

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS SOCIETY JOURNAL

WIDENING THE KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF THE MUSIC OF RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

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From the Editor



“...I await your reactions with interest.” These were my words in October when, not without some trepidation, I presented the *Journal*’s “new look”. Turning the pages of forty-five issues, over fifteen years’ worth, one sees little significant change in the appearance of the *Journal*. A little colour was introduced on the front cover in June 2002 to draw attention to the publication of Ursula Vaughan Williams’ *Paradise Remembered*, and the distinctive yellow band first appeared in February 2003. In all other respects the *Journal* had looked substantially the same since the first issue in September 1994. It was, in short, an old friend. With membership around the one thousand mark, I was expecting to hear from a fair number of you, and thought it likely that some members might be less than happy to see an old friend interfered with. In the event, only seven members sent in their views, and of those, not one got in touch primarily on the subject of the new look, but wrote in on other matters and mentioned the new look in passing. I was happy, though, that all seven reactions were positive. This, for example, from a distinguished American member: “I have just received the October 2009 *Journal*, the first in its ‘face-lifted’ incarnation. A resounding ‘Bravo!’ to you and Mr. Kasa – it looks wonderful at first glance, and I shall be spending the weekend reading and studying its articles and reviews. The cover photograph of RVW, which I have not seen before, is stunning – *that* is the face of the creator of the Fifth, the Sixth, the *Dona Nobis Pacem*, the *Hodie*...” In the world of commercial publishing, what we have done would be called a redesign, but I try to avoid using the term because I don’t want the *Journal* to look “designed” at all. Tadeusz Kasa understood this perfectly when he produced his new version of the outside pages, perfectly reflecting my desire for something simple, sober and clear. These three words apply to the inside pages too, where the improvement in the layout is an ongoing process. So if you liked the *Journal*’s new look, I’m delighted, and if you didn’t, I hope at least that you find it easy and pleasant to read. If you don’t care either way, at least we haven’t offended you. But I’m still surprised at how few of you got in touch.

Members will note that this issue of the *Journal* is thinner than usual. Another surprise! The first issue after the facelift solicited fewer contributions than I have ever received. At one point I began to worry that I was going to have to write most of it myself! If members want to avoid this in future, to your slates, I say! Quite a few letters came in, though, and reading them and preparing them for publication has been, as always, a most interesting experience. I take the view that the letters pages represent the most accessible platform for members’ opinions, and it is very rare indeed that I am unwilling to publish a letter. However, let me take this opportunity to remind members once again that the publication of a letter or an article in the *Journal* should in no way be taken as an indication that it represents my own views or those of the trustees of the Society.

There will be no specific theme for the forthcoming issue of the *Journal*. You are therefore invited to rhapsodise freely on our chosen composer, his life and the people around him. For the following *Journal*, however, due to appear in October 2010, I’m happy to pass on a suggestion from a member, who writes as follows: “Vaughan Williams certainly believed in a composer being involved with the community. One example of this is all that he did as conductor of Leith Hill Musical Festival over a period of nearly fifty years... [It would be interesting to read any] reminiscences of RVW by people who met him or sang with him or have stories of his rehearsing etc. while we still have this link.” Please get to work, then, on the subject of “Vaughan Williams and the musical amateur”. This has received relatively little attention in these pages, and I think it can be profitably explored. Leith Hill is, of course, a subject full of possibilities, but we shouldn’t forget the music written for amateur performers, nor the composer’s willingness to arrange his works for performance by reduced forces. And if you did ever sing or play with the great man yourself, your memories will be especially precious to us all.

William Hedley

Symphony No. 8 in D minor: An Introduction and CD Review.

Robin Barber

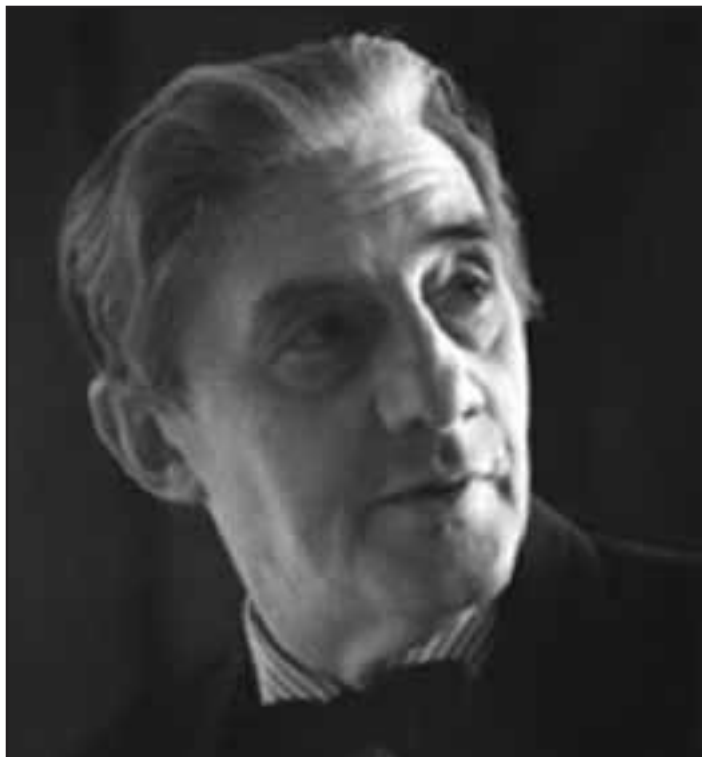
“Best new symphonic work.” (New York Music Critics’ Circle, 1956)

“What a surprise!” (Sir William Walton)

“Scored for what is known as the ‘Schubert’ orchestra: with the addition of a harp. Also there is a large supply of extra percussion, including all the ‘phones and ‘spiels known to the composer.” (Ralph Vaughan Williams)

Shortly after its first performance Vaughan Williams’ penultimate symphony was dubbed “the Little Eighth”. Like Beethoven’s, it is sandwiched between two epic, powerful symphonies and has suffered neglect, perhaps because of its relative brevity, apparent light-heartedness and unusual sonorities.

Along with the composer’s Ninth Symphony it has been referred to as “late Vaughan Williams” and often confusingly denounced as either modern and incomprehensible or reactionary and looking back. Both views are, of course, nonsense. In my opinion the Eighth is a gem of a symphony that contains many of the composer’s familiar fingerprints developed over fifty years of composing, and yet it looks forward to new sound worlds. I would recommend it as an introduction to the symphony cycle, since it is very approachable, succinct and has a rousing ending. Apart from the Fourth Symphony, with which it has little affinity, this is the only symphony not to end quietly – often with the composer’s trademark marking, *a niente* (a quiet fading to nothing). Unlike the



“Glorious John” Barbirolli

Fourth, which ends in anger, here we are treated to a blaze of uplifting brass and percussion leaving the listener, perhaps for the only time at the end of a Vaughan Williams symphony, cheerful, exhilarated and non reflective. I imagine that many readers will only know this symphony through a recording, since it is not often given an outing in the concert hall. The three live performances I have been fortunate to attend were spectacular visual as well as aural experiences due to the sparkling array of percussion and timpani. I am ever hopeful that this neglect will end, as a good performance gets a tremendous audience response.

The symphony was composed between 1953 and 1955 and the premiere was given at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester on 2 May 1956 by the Hallé Orchestra under the baton of Sir John Barbirolli. The score is “Dedicated to John Barbirolli”, qualified later on the autograph score after the first performance, “For glorious John, with love and admiration from Ralph”. The score was given to Barbirolli who asked all the members of the orchestra to sign it and one signature is that of the composer, Arthur Butterworth, who I believe was principal trumpet at the time. The first performance was very well received and the symphony was quickly taken up in the U.S.A. by Eugene Ormandy and Leopold Stokowski.

Until this work, the composer was not given to numbering his symphonies, simply referring to each one either by a name or key signature. When it was pointed out that this new “symphony in D” had the same key as an earlier one (the Fifth) and this could lead to some confusion in the future, he reluctantly agreed to it being given as number 8, though later changing its key to D minor! Of all his symphonies this seems to be the one that is most definitely not about anything: there is no discernible programme, and the composer’s own notes to the score are highly technical with no reference to meanings or influences. This is absolute music and is best listened to without any preconceptions for it contains much charm, beauty and excitement that need no explanation. Apart from the “Schubert orchestra” with an additional harp, the score also calls for extra percussion with five players, a side drum, triangle, cymbals, bass drum, vibraphone, xylophone, glockenspiel, tubular bells and three tuned gongs “as used in Puccini’s *Turandot*”, these last, *ad. lib.*, “not absolutely essential, but their inclusion is highly desirable.” The availability of these tuned gongs, which are rare in the orchestral repertoire and expensive to hire, may eventually have contributed in part to the symphony’s neglect.

There are four movements:

1 *Fantasia (Variazioni senza Tema)*

Described by the composer as seven variations in search of a theme, this is the longest and most complex movement of the symphony. It has a magical opening with a soft fanfare in rising fourths for trumpet being answered by the cool shimmering sounds of the vibraphone and celesta. A melody on solo flute is followed by an impassioned utterance from the strings; but no definite theme really emerges from these beginnings, rather a succession of different

motifs which the composer plays around with but doesn't develop. Often described as "kaleidoscopic", the music is a highly attractive and original mosaic of sounds. Despite its superficial jocularity, repeated listening reveals moments of tension just below the surface. It ends with a big, satisfying climax, before quietly returning to the opening bars, which James Day likens to "a snake biting its own tail".

2 *Scherzo alla marcia (per stromenti a fiato)*

This movement is very short indeed and is written for wind instruments alone. The music initially suggests a military band in a rather jaunty and happy mood. Earlier in his career Vaughan Williams had composed pieces such as the *Toccata Marziale* and the *English Folk Songs Suite* for band, but the music here is much less formal. The bassoon, trumpets and eventually flutes are prominent. There is a delightful pastoral episode dominated by flutes and oboes before the rather raucous ending, where all the wind instruments are in full flow until the rather dismissive final trill on the piccolo pops the balloon. Some commentators have suggested that Vaughan Williams was aping Shostakovich here, but I can hear none of the shrieks and anguish that are the Russian composer's trademarks. Perhaps the third movement (*presto*) of his Ninth Symphony is the only comparison.

3 *Cavatina (per stromenti ad arco)*

For strings alone, this is deeply felt and lyrical music. Michael Kennedy reminds us that the main theme on the cellos bears a similarity to Bach's "*O Sacred Head, now wounded*". It demonstrates the composer's sheer mastery of the string orchestra with lovely solos for violin and cello. Often compared with the *Tallis Fantasia*, I think it stands on its own and, as the title suggests, has a more singing quality than the earlier masterpiece.

4 *Toccata*

Perhaps a bit tongue in cheek, Hugh Ottaway suggested that Vaughan Williams, with a nod towards Aaron Copland, could have called this "Toccata for the Common Man". There is certainly an important role for the trumpet in this movement but there I think the comparison ends. The composer in his notes describes the opening as "sinister", but I can't hear anything too troubling. There are no great profundities here, and a first listening is likely to leave the impression of rumbustious music enlivened by percussion, the composer having fun for fun's sake. If there is a darker side, I have yet to find it. An energetic movement lasting barely five minutes, its seeming playfulness and good humour belies the skill and ingenuity of its composition. A loud and exhilarating climax brings this wonderful and not so "little" symphony to a close.

CD Review

In researching the available recordings of the symphony I was surprised to discover fifteen performances, including a full colour DVD. Some of the recordings from my own collection have later been re-issued on different labels but they are essentially the same.

