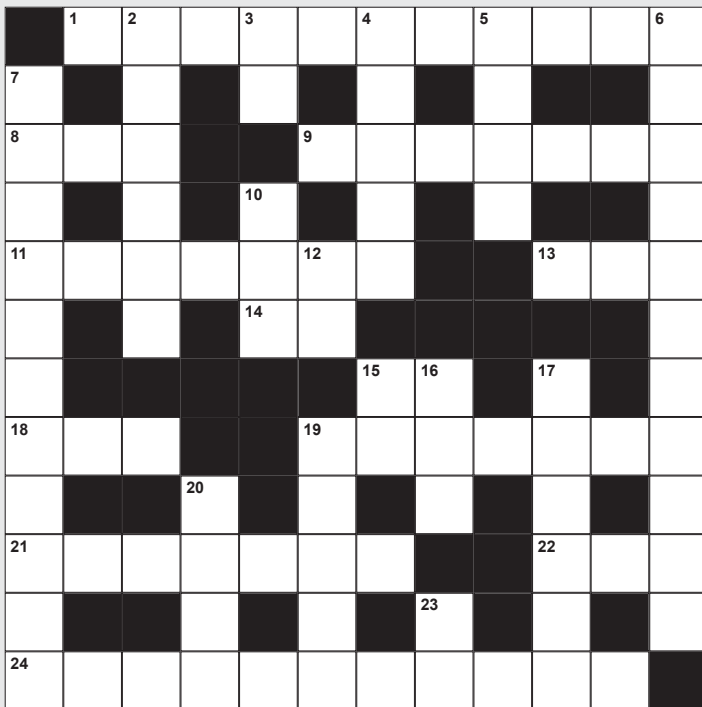
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## Short Notes for Contributors

**Editing the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society Journal is a privilege and a pleasure, but the time required is not always easy to find in a busy life. Please help by reading and respecting these simple guidelines.**

- 1 All submissions, however presented, are welcome and receive equal attention, but email or disc is preferred. Hard copy, typed or handwritten, always requires retyping which takes time and can lead to mistakes.
- 2 Please try to submit your piece as early as possible, especially if it is in hard copy.
- 3 Keep the layout simple. Leave a clear line between paragraphs, but let me decide what should be in smaller or larger type and so on. Please keep the margins constant throughout the piece.
- 4 Try to avoid footnotes. Supplementary information is better incorporated into the text. If you want to cite sources of information a list of sources at the end is better for the purposes of our Journal than a footnote after each quote.
- 5 Please refer to Vaughan Williams by his name rather than by his initials.
- 6 If you are planning a big piece, get in touch first to make sure no one else is preparing something similar.
- 7 Whether contributing an article, review or a letter, please include your address and, where applicable, your email address.

# RVW Crossword No. 30 by Michael Gainsford



## Across

1. He described the passions of RVW on BBC TV (4,7)
8. Sprite (3)
9. Sir John who took Pilgrim's part in BBC production in 1943 (7)
11. Five Tudor Portraits first performed here (7)
13. Uncouth person, once described as 'muddied' (3)
14. Doctor (of medicine, not music) (1,1)
15. \*\* Lovely Rose in Quilter's song (2)
18. The age of the Commonwealth in 1940 (3)
19. John the famous Tudor lute song composer (7)
21. RVW wrote music for this Greek play in 1911 (7)
22. Curtail 5 down for Indian food (3)
24. 20 down's unpublished dirge of 1896 (5,6)

## Down

2. City celebrated in an elegy (by a Cambridge man!) (6)
3. Note this well! (1,1)
4. Lord who ruled BBC with a rod of iron (come back please!) (5)
5. Over hill and this in RVW song (4)
6. Early setting of Herrick, recorded in 2008 (2, 9)
7. Baritone in first performance of 'England, my England' (6,5)
10. Little Island that featured voice of RVW on film (3)
12. Recording medium (1,1)
15. \*\* down Moses (Tippett) (2)
16. Tudor composer Thomas Vautor wrote a song about a sweet Suffolk one (3)
17. She has a lament in 'Folk Songs from Newfoundland' (6)
19. Valentine the speaker at the first performance of 'Thanksgiving for Victory' (5)
20. Reverberation (4)
23. A metronome marking (1,1)

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*RVW: A Bibliography* by Graham Muncy and Robin Barber £ 6.00 plus 55p.

### Available from:

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 Secretary, The RVW Society, 5th Floor, Old Mutual Place  
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 Martin.Murray@omg.co.uk  
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## Answers Page 24

**Next Edition:**  
**June 2009**  
**Vaughan Williams**  
**and London**  
**Deadline for**  
**contributions:**  
**March 16 2009**

## Call for Papers

The October 2009  
 edition will concentrate  
 on Vaughan Williams  
 and folksong

Deadline for contributions:  
 August 16 2009