

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



Left: Alan Rowland and Adrian Sims performing the 6th Symphony at the Annual General Meeting, Sunday 11 October 2009

As the number of Ralph Vaughan Williams Society members settles around the one thousand mark, it's interesting to reflect on the reasons why people choose to join and why they stay. The Society's principal aim can now be seen on the front cover of the *Journal*, and simply by being a member you play your part in this. But what is it that gives our Society its special character and flavour?

Quite obviously, I like to think that the *Journal* provides one of the reasons for staying with the Society. But I'm using my space this time to draw attention to another important aspect of the Society's work, its publishing activities.

An appeal for help with funding for a new recording from Albion Records appears on page 19 of this issue of the *Journal*. Albion is the recording arm of the Society, an ambitious project and one which merits our support. The intention is not to record the sixtieth version of the *Tallis Fantasia*, but instead, to concentrate on repertoire which is little known or unknown, and which major recording companies therefore tend to view as a poor commercial proposition. *The Garden of Proserpine* is a case in point. Never recorded, not even published: your help will ensure that it becomes known. Albion's latest release, the *Sixth Symphony* in an arrangement for two pianos by Michael Mullinar and edited by Alan Rowlands, has just become available. We know that many of Vaughan Williams works were first heard in "play-throughs" at the composer's home, often in the company of friends whose opinions he valued, and as Stephen Connock tells us in the CD booklet note, "central to many of these performances in the 1940s and 1950s was Michael Mullinar." We learn that, one day in July 1946, Mullinar played the *Sixth Symphony* twice to such a gathering, and that later, once the guests had left, he played it a third time, for the composer, Adeline and Ursula. Part of his reward was to have the work dedicated to him. Listening to the symphony in this form is no substitute for hearing the full orchestral version, of course, nor is it intended to be. But the music is certainly presented in a new light, with every strand audible, almost as if dissected and put back together again. Once we have heard it

like this we go back to the orchestral version with fresh ears. And of course, we can pretend to be part of the composer's chosen circle, invited to one of the most significant "play-throughs" of all. The pianists on the Albion disc are Alan Rowlands and Adrian Sims, and the version used is Michael Mullinar's own transcription for four hands, which also includes several contributions from the composer. This has been edited by Alan Rowlands, and the booklet includes a fascinating, short article in which Rowlands describes how he went about this task. Also on the disc are to be found Constant Lambert's piano arrangement of the lovely *Wasps Overture*, and two of John Ireland's most impressive works – *The Forgotten Rite* and *Mai-Dun* – arranged for piano, four hands, by the composer.

An independent review of this new CD disc will appear in a later issue of the *Journal*, but in the meantime, members will find details of how to purchase it in the Albion announcement on page 7. Reading that announcement will remind members that Albion Records has already issued five CDs before this new one. Each one is different, each one maintains the aim of publishing rare material, and each one is an artistic triumph. I can only urge those members who have not yet started exploring this series to do so as soon as possible. And then there are the books, of course, including two editions made possible thanks to the Society's close relationship with Ursula Vaughan Williams. One should add, too, that back numbers of most issues of the *Journal* remain available, though the *Journal* is not strictly an Albion publication.

I'm happy to report that a few members have written in to give their views both on the new look of the *Journal* and on its content. I'll be bearing these comments in mind, and putting into action one or two of the suggestions, in forthcoming issues. There will be no particular theme for the February 2011 issue, but I invite all members who are able to do so to get in touch with me on the subject of "Vaughan Williams and the Musical Amateur", which I hope will be substantially covered in the next issue, due out in October.

William Hedley

The Running Set

Roy J. Lidstone

Whatever is that? If you are a devotee of the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams you will know it is the title of a real gem of orchestration, rarely played and used often as a “fill-up” track on a CD of his more cerebral works. However, if you are a folk dancer you may remember it as a dance demanding very vigorous participation, and appearing only rarely in dance programmes nowadays. As a folk dance musician I have never been asked to play for it and my band has been working for over thirty years, performing at dance venues of every sort: village halls, schools, church halls and even in a squash court that had the acoustics of a swimming pool. As well as playing in the U.K. at workshops and festivals we have toured in the U.S.A. since 1993, playing once in Kentucky, which we will see was once the “home” of *The Running Set*, discovered by Cecil Sharp in 1917. Even on home ground no request came. But it was danced in the Royal Albert Hall on Twelfth Night in 1934 to music specially written and conducted by Ralph Vaughan Williams.

In 2009 a new recording was widely acclaimed: it was of Ashley Wass playing the Vaughan Williams’ Piano Concerto, with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by James Judd. Of course I bought a copy and soon began to realise what a wonderful and monumental task had been given to Harriet Cohen, who first played it at the B.B.C. Symphony Concert on 1 February 1933. The purpose of this article is not to comment on this music or the other gems, *The Wasps* or the *English Folk Song Suite* on this CD. To my surprise, I read that Track 13 was *The Running Set*. Somewhere in the recesses of my mind a little light came on: coming into focus gradually I realised that I did know what it was. Then I played the track, which lasts for six and a half minutes, and the sheer exhilaration of the way the composer had used familiar folk dance tunes, bringing them to robust life and showing what a master he was in orchestration, caught hold of me as I played it over and over again. Being “in the trade” I had to find out as much as possible about this work, and although it has not the gravitas and power of so much of Vaughan Williams’ amazing output, it has its own charm, bringing light and freshness to many a dull moment.