Studio Recordings:

1956: Sir John Barbirolli/Hallé Orchestra (EMI Phoenixa CDM 7 64197 2)*

1956: Sir Adrian Boult/London Philharmonic Orchestra (Belart)

1969: Sir Adrian Boult/London Philharmonic Orchestra (EMI Classics CDM 7 64021 2)

1971: André Previn/London Symphony Orchestra (BMG Classics 82876-55708-2)***

1990: Bryden Thomson/London Symphony Orchestra (Chandos CHAN 8941)

1991: Leonard Slatkin/Philharmonia Orchestra (RCA Victor Red Seal 09026 61196 2)

1992: Vernon Handley/Royal Liverpool P O (EMI Eminence 077776479828)****

1993: Sir Andrew Davis/BBC Symphony Orchestra (Warner Classics 256461730-2) ***

1996: Kees Bakels/Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra (Naxos 8.550737)

2000: Bernard Haitink/London Philharmonic Orchestra (EMI Classics 7243 5 70862 5)

2003: Richard Hickox/London Symphony Orchestra (Chandos CHAN 10103)

Concert Recordings:

1961: Sir John Barbirolli/Hallé Orchestra (Aura Music AUR 181-2)

1964: Leopold Stokowski/BBC Symphony Orchestra (Carlton Classics 15656 91312)**

1967: Sir John Barbirolli/Hallé Orchestra (BBC Legends BBCL 4100-2)

1972: Sir Adrian Boult/London Philharmonic Orchestra (EMI Classics DVB 38845690)

* now available on Dutton CDSJB 1021

** now on BBC Legends label BBCL 4165-2

*** boxed set of all nine symphonies

**** now Classics for Pleasure 7243 5 75309 2 7

Any comparative review of Vaughan Williams' Eighth Symphony has to start with Sir John Barbirolli's premiere recording with the Hallé Orchestra, made in 1956, a month after the first concert performance, and originally issued on a Pye/Nixa 10" vinyl. Currently it is available on a Dutton CD. With a timing of 26:29 this is the quickest of all the recordings. My version is a 1993 digital re-mastering on EMI and the sound is remarkably good, with just occasionally some distortion in the louder passages, and obviously the dynamic range is not as wide as in some modern recordings. The performance is wonderful and as the timings in the appendix show, Barbirolli doesn't linger in any of the movements, though in the opening *Fantasia* he does appear to pause momentarily after some of the variations. The scherzo is witty and full of mischief, it really does sound like a parody of a marching band. In the *Cavatina* the emphasis is on song-like melodies rather than *gravitas*. After a sparkling finale you do wonder where the time went. This is an essential recording for any collection, both in terms of performance and historical importance, but should we accept it as the Gold Standard?

There are also two live performances from Barbirolli with the Hallé available, though these are perhaps for the very serious or obsessional collector, and I wouldn't recommend them as first line listening. What is interesting about them, however, is that Barbirolli appears as time went by to broaden and deepen his view of the symphony. The first comes from a 1961 concert given in Lugano, Switzerland. This is an Italian CD, the liner notes are abysmal and don't refer to Vaughan Williams or the performance at all! I assume it was from a concert when the orchestra was on tour. The recording is however, surprisingly good, very clear and with an excellent dynamic range. The playing is occasionally marred by poor ensemble. The Swiss audience was very well behaved: I was only aware of one small cough and they applauded enthusiastically at the end. The second is a recording of a 1967 Proms performance,

and here the first movement seems less incisive than before and not so well played. The scherzo is unchanged, perky as ever. In the last two movements Barbirolli's interpretation becomes more expansive, the *Cavatina* is most wonderfully evoked with great depth, and with some fine violin and cello solos. The finale is just a degree less frenetic than in the studio version with the result we can hear more of what is going on behind the battery of percussion. Writing in an earlier edition of the *Journal*, Eric Seddon commended this CD as simply the best performance of the Eighth he had ever heard, and his detailed review is well worth reading. The recording is clear and there is only minimal audience intrusion until the enthusiastic applause.

Sir Adrian Boult was quick to record the symphony, and his version from the pioneering Decca cycle came a few months after Barbirolli's. The composer sat in on the recording sessions and obviously had some say in the interpretation, and the tempi here in all movements are just that little bit slower. Boult's is a measured and less emotional reading and as such is a good foil to the Barbirolli. The recording was the first of the cycle to be in stereo and still sounds good. The later (1969) recording on EMI reveals no new insights, though it is a touch more relaxed and in better sound. Both can be recommended.

A live recording comes from the 1972 anniversary concert which was filmed by the BBC, and we are fortunate now to have this on an EMI DVD. This is both fascinating listening and viewing. Despite his eighty-three years, Boult was a magisterial figure on the podium, the epitome of calmness and wisdom. His technique, with the famed extra long baton, was eloquent and authoritative, left hand gestures being employed sparingly but very precisely. He draws a fine and very dynamic performance from the London Philharmonic Orchestra. It is well filmed with good close ups of both conductor and players. I found it helpful to be able to identify which of the battery of percussion was playing at any one time. It is coupled with Beethoven's Violin Concerto (with Nathan Milstein) and I thoroughly enjoyed the whole disc.



André Previn

André Previn's version comes from the time of that very close and fruitful relationship he had with the London Symphony Orchestra which produced many fine recordings. I think his cycle of the Vaughan Williams symphonies was one of their greatest achievements together. Previn draws an impeccable performance from the orchestra in clear and balanced sound. The third movement is dark and deeply meditative, whereas the finale has a wonderful open air feel at times, suggesting a bracing sea voyage. I came to first know the symphony from this recording and it remains a favourite. Unfortunately, it seems only to be currently available as part of a box set of the symphonies.

Before researching these recordings, **Bryden Thomson's** Chandos version was new to me. I was completely unmoved by his ponderous interpretation which seems the antithesis of Barbirolli. This recording is by far the longest, and the first movement is so slow it feels at times as if it could grind to a halt. In adopting a rather stately and expansive approach the conductor doesn't evoke a magical, shimmering sound world, and there is none of the momentum or excitement of other recordings.

I feel sure the composer did not intend it thus. The *Cavatina* is elegiac and rather sad at times, maybe a view that could be justified, and the string playing is faultless. The *Toccata* is taken at a sedate pace with the percussion sounding rather inhibited: it just never takes off. The L.S.O do their best, and the recording is full and spacious, but this is not a version I shall return to. I know that there are many who admire Thomson's symphony cycle and I am sure some will strongly disagree with me.

Altogether more successful is **Leonard Slatkin**, in a reading close to Barbirolli's but in better sound. No meandering in the first movement here, this is a refined and incisive view. A sublimely ethereal *Cavatina* is followed by a nicely paced and very clear finale. Throughout, the Philharmonia play with great refinement and the sound engineering is excellent. The symphony is preceded by the short *Flourish for Glorious John*, a first recording of a tribute the composer wrote for the opening concert of the Hallé Orchestra's one hundredth season in 1957. Coupled with a strong performance of the Ninth Symphony, this is a very enjoyable CD.

Vernon Handley was a highly experienced conductor of Vaughan Williams both in the concert hall and studio. His cycle of the symphonies is arguably the most consistent of all, and he does a wonderful job with the Eighth. A dramatic performance, the slow movement is no nostalgic reverie, being lighter in feel than some others. In a previous review, William Hedley comments "The *Scherzo* has a pomp and mocking quality seldom heard in other recordings...listen to the final *Toccata*! It's a real orchestral *tour de force* and a furious finale in the truest sense of the word." I can't disagree with that: this fine performance and recording, now on a budget price label, can be recommended without qualification.

Sir Andrew Davis on Teldec has been maligned by some critics for uneven tempi, but for me, apart from the first movement, this is a magnificent version, and captured in a superb recording with a tremendous dynamic range which repays keeping the volume up. So what goes wrong in that opening?

Well, it's just a bit too quick. Of course the music should not be left to hang out to dry, but those extraordinary chords from the trumpet followed by vibraphone and celesta surely need some space to weave their spell and coax you into the extraordinary sound world of this symphony. Thereafter the music takes off nicely

and the alternating moods of the variations are well realized, the agitated music towards the end bearing some resemblance to *Satan's dance of triumph*, from *Job*. The final chords which repeat the opening suffer unfortunately in the same way. The scherzo is one of the finest, bright and jazzy; Miles Davis would have been at home here. The slow movement is played as a meditation, profound but not to my mind an elegy for the old pre-Great War compositions (*Lark* and *Tallis*) and the sound is just wonderful. The finale has tremendous vitality, a surf-blown journey through choppy waters, the percussion never drowning the tunes and at the end we land safely in a blaze of sunshine. I would not want to be without this CD and if you can live with the deficiencies of the opening then it would be a strong contender.



Kees Bakels did not conduct all of the symphonies in the Naxos cycle, but those he did were largely very successful. This disc has been widely praised for the quality of its sound and commended as a demonstration CD for hi-fi equipment, particularly for the *Sinfonia Antartica*. The sound quality obviously spills over into the recording of the Eighth, and it is stunning, although forward. This is one of the finest of all the versions I have reviewed here.

The approach is deeply serious with less emphasis on jocularity; in particular, the scherzo is given very straight treatment and has no element of parody. In the past some critics have suggested the work is more of a concerto for orchestra, but Bakels' approach is truly symphonic, so the movements don't stand alone as individual showcases. There are many moments of true grandeur. This performance is a very strong one, exceptionally clear and with fine playing from the Bournemouth orchestra.

Fellow Dutchman, **Bernard Haitink** would naturally be expected to emphasize the symphonic rather than showcase aspects, and indeed he does so, but at a price. Rob Furneaux, in an earlier review for the *Journal*, condemned Haitink's interpretation as "a seemingly blatant attempt to mount a counter-invasion and reclaim the symphony as Germanic." Strong stuff! Certainly Haitink's is a heavyweight approach seeking an expansive and majestic sound. Not as ponderous as Thomson, he sacrifices some of the drive, shifting moods and colours that make this symphony so unique,

with the result that the first movement glows but doesn't glisten. The *Scherzo* is taken rather literally and does at times have a resemblance to Shostakovich.

The *Cavatina*, easily the slowest of all the recordings, is played with a heartfelt *gravitas* creating an almost Brucknerian and religious aura, beautifully realized, but ultimately Haitink lingers just that bit too long. The last movement is marked *Moderato Maestoso*, and we certainly get majesty, but the percussion are reined in and it lacks the exhilaration of other recordings. The conductor's view is not, in my opinion, quite right for this symphony, whereas in the Ninth Symphony with which it is coupled it works to supreme effect. A missed opportunity, perhaps? Throughout the recording is first rate and the London Philharmonic Orchestra are on top form.

The late **Richard Hickox** gave several fine performances of the symphony in the concert hall and his experience and empathy with the score makes his a very convincing recording, one close to Boult's, perhaps? In any event it is quite faultless to my ears, with a sumptuous recording from Chandos giving great detail and dynamic range. Momentum is never lost in the outer movements and the *Scherzo* is suitably chirpy. The slow movement has a great nobility, though some critics have suggested the playing is too smooth. Not for me.

Finally, any performance of Vaughan Williams from **Leopold Stokowski** is worth hearing and his 1964 Proms performance with the BBC Symphony Orchestra is no exception. This is a very idiosyncratic but attractive reading. Very slow tempi in the first and third movements give a very expansive feeling. In the other two movements he does the complete opposite, with faster tempi than any other conductor.

The breathless scherzo barely lasts three minutes, and similarly in the *Toccata* he really puts the foot down. The digitally re-mastered sound is good and audience noise not intrusive. This is perhaps a purchase for Stokowski aficionados.

If you want this symphony on your shelves then the Barbirolli premiere is an absolute must and you could happily leave it at that. However I believe at least one modern digital recording should complement it, and maybe give you a different view. If I had to choose just one, it would be Kees Bakels on the budget price Naxos label. If funds permit I would also strongly urge readers to get the Boult DVD, as it will add not only to understanding the "freakish orchestration" (Kennedy) of the symphony but to the composer's remarkable technique.

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New Light on *I vow to Thee,* *my Country*

Alan Gibbs

[This is a slightly revised version of an article originally published in the *Bulletin of the Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Bulletin 257, Vol. 18:22, October 2008.]

Sir Valentine Chirol's *Memoir* (1919) of Sir Cecil Spring Rice (1859-1918) states that this hymn was "written on 12 Jan. 1918...on the eve of his final departure from Washington", where he had been as our Ambassador from April 1913. It is, to be precise, a new version of another poem, dated "probably 1910-12" in his MS book (below), from the period when he was Ambassador to Sweden.¹

In Washington, Sir Cecil was a vital link representing Lloyd George's government in the matter of the USA's possible entry into the war. His principal dealings were with William Jennings Bryan, American Secretary of State, runner-up in two presidential elections and destined to be remembered as the anti-Darwinist counsel for the prosecution in the Scopes "Monkey" Trial of 1925.

As a parting token of their warm friendship Bryan sent him lines entitled "Heart to Heart Appeals", to which Sir Cecil's new version was a response. As will be apparent, the first verse was not merely modified, it was completely rewritten, no doubt because the Englishman "was himself acutely aware of the dangers of appearing jingoistic."² Out went the imagery of a warlike Britannia, although the motherhood metaphor remained in the second verse. This was common enough in England (e.g. in *The Motherland Song Book*, with its banal "Mother of mine" refrains), and equally in America, where Whitman could sing of "Thou Mother with thy equal brood, /Thou varied chain of different states, yet one identity only." It is consistent with the Judaic "God is in the midst of her" and therefore *Urbs Dei* ("City of God"), but is at odds with the curious new title *The Two Fatherlands*.

This first occurs in *Songs of Praise*, in which Percy Dearmer, the Words Editor, seems often to have supplied not only the original titles to the poems, but sometimes abbreviated forms and titles where none previously existed (e.g. *Soul and Body* to Shakespeare's Sonnet 146.) Ironically, in view of the particular circumstances, "Fatherland" has German associations, and one cannot help concluding that the poem would have been best left without a title, or *Urbs Dei* retained – or the first line fulfil the function,

if need be. The debate continues as to whether the new emphasis on sacrifice in the first verse does enough to soften the notion of serving one's country "above all earthly things" (to restore the logical order of words). But Gerry Hanson points out³ that "nationalism can, and often does, have evil connotations, whereas patriotism – the love of one's country and a willingness to defend its freedom – is a noble concept." As we contemplate the world in 2008, we may well wonder whether peace ever is attainable without sacrifice:

*I vow to thee, my country – all earthly things above –
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love,
The love that asks no question: the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best:
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.*⁴

The second verse remains virtually unaltered, except in lines 3 and 4, where "you" becomes "we" – perhaps the inclusive word was preferred to the impersonal for the American reader to whom it was directed – and "pride" replaces "strength" – a comforting straw for all those grieving relatives to cling to?

There has been a mystery as to how the poem came to be so memorably adapted to the central theme from *Jupiter* in *The Planets*. One theory is that the poet's daughter Betty passed it on to Imogen, Holst's daughter, who was her classmate at St. Paul's Girls' School.⁵ Betty "vividly remembered choir, orchestra and

Urbs Dei:

*I hear my country calling, away across the sea,
Across the waste of water she calls and cries to me –
Her sword is guided at her side, her helmet on her head,
And round her feet are lying the dying and the dead –
I was the noise of battle, the thunder of her gun –
~~My sword is in my hand, a son among thy sons.~~
I have to see my mother –*

*and there's another country, I've heard of long ago –
Most dear to men that love her, most great to them that know –
You may not count her armours: you may not see her things:
Her fortress is a faithful heart: her strength is suffering –
And soul by soul, and silently, her shining banners increase –
And her ways are ways of gentleness, and all her paths are peace.*

conducting lessons” in Holst’s time as Director of Music there, but the Spring Rice family has no recollection of how the *Jupiter* theme came to be associated with the poem. Betty’s daughter Caroline writes “Even my grandmother, Lady Spring Rice didn’t know.”⁶ Further, Imogen did not enter St. Paul’s until the autumn of 1921, the year in which the poem was first published with the music as a unison song. However, research into the diaries of Lucy Broadwood (1858-1929) whom, like Vaughan Williams, we remember in this anniversary year, has now revealed the most plausible route. The Broadwoods, famous as a family firm for making pianos played by the likes of Beethoven and Chopin, were close neighbours of the Vaughan Williamses and Wedgwoods (Ralph’s mother’s family) at their country houses in Surrey. Lucy, following in the footsteps of her uncle the Rev. John Broadwood, was “a pioneer of folksong research”, to quote her beautiful memorial in Rusper church. She not only introduced Ralph to folksong, but gave him advice (which he requested) on his music; she also figured with him and his great friend Gustav Holst in the revival of the music of Byrd, Purcell and Bach in excellent amateur performances. At her London address she was in regular contact with them, and was also a close friend of the Spring Rices in Kensington, particularly Cecil’s sisters Agnes and Georgina (Georgie). Her cousin Aubrey Birch Reynardson married their sister Margaret in 1894. The following entries in her diaries are relevant to our subject:

1 Feb 1891

To the Spring-Rices & we sang madrigals. Was introduced to Mr. Cecil S. Rice.

14 Feb 1918

News of the sudden death of Sir Cecil Spring-Rice in Canada, whilst staying with the Duke of Devonshire. [He had died overnight from a heart attack, after a vigorous afternoon’s skiing. The Duke was Governor-General of Canada, and Sir Cecil was buried in Ottawa.]

15 Feb 1918

Wrote to Agnes Spring-Rice & Margt. Birch Reynardson, on the death of their brother.

21 Feb 1918

After luncheon I attended the memorial service for Sir Cecil Spring-Rice.

She encloses a newspaper cutting of the service at Holy Trinity, Sloane Street, where the distinguished list of mourners includes a former Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour, the Italian and US Ambassadors and Lord and Lady Farrer. Another enclosure, dated 26 April of the same year, is a carbon copy of a typescript, “Cecil Spring-Rice’s poem to Mr. Bryan. Washington. 12th Jan. 1918.” It is described as “copied by Oliver Farrer from unpublished MS. and given to L.E.B. [Lucy] by Evangeline Farrer.” Evangeline Knox married Lord Farrer in 1903, but his first wife had been Cecil’s sister Evelyn, who died in 1898.⁷

Oliver was Lord Farrer’s son by Evangeline and destined to become the fourth Baron, but only thirteen years of age when he typed the poem. Not surprisingly, perhaps, there is one evident mistyping, “pays undaunted” instead of “makes undaunted”, and this has been carried over into Lucy’s own handwritten copy, which is also in the Surrey History Centre archive. The following year, we read this very significant entry:

6 Oct 1919

Wrote to Ralph Vaughan Williams with Sir Cecil Spring-Rice’s poem “I vow to thee, my country”.

There is a further entry which may, or may not, be connected:

20 Oct 1919

Heard from... Mr. Gustav Holst etc etc

Unfortunately, none of Holst’s letters survived her periodic tearing-up sessions. Nor has her letter to Vaughan Williams enclosing the poem survived, or his presumably forwarding it to Gustav. But Vaughan Williams commonly passed opportunities on to Holst: early on it could be organist work and a school teaching post, later a composition commission, e.g. choral settings of Welsh folksongs. In 1914-16 Holst had composed *The Planets*. Balfour Gardiner had paid for a private performance in 1918, *Jupiter* had been launched on the public in a selection in February 1919, and finally the whole suite was heard in November 1920. In the July of that year, Vaughan Williams observed in *Music and Letters* that the *Jupiter* theme “might be used by the League of Arts, set to appropriate words (not the rhyming homilies of *The Motherland Song Book*) and sung at points of vantage when next we have a peace celebration (which Heaven forbend).” Imogen recalled that “in 1921, when he was asked to set the poem as a unison song, [my father] was so overworked and overtired that it was a relief to him to discover that the words ‘fitted’ the tune from *Jupiter*.”⁸

This is surely what Holst himself had in mind in his letter to John Drinkwater of 11 December 1923, when the latter had requested that he set one of his poems: “The last time I was asked to do anything of the sort I failed completely until a lucky day when I discovered that the poem that had been sent me fitted a tune in one of *The Planets*.”⁹ So in 1921 the combination of Spring Rice’s words and Holst’s music first appeared, with orchestral accompaniment such as the League of Arts often used, and with the blessing of Sir Cecil’s widow and the publishers of *The Planets*, Curwen. Compromise was necessary to suit the range of the voice, so gone was the wide sweep of the melody beginning on the gravelly low G of the violins, plus violas, cellos and horns at the same pitch; the key was changed from E flat major to C; and the continuation of the tune from the third phrase onwards was put down an octave. Small changes were made to adapt the rhythm to the words. The ten phrases of the tune, as against six lines in each verse, meant repeating some of the text, and an introduction was fashioned from the third and fourth phrases. In 1925 it finally emerged in the compact form familiar to us, as a hymn in the groundbreaking *Songs of Praise* (music editors, Vaughan Williams and Martin Shaw.)

Bernard Shaw once commented to Percy Scholes, at a performance of *The Planets*, that the tune “ought to go at half the speed. It has no place in *Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity*. It expresses all the sorrows of Ireland.”¹⁰ Scholes agreed with him and Vaughan Williams as to its suitability for a national outpouring, but with the reservation that “the range is too great for popular singing.” The compass is, in fact, slightly smaller than that of another national favourite, *Jerusalem*, but the contour makes for difficulty by its insistence on a high, repeated note of climax.

This may explain why Vaughan Williams wrote an alternative melody for the later Enlarged Edition of *Songs of Praise* (1931), *Abinger*, named after the locality of the Farrers’ home, as Holst’s had been named after his at Thaxted. Vaughan Williams’ tune is both attractive and singable, but was destined, as in the case of at least ten other settings by the like of Walford Davies, Martin and Geoffrey Shaw, not to be taken to the nation’s hearts as was *Thaxted* – for which he had only himself – and Holst – to blame!

[In preparing this article I have been especially indebted to Thomas Arthur and Caroline Kenny. Also to Michael Goatcher, Hugh Cobbe, Sir John Ure, Caroline Herbert of the Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge and Julian Pooley and the staff of Surrey History Centre, Woking.]

Notes:

1. Cf. S. Gwynn: *The Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring Rice: a Record* (1929). Gwynn's version of verse 1 differs from the MS in having "heard" for "hear" and "calls and calls" for "calls and cries".
2. Sir John Ure, in a letter to *The Times* of 11 August 2001. Sir John was one of Sir Cecil's more recent successors in Sweden.
3. In his article on the hymn in *This England* (Summer 2006).
4. The punctuation is as found in the first edition (in *Poems by Cecil Arthur Spring Rice*, ed. Bernard Holland, 1920).
5. Cf. I. Bradley: *The Penguin Book of Hymns*.
6. In a letter to myself of 7 August 2008.
7. Lord Farrer's stepmother was a Wedgwood: thus closely were the five families entwined. Evangeline was a fellow student of Vaughan Williams at the Royal College of Music and they, Ralph's sister and Lucy were inspirers of the Leith Hill Musical Festivals.
8. *Holst's Music Rediscovered* (1986), p 137.
9. Quoted in J. C. Mitchell: *A Comprehensive Biography of Composer Gustav Holst* (2001), p. 490.
10. "Holst – The Planets" in *Scholes: The Second Book of the Gramophone Record* (1925), pp. 169-170.

Elegy for Ralph Vaughan Williams

At forty-two his duty bugle called.
He left his English folk songs for Ecoivres
and every night stretchered the wounded from the front.

He heard and saw it all –
that thud and gash of war, the screams,
the drowning eyes.

The bugle called once more.
He manned a gunnery, all music muffled
by the deafening din.

Here his Pastoral Symphony was born,
recalling a soldier trumpeting the Last Post,
mourning the promise of unnumbered young.

He'd stopped composing on the page;
but in his head transposed that ghostly dance
of Shropshire lads who never would grow old.

His mind's eye reflected sunset harmonies,
conjured the Corot fields, the twilight woods,
and in all the carnage echoed a girl's wordless song.

Bernard Battley

The Stanford Society

Chris Cope



Charles Villiers Stanford

Unlike the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society, the Stanford Society is very much in its infancy. We were established in March 2007 by John Covell, an English chartered accountant living and working in Chicago – a far cry from Dublin, where Stanford was born in 1852. The aims of the Society are to further the appreciation, understanding and knowledge of Sir Charles Villiers Stanford's life and music, and of his contribution to the history and development of English music.

One of the aims of the Society is to encourage performances of Stanford's music and also the music of his students and colleagues at the Royal College of Music and Cambridge University. When you consider the large number of English composers who were taught by Stanford (Bliss, Bridge, Coleridge-Taylor, Gurney, Holst, Howells, Ireland, Charles Wood and, of course, Vaughan Williams himself), you will immediately recognise that there is a great deal of music that we would like to see performed. And, apart from Stanford's pupils, we also aim to encourage the performance of music by Sir Hubert Parry, who was Director of the R.C.M. when Stanford was professor of composition there.

We also intend to encourage and support recordings of Stanford's music. Twenty-five years ago, little of Stanford's large output had been recorded. Today, the complete cycle of seven symphonies has been recorded by the late Vernon Handley and, more recently, by

David Lloyd Jones. To a great many lovers of British music, the name Stanford will be associated with church music and Stanford's long tenure as professor of composition at the R.C.M. Anyone who has sung in a church or cathedral choir will be familiar with Stanford's canticles and anthems, which remain at the heart of the repertoire of the Anglican Church.

Those wishing to hear Stanford's sacred choral music would be well advised to invest in the three-volume set issued by Hyperion and performed by the Winchester Cathedral Choir under the baton of David Hill.

Apart from that, little of Stanford's orchestral or chamber music is known. His large output of part songs is now almost completely forgotten. His seven operas are neither played nor have they been recorded.

Anyone regularly attending concerts in Britain's towns and cities will have to search far and wide to hear a work by Stanford included in the programme. But things are looking up. The Second Piano Concerto was performed at the Proms in 2008. In 2009, there was a performance of the orchestral version of Stanford's *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in A Major*. I understand that the Hitchin Symphony Orchestra intends to perform Stanford's Sixth Symphony towards the end of 2010.

So what of the music itself? Is Stanford yet another late Victorian composer who churned out masses of dull and stodgy music which frankly is better left forgotten? Well, not a bit of it. Of course, with such an extensive output, not all of Stanford's music is worthy of resurrection. But the same could be said for most composers.

Of the great British symphonists, Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Walton can regularly be heard in the concert hall. But most of the rest are greatly neglected, including the seven symphonies of Stanford. Anyone listening to these symphonies is likely to be astonished at their freshness and appeal with great melodies and imaginative orchestral colour. If a reader of this journal would like to sample a Stanford symphony, may I suggest any one of 3, 4, 5 or 6.

But if, on the other hand, you feel like something a little shorter than a full-scale orchestral symphony, why not try the six Irish Rhapsodies, which frankly should be part of the standard orchestral repertoire and whose exclusion is nothing less than a scandal. Stanford's particular favourite was number 4, which is a great rumbustious piece. But my particular favourite is number 2 – the *Lament for the Son of Ossian*.

With regard to concertos, the most popular are the Clarinet Concerto of 1902 and the Second Piano Concerto of 1911. In fact, Stanford composed no fewer than five piano concertos, including a very early work dating from 1873. In addition, he composed three violin concertos, including a very early work dating from 1875.

There is also a cello concerto of 1879 and a short organ concerto dating from 1921.

There is a substantial volume of organ works. In addition, there is much piano music.

With regard to the seven operas, there are probably few people alive today who have actually heard one. None has been recorded. However, there is good news.

When announcing the formation of the Richard Hickox Memorial Foundation at the Barbican Concert Hall last November, the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society's former chairman, Stephen Connock, referred to one of the aims of the Foundation as being to encourage the recording of British music. He mentioned in particular that the late Richard Hickox had intended to record some of Stanford's operas, and it may well be that the Foundation will provide funding for this to occur.

And lastly, I turn to choral music, of which, again, Stanford had a substantial output, much of which is not performed today nor has ever been recorded. Perhaps the best known works are the *Songs of*

the Fleet and the *Songs of the Sea*, of which the latter received a rare outing at the Proms a few years ago. Both have been recorded.

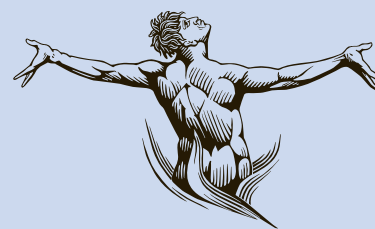
In view of the fact that Stanford was Vaughan Williams' composition teacher, I would hope that the two societies can form a close association, possibly with joint concerts including the music of these great composers.

The Stanford Society holds an annual weekend celebrating the composer's life and music. To date, we have held weekends in Cambridge, London and Oxford. A weekend in Dublin is planned for 16-18 October 2010. We are hoping to travel to Durham for our Stanford weekend in 2011.

The subscription is £20 per annum. Concessionary rates are available. For more information with regard to the Society, please visit our website at www.thestanfordsociety.org.

[Chris Cope is Events Secretary of the Stanford Society. Those interested can contact him on his daytime telephone number, 01769 581581.]

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Em Marshall introduces...

The English Music Festival

The fourth English Music Festival will take place in and around Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, from Friday 28 May to Bank Holiday Monday 31 May 2010.

EMF regulars the BBC Concert Orchestra will open the Festival on the Friday evening with a major concert of rare English works from the early twentieth century, including neglected masterpieces that delighted and overwhelmed critics and audiences at the time, but have not been heard for over a century.

Other concerts will include a brass band concert of works by Holst, Vaughan Williams (*English Folk Song Suite* and *Variations for Brass Band*), Bantock and Percy Fletcher (by popular demand!), choral concerts from the Elysian Singers (including Vaughan Williams part-songs) and the Syred Consort (some extremely rare Vaughan Williams anthems here), the Orchestra of St Paul's performing works by Warlock, Paul Carr, Elgar, Purcell and Armstrong Gibbs; and Rupert Luck giving some premieres of English violin sonatas.

We also plan a semi-staged performance of Holst's powerful opera *Savitri*, with David Wilson-Johnson singing the leading role. The Tippett Quartet will be launching their new CD with a concert

including a quartet by Sir Donald Tovey, and audiences will also see the return of early music ensemble Joglearesa, Oxford Liedertafel (who so delighted RVW Society members and EMF Friends in December), and Hilary Davan Wetton with the City of London Choir – with more “forgotten gems”.

Last, but by no means least, come and join us to sing Vaughan Williams' *Five Mystical Songs* and Elgar's *Scenes from the Bavarian Highlands*. You will be conducted by Brian Kay (conductor of the Leith Hill Musical Festival and much-loved presenter and broadcaster) and David Wilson-Johnson will be singing the solo, with David Owen Norris accompanying. If you feel your voice is not one of which you can be proud – come and listen instead!

Society members will be aware that festivals such as this are heavily reliant upon ticket sales in order to survive and flourish – so please come along and support me in this important venture – I can promise you a weekend of gorgeous music and the fellowship of like-minded people in a glorious rural setting! And for more information, just contact me at the address on the back page of the *Journal*.



Hilary Davan Wetton conducts the City of London Choir at the 2009 Festival

John Treadway introduces...

The Woodbridge Chamber Concerts

This May sees the third series of Woodbridge Chamber Concerts, set in the beautiful parish church of St Mary's in the centre of this ancient, Suffolk market town. The major aim of the concerts is to celebrate and support young musicians at the start of their professional careers and where possible, include performances of English music. The main event on Saturday 8 May will feature Iain Burnside, a patron of Woodbridge Chamber Concerts, performing with two young singers. These are Natalya Romaniw, soprano and Gary Griffiths, baritone. Natalya was a finalist in the 2009 Cardiff Singer of the World Song Competition and her recital was broadcast on BBC2. Gary Griffiths is a Gold Medallist of the Guildhall School of Music, and a singer admired by Sir Thomas Allen.

The concert is entitled "A Celebration of Twentieth Century Song", and will feature works by Vaughan Williams, Butterworth, Warlock, Finzi, Ireland and Britten. The more I explore these songs, the more I am impressed by their incredible range and quality. Here are works that I believe can stand comparison with any written by their contemporaries in mainstream Europe.

The previous evening, by courtesy of Mark Messenger, Head of

Strings at the Royal College of Music, the Apassionata Trio with Sophie Stanley, viola, will be playing Frank Bridge's Phantasy in F sharp minor for Violin, Viola, Cello and Piano, a piano trio still to be decided and, in the second half, Schumann's E flat major Piano Quartet, Op. 47. These young artists have chosen the performance of chamber music as their special interest and are pursuing a career in this field.

The Committee of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society is actively encouraging regional events such as this, which broaden the Society's activities from simply being a magazine-based society with the occasional annual meetings. I am very grateful for its support for this event. I do hope that Society members in the East and from further afield will want to come and hear these concerts.

Full details of the concerts and accommodation, together ticket prices and directions are available on the WCC website which is www.woodbridgechamberconcerts.org. Alternatively email me on or ring me on 01986 798324.

[John Treadway is a trustee of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society and Regional Chairman for East Anglia.]



The Carducci String Quartet performs Vaughan Williams' String Quartet No. 1, Woodbridge Parish Church, June 2008

From the Publicity Officer

Two Society launches end 2009 on a high note!

Piano Concerto

During October members attended a joint Ralph Vaughan Williams Society/Naxos drinks reception at Steinway Hall, Marylebone, to launch the new recording of the *Piano Concerto* with Ashley Wass, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and James Judd conducting.

We were lucky enough to welcome Ashley to the event – whom many of you will know as an exponent of English music: Alwyn, Bax, Bridge, and Elgar (for Naxos) – and we enjoyed a live performance of Alwyn's *Phantasy Waltzes*.

If you heard Ashley's performance of the *Piano Concerto* at the Proms in 2008 you may remember that the pianist had to battle against the elements during a storm, the pelting rain and thunder adding to the atmosphere in the hall!

It is pleasing to note that this new recording was the Naxos "Disc of the Month". It was also an "Editor's Choice" in the *Gramophone*.

The recording also includes the *English Folksong Suite*, *The Wasps*, *Aristophanic Suite* and *The Running Set*. The disc is reviewed in this issue of the *Journal*, and further information plus other reviews can be found at www.naxos.com.



(l to r) Karen Fletcher, Ashley Wass, Em Marshall

Folk Songs of the Four Seasons

Ralph Vaughan Williams Society members and invited guests gathered at the Royal Festival Hall on 5 December to celebrate the launch of Albion Records' fifth release, *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* and *In Windsor Forest*.

Society members who had supported the release, together with those associated with the production, joined guest-of-honour Sir David Willcocks for drinks prior to the London Philharmonic Orchestra's Christmas concert, which featured Vaughan Williams' *The First Nowell*, on which the composer was working at the time of his death.

Sir David has a long and distinguished relationship with the music of Vaughan Williams so it is fitting that he has added these significant works to his repertoire. During the launch, and proudly sporting his Leith Hill Musical Festival tie, he spoke at some length about his experiences of meeting Vaughan Williams and recording his music.

We were then delighted to welcome the Chief Executive of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Timothy Walker, and Principal Conductor, Vladimir Jurowski, who spoke about their interest in Vaughan Williams' music and the programme for that evening's concert. Maestro Jurowski is keen to programme Symphonies 4, 6 and 9 in a future series with the LPO at the Royal Festival Hall. He also accepted a copy of the *Folk Songs* CD.

Folk Songs of the Four Seasons (ALBCD 010) is priced to members of the Society at £10.00 plus £1.80 postage and packing. Order direct from Mark Hammett, 7, Endsleigh Road, Merstham, Redhill, Surrey, RH1 3LX, email albionmrh@btinternet.com.



(l to r) Em Marshall, Vladimir Jurowski, Sir David and Lady Willcocks

Heroic Elegy and Triumphal Epilogue

If you missed the Hallé Orchestra's performance of Vaughan Williams' early work *Heroic Elegy and Triumphal Epilogue* on BBC Radio 3 recently, a recording is now available on the Dutton label. The disc also includes music by Alwyn, York Bowen and Parry. A review appears in this issue of the *Journal* and further information can be found at www.duttonvocalion.co.uk.

Naxos announce two new Vaughan Williams recordings

A recording of sacred choral music was released at the beginning of February, featuring Clare College Choir conducted by Timothy Brown. The programme includes the *Mass in G minor*, *A Vision of Aeroplanes*, *The Voice out of the Whirlwind* and other works.

Forthcoming Concerts in the UK

13 February

St John's, Smith Square, London SW1P 3HA

Songs of Travel

Dominic Argento – *The Andree Expedition*

Mark Stone, baritone

Stephen Barlow, piano

tel. 0207 222 1061

25 March

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall

26 March

Usher Hall, Edinburgh

Symphony No. 4

Royal Scottish National Orchestra

Peter Oundjian, conductor

www.rsno.org.uk

16 April

Leith Hill Musical Festival

Benedicite

Loch Lomond (arr. RVW)

Gounod - *Messe Solonelle de Sainte Cecile*

Wilbye - *Flora gave me fairest flowers*

Chilcott - new work

Eleanor Daley - *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*

Pearsall - *Who shall win my lady fair*

www.lhmf.co.uk

1 May: 7.30pm

Just confirmed: an English Music Festival Gala Concert in London St John's, Smith Square, London SW1P 3HA. The Bridge Quartet, with Charles Daniels (tenor) and Michael Dussek (piano)

Purcell: *Two Fantazias*

Britten: *String Quartet no. 1*

Vaughan Williams: *On Wenlock Edge*

Bridge: *Piano Quintet*

Bookings by post to St John's Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HA.

Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope and make cheques payable to "St John's, Smith Square". By telephone

on 020 7222 1061, (10am – 5pm), in person, or online: www.englishmusicfestival.org.uk. For more information, contact Em Marshall (address on the back page of the *Journal* or visit www.englishmusicfestival.org.uk).

28 - 31 May

English Music Festival, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire The 2010 Festival will include a "Come and Sing" event featuring Vaughan Williams' *Five Mystical Songs*. Other highlights will include a brass band concert to include works by Vaughan Williams, Holst, Bantock and Percy Fletcher, and choral concerts from the Elysian Singers and Syred Consort. The Orchestra of St Paul's will perform works by Warlock, Paul Carr, Elgar, Purcell and Armstrong Gibbs. A semi-staged performance of Holst's *Savitri* is also planned, as is a concert given by the Tippett Quartet which will feature a quartet by Sir Donald Tovey.

The early music Joglearesa, Oxford Liedertafel, and Hilary Davan Wetton with the City of London Choir will be making return visits to the Festival. The full programme will be available soon at www.englishmusicfestival.org.uk.

10 July

Snape Maltings Concert Hall *A Sea Symphony* Walton: *Belshazzar's Feast* Stowmarket Chorale & Orchestra Leslie Olive, conductor

10 August

Gloucester Cathedral – Three Choirs Festival *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* The concert celebrates the centenary of the first performance of the *Fantasia* in Gloucester Cathedral which was conducted by the composer.

Holst: *St. Paul's Suite*

Elgar: *Violin Concerto*

Philharmonia Orchestra, Philippe Graffin, violin

Sir Roger Norrington, conductor www.3choirs.org

Don't forget to check on the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society website for the latest concerts around the UK and abroad: www.rvwsociety.com.

If you would like to receive publicity emails relating to Vaughan Williams recordings, concerts, broadcasts and publications, please send your email to me at archerypromos@btinternet.com. We never pass your details on to third parties.

Karen Fletcher

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Letters

GLOCK, THE BBC AND VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

An addendum to Edward Westhead's letter (Journal, issue 46): On the Glock side, Hans Keller and Donald Mitchell were just as much to blame as Glock, and on the other side, Howard Ferguson's correspondence with Finzi about Britten sounds so childish I wouldn't dream of reading it.

James Gilchrist, Ian Burnside, Michael Kennedy and of course the now so missed Richard Hickox have been splendid in simply ignoring this provincial split in English music, which the two protagonists, Britten and Vaughan Williams, also deplored.

*Peter Newmark,
Guildford, Surrey, U.K.*

MORE...

I couldn't agree more with Mr. Westhead about the deleterious influence of William Glock on the position of the music of the "English renaissance" in our cultural life. I fear that the Proms, though, have long since become a lost cause; not only do the promoters proudly champion their "international" status, but the rare occasions when British music from the mid-20th century has been played have often been damned by the critics (for example, Rubbra's Fourth Symphony in 2005). The poor attendance at a 1984 Prom featuring Bax's Fourth Symphony was used many years later by Nicholas Kenyon as the justification not to put any Bax on the programme!

Even though this music – like all fine music – needs to be heard performed live, at least we now have a range of recordings unimaginable twenty years ago. The sales figures for recordings of British music, especially (though not exclusively) on labels like Naxos point to its real level of influence. With Roger Wright's "popular" regime now in control of the Proms, we shall have to make do with our recordings for the time being.

*James W. E. Rodley,
Bournemouth, U.K.*

MORE...

Having read with interest Anthony Newton's article on the *Norfolk Rhapsodies* in the October *Journal*, I thought perhaps, even over a year after the broadcast, that members might like to be made aware of something that I recently discovered about the Radio 3 programme entitled "Fantasia on a Theme: The Captain's Apprentice". Listening again to my recording of this interval feature to the Prom of 17 August 2008, I realised, with the aid of scores, what was amiss with it: instead of the supposed extracts from Vaughan Williams' *Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1* to illustrate his use of the folk song *The Captain's Apprentice*, the BBC had mistakenly used the opening of his *In the Fen Country*, originally composed the year before he went to King's Lynn and noted down the song! Admittedly there are similarities between the two pieces, but if ever that programme is broadcast again this is something that definitely needs to be rectified. Another point that might have

been brought out is that the version of the song sung by a modern folk singer during the programme, impressive as it was, had rather different note values from the one noted down by Vaughan Williams, and omitted the repeat of the second half of each verse.

Perhaps one shouldn't be too surprised by this any more. A few weeks later, in October, what should I hear from a Radio 3 announcer but that the original version of *On Wenlock Edge* was not finished till the 1920s! When I pointed out to them by email that it was only the orchestral version that was that late and, in fact, the centenary of the first performance would fall the very next month, I received an immediate apology.

Nevertheless, November has passed without any notice by them of that anniversary, nor indeed much notice of Vaughan Williams at all. Perhaps, though, I should also add that I was at least able to commend their first broadcast of the *Heroic Elegy and Triumphal Epilogue* the previous month.

*Robert Allan,
Edgbaston, U.K.*

RELATIVISM AND MUSIC

Sean Beirne's attack on relativism is timely and all the more pleasing coming from one so young. Not a lover of Messiahs myself, it struck me, however, as I pondered his piece, that it had an innate Romanticism at its heart, with its concern for music grounded in the very core of our landscape. Its deep concern for music, and the healing qualities it possesses, is one I share. But there are realities to face in his thoughts.

It is my belief that people in consumer societies pursue the "instant" and the "glamorous" to make their lives worth living, with the cult of celebrity the mainstay of existence, amid the general dull ordinariness of things day to day. The idea that contemporary pop songs can be seen as of equal importance to a Schubert Lied, or that a rock piece could be put in parallel with a Bach suite, has gained credence in recent years.

If you did not know a Schubert song, or the music of Bach, and yet knew pop songs, you might be forgiven for believing that these very pop songs were of extreme importance. In the end it does come down to breadth of musical experiences. A great many people who reject so-called Classical music, know little of it, and are rejecting a chimera when they defend their own taste in say, the Arctic Monkeys.

Plato is quoted with approval, but would ban certain types of music and instruments from his city. He wanted Spartan warriors with concise brains alert to a hostile world. Would he have allowed his guardian students to hear Vaughan Williams' Fourth or Sixth Symphonies for instance, with their wild dissonances? Would Beethoven's late quartets have been allowed performances? Further, would the composer of the *Romanza* of the Fifth Symphony have approved of being made a Messiah? Would *Erwartung* have had a place with him in his society?

References are made to the British character, but Britishness is surely a most difficult matter to entertain reasonably with our history of immigration since Roman times. And now, as part of the European community, do we want such a search for it to be made? As someone who wants to put my European sensibilities first, I would consider replying “No.” And all those glories of our past: the slave trade, burnings at the stake? Where does our classical architecture come from?

My own feeling is that it is not in the nature of people to place all experiences on the same level. Some experiences we have are indeed profound. The death of a loved one in battle; a religious conversion; a panic when you cannot find your way in a strange place; a heart attack: such experiences make us change the direction of our lives.

A work of art can so profoundly hit you that whole pathways are opened up for the inner consciousness. But most people in the daily slog just drift along emotionally, and don't seek out what could change them – a symphony, a mass, a novel, a painting, an idea from philosophy. It needs will and self authority to seek out, with intuition perhaps, a higher classical experience. Education certainly helps, but is not all that is needed.

Plato's metaphor of the cave in *The Republic* (book 7) is certainly central to European thought, and perhaps most of humanity does exist in a shadowy environment where puppets dance before distant walls, the very celebrities they love to follow in the magazines they read week by week. But we must not be superior in all of this. We are all occupants of that metaphorical cave with our prejudices, dogmas and idealisms.

It was hearing an organist play Handel in Corfe Castle Parish Church, at the age of ten that set me into classical music. I was still sitting there long after the congregation had departed. Mother had to come back for me. From that simple event of recognition, my real education into selfhood began. A trigger is needed to fire the progress of one's life into the Humanities. And that is what troubles me about Sean Beirne's piece. How do you stimulate such an event as an aesthetic conversion?

*Colin W. Thomas,
Stanley, West Yorkshire, U.K.*

MORE...

I am writing in response to Sean Beirne's article in the October Journal. In his refreshing young idealism, Sean has indeed identified relativism as a large obstacle in the appreciation of classical music, both in Britain and in the U.S.A. from where I write. It is true that the accepted stance of relativism will recognize no standards by which to evaluate music except personal preference. But there is a clear underlying cause for this. Relativism has been accepted in the areas of religion and morality as well. The relativism in music is just a symptom, not the cause, of a much wider phenomenon. The culture of the West has embraced the idea that all religions are equally good (or equally bad), and that morality is defined by personal preference rather than an absolute standard. The inevitable consequence of this is a loss of standards in all areas of endeavour, not just in music. Witness (in the U.S.A. at least) the fact that there are now some schools which no longer grade students because they think it will give them low self-esteem.

What would Vaughan Williams have thought? I don't know. The subject of what he believed is much debated; and he ensured that we would not know all the details. But at least he believed very strongly in things that were right, and things that were wrong in music. True, he said that he doubted whether there could be absolute musical standards applied which would ignore time and place (see *National Music*, 7-9).

In this, music is different from morality, in the sense that context, place, and function are important; whereas morality transcends these things. But certainly Vaughan Williams' writings resonate repeatedly with the idea that some music is much better than other music, and that some composers were much better than others by virtue of their commitment to absolute standards of musical expression, such as clear form, melody, rhythm, and harmony, allied with a sincerity which avoided mere tricks to impress, mere novelty, and obscure experimentation. He recognized that in order for music to be truly great it must come from the heart and speak to the real life of real people, not a sequestered elite in an ivory tower.

He recognized (see his essay *The Letter and the Spirit*) that non-verbal communication was the essence of music; a communication that could not be put into words, but which brought its hearers nearer to the “unseen realities” and “that which is spiritual”, and that music uses our senses in order to glimpse “what lies beyond them”.

The solution to the problem identified by Sean is one that I fear many in Britain (if the statistics I've seen regarding the overwhelming number of agnostics there are to be trusted) may not just yet be willing to embrace; and that is that it is important to actually find out what truth is; and not take the easy way out and say that everyone is right (or wrong). My suggestion, rather, is actually to evaluate everything, from religions and morality, to music and scholastic work, by absolute standards. This can be done if we actually study to find out who is right about their claims concerning the truth.

The accepted idea in the postmodern world today seems to be that if someone claims to be right or actually knows what the truth really is, then that person must be by definition arrogant, or even intolerant and oppressive. But is this really true? Certainly *some* are like this, and have been throughout history (usually when in positions of power). But many devoted adherents to many world religions who claim to be true are none of the above. This does not address, however, the real question of what is really the truth. If all the evidence is examined with a truly open mind, it will be found who the real Messiah is – He whose birth in a manger is celebrated at this time of year.

*Timothy Arena,
Bloomington, Indiana, U.S.A.*

MORE...

While there are many ways to use and define the term classic or classical in modern use, the most pertinent one seems to have been overlooked in Sean Beirne's article on relativism. A work of music, art, or poetry can be deemed “classical” when it seems fresh and new to an observer discovering it, hundreds or even thousands of years later. Regardless of how many times it has been copied or imitated, the original shines through as more alive

and “recent” than its imitations. One can argue that compositions at this classic level, succeed by revealing or expressing human experience in a timeless or universal way; and that the composer is a “creative genius.” And one can also argue that the artist is only a vessel or tool of “higher powers”, and that the work of art is “a gift from the gods”. The vital mystery is that so much that is new seems stale from the start; and that so much (given some education and exposure) delights us, from outside our historical context.

*George Ihlefeldt,
Carmel, California, U.S.A.*

JMS & RVW

I wonder whether many members heard the broadcast of *Riders to the Sea* (in the original play form) on BBC Radio 3 on Sunday evening, 3 January.

It was interesting to compare it with the libretto of the Vaughan Williams opera. One short part omitted, which to my mind adds to the sense of tragedy, is when the sisters find that Bartley has departed wearing one of Michael’s shirts. The other small extracts which the composer omitted seem to add little to the story. For example, there is a mention of a black pig which has been chewing through the spare rope taken by Bartley, who then suggests that the animal should be sold.

I had never heard or read the play prior to this broadcast, so knew it only by way of recordings of the opera. Bearing this in mind I have to say that I find the opera far more moving than the play. I don’t know how J. M. Synge would have reacted to the “chopping about” of his play. A. E. Housman certainly didn’t like this sort of treatment!

Incidentally I grew up with the old HMV recording of *Riders* by Meredith Davies and the Orchestra Nova, recently available on DVD. Perhaps it is because I approached the opera via this performance that I find it far more moving than the more recent Chandos CD with the Northern Sinfonia under Hickox.

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

A SATISFIED CUSTOMER

I am a new member, and have just finished reading issue 45 of the *Journal*. I wondered how much the *Journal* would have in it for a non-musician. I need not have worried.

Your Editorial in No. 45 mused on its content and purpose, and if this edition is typical, then I think a good balance has been achieved.

I enjoyed all the articles, particularly *Vaughan Williams, Cheyne Walk, and the 1911 Census* for its information about the composer’s life – how his heart must have sunk when Gurney appeared at his door! – and *The Joy of Playing the Music of*

Vaughan Williams, which gave this non-musician a lot of technical insight in comprehensible terms.

Mr Atlas’s article also hit the nail for me. I have been a concert-goer at the Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent, for many years, but can only recall two instances in the last decade when Vaughan Williams has featured in a concert. His music is reasonably well represented on radio, but it’s clear that to hear it live involves a lot of travel and no little expense.

I look forward very much to the next edition.

*Peter Hanks,
Stone, Staffordshire, U.K.*

THE NINTH

Am I alone in loving Vaughan Williams’ Symphony No. 9 to pieces? I have read the criticisms going as far as saying that it is rehash by an Old Chap who couldn’t think of anything else. But for me, it is entirely different. Yes, he was old when he wrote it, and he must surely have guessed that it might be his last. For me, though, it is a summation of his life. There are all the symphonies in there, plus some *Wenlock Edge* and even *Joanna Godden* and dear old *Job*, as well as a touch or two of folk song cadence.

If it’s just me it doesn’t matter, but I’d be interested in any comments. And my favourite version? Bryden Thomson on Chandos.

*Alan M. Watkins,
Burnham-on-Crouch, Essex, U.K.*

THE TRISTAN EFFECT

On 2 May 1956, while a student at Nottingham University, I travelled to Manchester for the premiere of Vaughan Williams’ Eighth Symphony in the Free Trade Hall. Afterwards I returned on the overnight milk train. Two years later I became engaged while listening to the slow movement of the same work.

Thinking that the composer might be amused by this I wrote to him. By return of post in his inimitable typing he replied most courteously, thanking me for my letter. He added: “I went one better than you; I became engaged on the strength of Tristan. Please give my polite love to your Anna.”

Three weeks later on 1 August 1958, my future wife and I were at a performance of *Hugh the Drover* at Sadler’s Wells, where Vaughan Williams was sitting in the stalls. By the end of the month the great man had died. We were very privileged to attend his funeral in Westminster Abbey, a truly memorable occasion.

*Neil Butterworth,
Greenlaw, Berwickshire, U.K.*

Concert Reviews

TWO CATHEDRAL CONCERTS

Norwich Cathedral was the venue for “A Tribute to Vaughan Williams” on Saturday 29 August 2009. The Norwich Pops Orchestra along with the Mid-Norfolk Singers had selected a programme entirely made up of Vaughan Williams pieces including, appropriately, *Norfolk Rhapsody no.1*, as well as excerpts from *Job*, first performed in Norwich.

The selection of the pieces and their presentation revealed a sense of drama, but there was humour too, as each piece was briefly introduced by conductor Geoff Davidson along with anecdotes which revealed something of the character of Vaughan Williams and people’s reaction to his music. This enriched the concert and gave warmth to the evening, although a playful jibe by Mr. Davidson regarding the rehearsal performance of some visiting choristers from Wolverhampton was, I thought, just slightly too harsh!

The concert began with *Norfolk Rhapsody no.1* which was played sensitively and evocatively. The central part of this piece contains a folk song collected from nearby King’s Lynn. Unfortunately the work was not well suited to the cathedral acoustic. Thunderous percussion was overbearing at times and did not seem balanced with the more delicate string sounds. This problem of imbalance was repeated at times later in the concert. Fortunately it did not spoil this performance too much and I enjoyed it overall.

Next was the *Fantasia on Greensleeves* which, by contrast, seemed positively enhanced by the acoustic. The solo flute and harp sang sweetly and proved that this piece, though brief, was a good choice for the programme.

Serenade to Music was next and, though a work that I love, was the piece that I least enjoyed. Again the overall sound did not seem balanced, with virtually none of Shakespeare’s words audible – was the choir too small? Soprano Janette Davidson’s voice, though boldly projected, did not carry at all well.

Now it was time for *Job*. Four excerpts had been chosen for their contrasting nature and dramatic effect, namely scenes IV, VI, VII and VIII. The saxophones of *Job*’s comforters were suitably oily, and Elihu’s *Dance of Youth and Beauty* was exquisitely played by first violin Fiona Hutchins. However her instrument was another victim of the acoustic, sounding flat and metallic. A moment of drama came during the crescendo in the middle of scene VI, when audience members visibly jumped – including me! Later in that scene the mighty organ of the cathedral was used to good effect.

After the interval there was more drama with the first movement of *Sinfonia Antartica*. This was one of the two highlights of the concert for me. The noble grandeur of the human struggle evoked by the music was perfectly suited to the cathedral setting. Moreover, the layout of the cathedral facilitated an extra touch of showmanship. The solo soprano Janette Davidson appeared dramatically in the organ loft and from this elevated position launched her voice upwards and outwards. Her wordless song sailed deep into the nave of the cathedral, and together with the female chorus of the Mid-Norfolk Singers, perfectly evoked the threatening and ever-present wind. I had never seen *Antartica* performed live before, but I will now seek it out. It was as though

the cathedral surroundings evoked a deeper meaning behind the terrible journey of Scott and his men which the music depicts, like a metaphor for our spiritual struggle through life.

As the orchestra was being reset for the *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*, Mr. Davidson recounted the tale of how Herbert Howells and Ivor Gurney, after hearing the first performance in Gloucester in 1910, wandered the streets of the town all night, stunned by what they had heard. As he spoke, the second orchestra crossed the front of the nave to take up their new positions, and Mr. Davidson explained how their positioning helped to emulate the spatial effect achieved by Tallis in his choral music. He also informed us that the violinists would stand throughout the performance. Then, in a masterstroke of simplicity, the main lights to the nave were extinguished leaving the audience in darkness. The performers remained illuminated and a glow from the side aisle revealed the second orchestra. With the violinists standing ready around Mr. Davidson, the darkened cathedral was hushed as though awaiting some secret, sacred ritual.

The opening chords rose from the orchestra and this time everything was right. The music seemed to flow from the very fabric of the building as though it had always been there. The second orchestra’s positioning was just right in order to give an answering echo to the main performers. The only imperfection was that the solo violin, though beautifully played, again suffered in the acoustic. This will probably always happen in cathedral performances of *Tallis*. It is as though Vaughan Williams knew that this would happen and so he added the solo viola, to lead the violin and support it.

After this piece I was stunned, just as Howells and Gurney had been in Gloucester, but then the concert ended on a boisterous, upbeat note with the *English Folk Song Suite*. Overall I was very impressed with the Norwich Pops Orchestra. If you live in the Norfolk area it is definitely worth looking out for them.

May I make a general comment about visibility of performers in cathedral concerts? With the orchestra sitting as they were for this concert, on the same floor level as the audience, they were all but invisible to around ninety per cent of the audience. Would it be possible in similar concerts, whether in Norwich or elsewhere, for the orchestra to be raised up on some sort of dais? An elevation of just a couple of feet would help enormously.

This most enjoyable concert whetted my appetite for another, in a different county, three weeks later. If you walk along the Thames Path through Oxfordshire, you reach a place where the tower of an ancient abbey beckons across the meadows. In medieval times, pilgrims would have come by river to visit this holy place, site of the baptism of an Anglo-Saxon king of Wessex in 635 A.D. The place is Dorchester-on-Thames, and in September 2009 people were converging on the abbey for a series of concerts by the Orchestra of St. John’s, conducted by John Lubbock. The concert on Saturday 19 September included pieces by Elgar and Vaughan Williams, along with a lively mix of music from Russia and Argentina.

The concert was to be filmed, and the whole abbey interior was brilliantly lit. I remembered the Norwich concert just three weeks

previously where dimming the lights had created such a magical effect, and my heart sank.

The first item in the concert was, again, the *Tallis Fantasia*. As at Norwich, the violinists rose and performed standing in a semi-circle around John Lubbock, with the second orchestra seated behind. The acoustics were good and there was a rich sound. Mr. Lubbock's conducting was expressive, spreading both arms out wide and seeming elated by the music. At the point where the orchestra quietened and viola player Jane Atkins was released into her solo role, I was moved almost to tears as the sound soared between the abbey's stone arches. The solo violin joined her, the sound better than at Norwich and complementing the viola beautifully. There was one point in the piece where the acoustics did not quite work, at the climax of the crescendo, where the violins sounded screechy, their pitch too high. Nonetheless, in the silence that followed the end of the work it seemed that no one in the abbey dared breathe.

Next was Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro for Strings*, played as always with a similar arrangement of instruments as *Tallis* but, curiously, creating a quite different sound. Mr. Lubbock conducted at a measured pace which worked well, as this is a work which, if played too quickly, can sound rushed and agitated. This time all the moods of the piece were allowed to express themselves. You could say it was furious, but not too fast.

The Orchestra of St. John's works with a wide range of musicians and the next item on the programme was to prove this. The Karavai Quartet are from Russia and they play their country's folk music on balalaika and domra. They were accompanied by the orchestra for a few pieces, which would surely have delighted Vaughan Williams, with his love of folk music and his own willingness to use unusual instruments.

After the interval we were transported from Russia to Argentina. We were to hear *The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* by Piazzolla in the arrangement for strings by Desyatnikov. This work combines Piazzolla's habitual tango-inspired rhythms with allusions to Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. The Winter movement not only featured astonishing solo violin playing by Jan Peter Schmolck, but was also marked by the appearance of two dancers, starting with Gregory Warren Wilson who stepped down the aisle, took the hand of Liz Tomlin who was seated in the audience and led her in a tango around the abbey, not a frequent event in church!

For an orchestra that has been featured on two albums with the rock group Radiohead, perhaps this evening was a little tame. If the lighting had been less harsh and more sympathetic to the abbey with its delicate, feminine beauty and atmosphere of sanctity, more might have been created in *Tallis*, a work where the setting can be as important as the music.

Robert Shave

A RARE OUTING IN LEICESTERSHIRE

On Sunday 13 September 2009, the rarely heard Vaughan Williams *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis (The Village Service)* was performed at evensong by the choir of St Catherine's Church, Burbage, Leicestershire.

Knowing little about this piece I searched the Internet beforehand for references. There were very few, though I did discover that, presumably as part of the 2008 celebrations, the work was performed in the Episcopal Church of St Stephen, Seattle, on 2

November of that year. There is no mention of the piece in Ursula Vaughan Williams' biography, nor in any other of my books on the composer, except for Michael Kennedy's *Catalogue* (2nd edition), which has a very brief entry. There is a recording on Priory by the choir of Keble College, Oxford. The accompanying booklet has very little information, and to tell the truth I was not very much taken by the piece when I first heard it on CD.

What a pleasant surprise, then, to hear our local church choir give such a splendid rendition! Perhaps it was because I was hearing it live, by a smaller choir, allowing the parts to be more easily heard, but I thought our locals at least equalled the Keble choir.

St Catherine's choir was much depleted, it being a Sunday evening, and comprised just nine ladies and girls, and five men. One of the ladies said she had been unable to attend rehearsals and was sight reading it for the first time. For the twenty years I have known it, St Catherine's has always had an excellent choir, a cut above most village, or indeed town church choirs that I have heard. The choir has sung at Balliol College, Oxford (the church patron) and my wife and I have travelled to hear them sing at Norwich and Gloucester cathedrals. Cathedral visits by the choir are annual events. On the down side, over the years the choir has lost almost all its boy trebles, their places being taken by women and girls. But performances can be so good that on occasion they have been greeted by spontaneous applause from the congregation!

Discussing the work with John Adams, the conductor for the evening, and choir members, I found that they all thought it a difficult piece to perform. There are frequent time signature changes, and the choristers I spoke to thought it "difficult to get hold of", with two saying that they could find no recognisable tunes. (In fact there *are* modal tunes there, and we all know that Vaughan Williams didn't write music without tunes!) It is clear that the composer's aim was to provide a piece suitable for small village choirs with perhaps limited forces (to quote from the score: "The tenor part may be omitted, or by singing the soprano part only, the canticles may be sung by boys' voices only, by men's voices only, or both in octaves") but perhaps he fell short of his aim, as the piece seems to be infrequently used. Nonetheless, I really enjoyed hearing the rare outing for this little known Vaughan Williams piece.

Michael Gainsford

CHRISTMAS IN STAFFORDSHIRE

A very decent audience gathered in St. Matthew's Church, Walsall, for Walsall Choral Society's concert on 5 December 2009. The sixty-strong choir sang Haydn's "*Little Organ Mass*", excerpts from Handel's *Messiah* and Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*. This delightful work had been well-rehearsed by the Society's Musical Director and Conductor, Toby Barnard, and a near-faultless performance was enhanced by splendid playing from a small orchestra led by Ros Rayner, the cello introduction being particularly evocative. The splendid baritone soloist was Matthew Stone from Birmingham Conservatoire. I'm sure his is a name to look out for!

The Choral Society, founded in 1944, will perform more Vaughan Williams on 15 May 2010 – *Five Mystical Songs*, together with Gabriel Fauré's *Cantique de Jean Racine* and Maurice Duruflé's *Requiem*.

John Rushton

Book Review

Dear Müller-Hartmann: Letters from Ralph Vaughan Williams to Robert Müller-Hartmann. Edited and published by Steven K. White. ISBN 978-0-578-03584-0

This simply produced but handsome, hardback book arrived in the post, unannounced, from the author. A number of the Society's officers also received a copy. I'm delighted to be able to bring it to members' attention.

Robert Müller-Hartmann was born into a musical family in Hamburg in 1884. His own talent was apparent from an early age, and before he was forty, composer, university teacher and music critic numbered among his professional musical activities. In common with other German Jews, he suffered persecution as the Nazis rose to power in the early 1930s, but he managed to leave Germany with his family, coming to England in 1937, where he hoped to establish himself in the musical world but in reality faced an uncertain future. Life can scarcely have been easy, and things were made worse when, along with thousands of other Jewish refugees, he found himself interned by the British government, in his case in a camp on the Isle of Man. Ursula Vaughan Williams takes up the story:

Among the musicians whose internment gave Ralph concern was a German composer, Robert Müller-Hartmann, whom he had met through Imogen Holst. He had come to Dorking with his wife and daughter to their friends the Hornsteins, whom Ralph already knew through the Dorking Refugee Committee on which Mrs. Hornstein also served. A warm friendship developed. Robert Müller-Hartmann spent much of his time after his release in the spring of 1941 at Dorking. Ralph came to respect his new neighbour's insight, scholarship, and wisdom particularly when he was in doubt or difficulty about works of his own. (R.V.W., p. 237).

The friendship lasted until the German composer's sudden death in 1950. During that time Vaughan Williams helped and encouraged him as much as he could, and often in highly practical ways, such as commissioning from him a German translation of *The Pilgrim's*

Progress. And then in one letter, from August 1947, he writes, inimitably, "The young man who writes my music for me is at present away on holiday, will you do it? what I want you to do is to correct any mistakes before I send it to the copyist and also tell me of any places where you think I have made any error of judgment." The "young man" in question was, of course, Roy Douglas, and the work, which Vaughan Williams later dedicated to Müller-Hartmann, was the *Partita for Double String Orchestra.*

The book begins with a well-written series of short essays setting the scene and presenting the different characters in the story. "As it turns out," writes White, "life in Dorking in the 1940s was much more interesting and modern than might be suspected." I'll leave members to read the book to find out why, saying only that the author deals with the intertwined lives of the three couples, Müller-Hartmann, Hornstein and Vaughan Williams, with such tact and restraint that the result is both respectful and moving.

The main body of the book is, of course, the letters. Some of them have already appeared in Hugh Cobbe's indispensable *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, but as I understand it the present volume gathers together all the surviving correspondence from Vaughan Williams to Müller-Hartmann. A transcription of each letter is given with, on the facing page, a facsimile of the original. We thus have a fair collection of samples of the composer's often challenging handwriting. Many of the letters are very short and inconsequential, and it is perhaps true that the letters themselves do not add much to what we already know about Vaughan Williams. But they do bring out, in case any of us had forgotten it, his fundamental generosity to others genuinely in need.

This is a lovely book for Vaughan Williams enthusiasts to have on their shelves. I have found it available by mail order for around £22, and there is a dedicated internet site at dearmuller-hartmann.com.

William Hedley

Journal Index

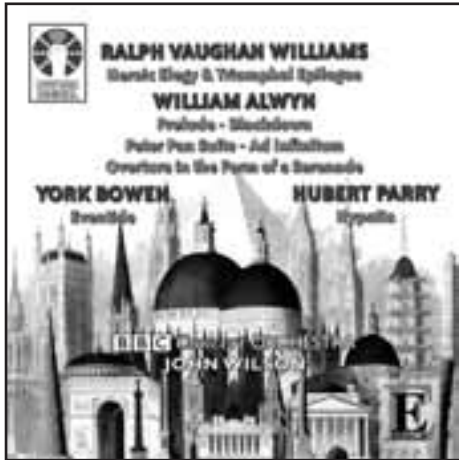
The Ralph Vaughan Williams Society is delighted to announce that a comprehensive index of the contents of *Journal* issues 1 to 44 is now available. Preparing the index was a huge labour of love, and we are indebted to Linda Hayward who compiled it in sections over a number of years, and to Roy Bexon and John Francis who have consolidated the sections into one index and formatted the result for publishing. The index is available free of charge on the Society's website, but members who prefer a printed copy can acquire one for £5. Please send a cheque made out to the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society to John Francis, the Society's treasurer, at the address on the back cover of the *Journal*.

CD Reviews

Vaughan Williams: *Heroic Elegy and Triumphal Epilogue*.

With William Alwyn: *Overture in the Form of a Serenade, Prelude, Blackdown – a Tone Poem from the Surrey Hills, Peter Pan Suite, Ad Infinitum – a Satire for Orchestra*; York Bowen: *Orchestral Poem “Eventide”*; Sir Hubert Parry: “*Hypatia*” – incidental music. BBC Concert Orchestra, The London Chorus (Chorus Master, Ronald Corp), conducted by John Wilson.

DUTTON EPOCH CDLX 7237



This relatively early work by Vaughan Williams was given its first performance for over a hundred years at a public concert by the Hallé Orchestra at the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, on 13 October 2009. A recording of this concert was given an airing on BBC Radio 3 on 20 October. Hot on the heels of that first performance came this release of the same work in a coupling with several other neglected works by English composers, one of which has strong Vaughan Williams connections. Dutton are certainly doing Vaughan Williams proud just recently.

The *Heroic Elegy and Triumphal Epilogue* dates from 1901, with a revision in 1902, and apparently the composer was glad to let it slide into obscurity thereafter. This is sad. I listened to the Hallé version and have to admit that on first hearing I was not unduly impressed. It seemed to me that it bore no hints of the composer's more mature style. However, the more I listen to it the more I like it, and especially in the Dutton recording. It may be a purely subjective opinion, but I think that the BBC Concert Orchestra makes a better job of it than the Hallé. Although both orchestras take a similar timing for the initial *Elegy*, Wilson with the BBC Concert Orchestra take 12:41 for the *Epilogue* against Elder's 11:30,

giving the music time to breathe. Furthermore it thereby sounds much less episodic. Incidentally, Sir Mark Elder gave a short pre-concert introduction to the radio broadcast, and seemed quite enthusiastic about the work, although he sounded a slightly jarring note when saying that part of it sounded like *Toward an Unknown Region* (sic).

It seems to me that the composer's thumbprints are more to be found in the *Epilogue* than the *Elegy*. The main theme at the beginning of the former is typical Vaughan Williams. Later on there are pre-echoes of *In the Fen Country*, and parts of the full-length version of the *London Symphony*, and the last movement of *Dona Nobis Pacem*. Other parts remind me of Stanford, which is not unsurprising. But you'll have to purchase the CD and listen for yourself! I can thoroughly recommend it. It is to be hoped that more of these early works will be given an airing. There has been nothing to my mind in the chamber works and *Willow-Wood* or this latest release to justify their neglect. Admittedly they are not in the composer's mature style, but they are by no means incompetent, and they give a valuable glimpse of how he developed.

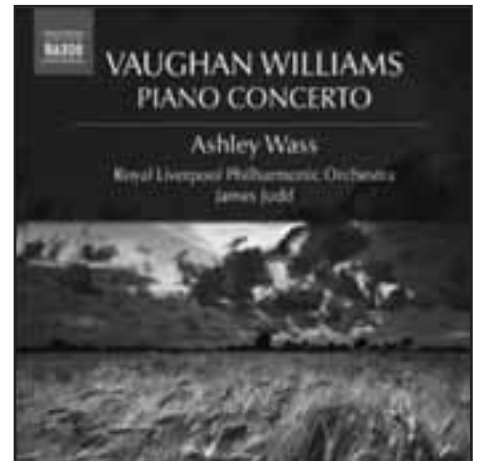
The other items on the Dutton CD are works by William Alwyn, York Bowen and Vaughan Williams' teacher, Hubert Parry. Alwyn's *Overture in the Form of a Serenade* (lasting just under six minutes) is a very interesting work, an overture with a soprano soloist and wordless choir, and intended as a tribute to Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst. It quotes from both *The Perfect Fool* and the theme from the third movement from the *Pastoral Symphony*.

Michael Gainsford

Vaughan Williams: *Piano Concerto in C major*. With *The Wasps – Aristophanic Suite; English Folksong Suite; The Running Set*. Ashley Wass (piano); Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by James Judd
NAXOS 8.572304

The far-reaching and mysterious oceans of sound from Ralph Vaughan Williams' orchestral palette come into sharp focus on this CD release, with the rarely performed,

dark, brooding *Piano Concerto in C* sitting firmly glowing at its heart. Surely the arrival of this CD is something to celebrate for lovers of English music.



By contrast, we find lighter couplings in more familiar inshore shallows, vis-a-vis the delightful melodic bubbings of *The Wasps* (five-movement *Aristophanic Suite*) and the inimitable *English Folk Song Suite*, (ably orchestrated by Gordon Jacob) as well as a satisfying end piece – a short but sweet Vaughan Williams cameo, *The Running Set*.

There is sparkling, sumptuous clear water here with the RLPO players revelling in *The Wasps*. Many students of the broader classical musical canvas will be familiar with the *Wasps Overture*. But here the listener is treated to the suite's full five seductive movements – ranging from an *Entr'acte* to the closing *Ballet and Final Tableau*, a relentless wave of sheer unadorned musical majesty.

The centrepiece of this very generous release comes in the shape of the *Piano Concerto in C*, championed – both in terms of keyboard technique and artful articulation – by a decidedly hypnotic and dazzling interpretation from a committed soloist, Ashley Wass. This well-engineered CD is a convincing follow-up to Wass' first real exposure of this work in his memorable 2008 Proms concert performance.

Vaughan Williams' short but high-impact concerto was originally penned in 1931. Many believe it was the composer's own musical premonition of the destructive Second World War that was to come, although, at the time, the composer fervently denied this. Its pre-war menacing atmosphere immediately pre-dates one of Vaughan Williams' more hostile works, that

brilliant landmark, the *Fourth Symphony*. The craggy *Piano Concerto*, well balanced in this recording, is a dark, fathomless and threatening piece. At times it is almost as if Wass uses the great energy running throughout this significant score to fight his accompanying orchestra. He revels in a poignant overall performance of high sound quality and plays with precise detail. As he recently said of the concerto, "There is a sense of battle against the orchestra and it's a physical challenge just to come through." Well done Ashley, you won.

Hearty congratulations must be due to both Mr. Wass and his more prosaically sounding partner, conductor, Mr. Judd, for a very satisfying interpretation of the concerto featuring soaring strings, crisp brass and superb folk-like scoring for woodwind. Emphatic thuds on timpani and percussion add to the work's overall impact.

In 1946 Vaughan Williams revised this work with a new softer ending. Wass and Judd deliver this delicately, emphasising an exceptional restraint and quietude following a gritty and arresting exposure of the

composer's surprisingly tough, war-like world encapsulated in other movements.

This work was first written in troubled times and then revised at the end of the Second World War when relative peace finally prevailed. Was this a conscious reaction or merely coincidence? When I think of the composer's harrowing personal experiences as a battlefield medic in the First World War, perhaps this interpretation becomes more appropriate. This may be a contentious view. The considered views of other Vaughan Williams scholars and enthusiasts would be most welcome.

Which rather neatly brings me back to the outlandishly violent *Fourth Symphony*. As Wass and Judd combine to reveal these symphonic parallels in their "sit-up-and-take-notice" interpretation of the *Piano Concerto*, I can't help asking myself why this stunning piece hasn't seen more performances over the years in more mainstream concert hall repertoire.

The Running Set finds good old Vaughan Williams again singing loudly for Britain.

James Judd exploits this aspect to the full. The work is another example of the composer's ebullient folk song-inspired style, including knarled old nutmeg songs like *The Blackthorn Stick*, and *Cock o' the North*, proficiently redelivered by Vaughan Williams in an infectious toe-tapping style. This is another little-known, glistening gem which adds considerable weight to a five-star compact disc recording. Exceptional orchestral larks also run coruscating through the *English Folksong Suite*. Here are highly experienced RLPO classical players having tremendous good fun. In this release the heady listener can almost touch the Vaughan Williams wit and charm. A well-wielded baton closely follows superb scintillating score-lines.

I do sincerely hope that this keenly priced Naxos budget release will win Vaughan Williams' distinctive musical character even more good friends. It certainly deserves to.

C. Harwood Bye

Albion Records

The Garden of Proserpine and Fen and Flood

Albion Records is hoping to record two more very rare works. To do so, we need your help again. Stephen Connock describes what is needed.

Our last appeal to members produced the glorious *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* (ALB CD 010), the first recording of which *The Gramophone* described as "a world event". Now Albion wants to record two more unknown works. The first is Vaughan Williams' early Swinburne setting for soprano, chorus and orchestra, *The Garden of Proserpine* (1899). Michael Kennedy considers that this unpublished work is superior to *Willow Wood*, with "imaginative scoring" and "unmistakeable VW fingerprints". It is a substantial piece, at 489 bars, and is scored for full orchestra including four horns and three trombones. Big stuff for the twenty-seven year-old composer!

The coupling is Patrick Hadley's cantata *Fen and Flood*, arranged by Vaughan Williams in 1956, for soprano, baritone and mixed chorus. Members will, hopefully, know and love Hadley's gorgeous *The trees so high*. Vaughan Williams must have thought very highly of *Fen and Flood* to spend the time making this arrangement. The Albion recording will be a world premiere.

Please help! Members sponsoring the recording for £100 will receive a free copy of the CD and their name in the booklet notes. Special dedications are possible. To express an interest please email me at albionslc@aol.com or write to 65, Marathon House, 200, Marylebone Road, London NW1 5PL.

Thanks for helping bring rare Vaughan Williams to life!



From the Chairman

Now that the snows have cleared and life is getting back to something approaching normality, it's an opportune time to return to the serious business of enjoying, appreciating and discussing Vaughan Williams!

The Society has had a busy and fruitful winter. One highlight was the launch of Naxos's Vaughan Williams Piano Concerto CD with Ashley Wass. Another was a joint event with the English Music Festival Friends at the Oxford & Cambridge Club in Pall Mall, when Oxford Liedertafel treated us to splendid renditions of some Vaughan Williams part-songs. Then there was the reception at the Royal Festival Hall to celebrate the arrival of our latest Albion Records disc, *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons*, with Sir David Willcocks regaling us with anecdotes and heart-warming tales before Vladimir Jurowski's insightful performance of *The First Nowell* later in the evening.

And so we come to 2010, which is already shaping up to be another busy year. For me, the spring is always dominated by preparations for the English Music Festival. I am always especially pleased to see fellow Ralph Vaughan Williams Society members at this annual event, and hope that the performances of rare works by Vaughan Williams and his contemporaries will be appreciated, both by devotees such as ourselves and by those Festival-goers who may be less familiar with the great man's music.

In addition to this, I'm also trying to finish off a – rather overdue – book on British composers and the countryside, and completing a chapter on Vaughan Williams gave me pause for thought. It struck me, in particular, that Vaughan Williams and Holst must surely have been not just the most pleasant of all British composers of that period to spend time with, but also the most humane. Kindly, generous, quick to praise, slow to take offence, they lived not to further their own careers but to serve others, both through their deeds and through their music. An obvious example of this is the work that Vaughan Williams did during both war periods – both in terms of actual service and physical labour in aid of the war effort.

Musical activities took place in addition to all this. After giving a broadcast talk entitled "The composer in wartime", in which he exhorted his fellow composers to write music that was easy to play by all, he followed his own advice by composing *Household Music*. Scores for the war films *49th Parallel* and *Coastal Command* followed. He then organised an "Informal Hour of Music" (nicknamed "Infernal Hour of Music"!) at which young musicians played both to gain experience and to bring audiences relief from the horrors of war.

One of the most interesting discoveries I made was of Vaughan Williams' involvement with a rambling club, the "Sunday Tramps". Founded in 1879 by the author, critic and mountaineer Sir Leslie Stephen (Virginia Woolf's father) and the jurist Sir Frederick Pollock, the group caught trains to villages more than twenty miles outside of London and then walked back into town from there, no doubt discussing high-brow subjects en route. Vaughan Williams' fellow members included the politician Lord Haldane, the Bloomsbury group artist Roger Fry, the author John Buchan, the historian Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, the critic Desmond MacCarthy, three Trevelyan brothers, and Geoffrey and John Maynard Keynes. What an eclectic but brilliant group of people!

Em Marshall

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS SOCIETY

PRESIDENT

Michael Kennedy, C.B.E.

VICE-PRESIDENTS

Stephen Connock, M.B.E.

Roy Douglas

CHAIRMAN

Em Marshall,

The Red House,

Lanchards Lane,

Shillingstone,

Dorset, DT11 0QU.

Tel. 07808 473889

em.marshall@btinternet.com

TREASURER

John Francis,

Lindeyer Francis Ferguson,

North House,

198, High Street,

Tonbridge,

Kent TN9 1BE.

Tel. 01732 360200

john@lffuk.com

MEMBERSHIP OFFICER

David Betts,

Tudor Cottage,

30, Tivoli Road,

Brighton,

East Sussex BN1 5BH.

Tel. 01273 501118

davidbetts@tudorcottage.plus.com

PUBLICITY OFFICER

Karen Fletcher,

archerypromos@btinternet.com

JOURNAL EDITOR

William Hedley,

68, rue Mauléon,

11400 Castelnaudary,

France.

Tel. 00 33 468 60 02 08

rwwsocjournal@orange.fr