A library is always a good place to start a hunt for facts. If these facts are about Vaughan Williams then The Ralph Vaughan Williams Memorial Library at Cecil Sharp House, the headquarters of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, is a particularly good place. Here the Director, Malcolm Taylor, and his staff, made available a veritable treasure-chest of research data, the orchestral score of *The Running Set* and commentaries by experts in dance history. The monumental work which Ralph Vaughan Williams achieved in researching, annotating and recording the cultural heritage of our folk music tradition was accompanied by many notable musicians at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Cecil Sharp was one such, and it is to him that we owe the discovery of *The Running Set* in the Appalachian Mountain area of Kentucky, U.S.A., in 1917.

He and his assistant, Maude Karpeles, travelled extensively but with great difficulty in those mountainous areas of rural Kentucky. Facilities, trains, passable roads and general communications were few once townships were left behind. This is described graphically in the E.F.D.S.S.’s publication *Dear Companion, Appalachian Traditional Songs and Singers*. This is a compilation of Sharp’s writings and comments by contemporaries. Miss Evelyn Kendrick Wells was a young teacher at Pine Mountain School and following Cecil Sharp’s death in May 1924, sent the following reminiscence to Maude Karpeles: “I remember what a hot day it was when Mr. Sharp and Miss Karpeles came walking across Pine Mountain. Most visitors from the outside world were heralded by the guide, who came ahead to open gates for their mule passengers; not so for these two, who were quietly at our doorstep before we knew it.” Miss Wells then gave them directions about the different houses where they were to be put up. “Mr. Sharp said quickly, ‘I hope they are not too far apart, because Maude has to give me my tea!’” Tea was offered to them but “Mr. Sharp with his inimitable courteousness said, ‘Is it permissible to bring one’s own tea?’”

The actual discovery is described by Miss Wells thus: “There was the warm, rainy night when in front of the fireplace at the Far House we listened to his talk of Appalachian discoveries, and watched with a bit of amusement how he lost the thread of his talk as he became conscious of a rhythmic patting and stamping on the porch and suddenly stopped, and with a look at Miss Karpeles stepped outside, followed by her. His own description of that first running set is in his book.” The description is quoted later in *Dear Companion*. “I came across a most wonderful dance the other day called the Running Set. It is a form of circular country dance of a type about which I know nothing. There is certainly nothing of the kind in England at the present day and there is nothing that I know of in any of the old dance books. It is a very strenuous dance for six couples and extremely complicated. In many ways the general effect was not unlike that of the Sword Dance.” Shortly after this Cecil Sharp achieved his collection of one thousand Appalachian songs, all along feeling increasingly ill, which the privations of rough travelling exacerbated. (He enjoyed his relationship with Ralph Vaughan Williams. Michael Kennedy quotes from a letter of February 1922: “I am v. glad you liked the symph. – you know I value your opinion v. much – you are one of the few people who possess technical knowledge and yet do not let it bias your judgement.” (*The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, page 156.)

When Elizabeth Bennett first encounters Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, it is on the dance floor, one of the few occasions that young men and women of the time could touch hands in public. John Playford, and later his son, was a prolific music publisher in London in the mid-1600s. In country houses and meeting places when dances were presented the music would most probably have been selected from Playford’s *Dancing Master*, a

comprehensive collection of beautiful tunes and interesting dance figures. As the first settlers began their perilous journeys across the Atlantic at this time they took not only their goods and chattels but also their culture. English country dancing (from Mr. Playford) was an important component. It was not long after landing in the New World that communities came together and, needing some respite from the back-breaking tasks of establishing farms and buildings, created their own entertainment. Dancing naturally helped everybody to relax and forget, for a few precious moments, what still needed to be done. As communities settled further and further west the dances went with them, gradually taking in local flavours and customs. These were the dances that Cecil Sharp and Maude Karpeles, with many other collectors, “discovered” some two hundred years later. In the *Country Dance Book, Part 5*, published by the E.F.D.S.S., the theory is put forward that the *Running Set* dance was found in the Appalachian area because most of the original settlers there came from Northern England and the Scottish Borders, people who, before they came to America, were used to a vigorous country dance (listed in the *Country Dance Book, Part 3*, from 1650) which had none of the niceties associated with Playford in London. The dance was called *Up Tails All*.

Now, to *The Running Set*. Ralph Vaughan Williams’ own description is printed at the beginning of the score: “*The Running Set* is a dance of British origin still performed in the remoter parts of the United States. When Cecil Sharp discovered it a few years ago it had already lost its proper tune, if it ever had one, and was danceable to any appropriate tune or even to the mere thrumming of the bow on the fiddle. When Sharp introduced it into this country he used for it several traditional tunes from the British Isles which have since become closely connected with it. Lately, a massed performance of the dance was arranged for the Annual Festival of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. For this purpose several of the tunes were combined to make one continuous movement. At one point in the dance where a difficult new figure had to start, the director of the dance, Mr. Douglas Kennedy, asked that a well-known air should be introduced to guide the dancers. This was accordingly done.” Three types of score were printed: for full orchestra; a version for two pianos, arranged by Vally Lasker and Helen Bidder; and a version for military band arranged by Gerrard Williams. The original of this last score was lost in a fire following enemy action in 1941 when the B.B.C. Music Library was bombed. This version was specially written for a series of broadcast talks given by Vaughan Williams on the subject of “Folk Song Music”. On 27 March, 1940, *The Running Set*, conducted by Major B. Walton O’Donnell, was played, together with a “Folk Dance Medley” and other march tunes. The composer, talking about marching and tunes for marching, said, “There is not only the quick step march to be thought of, but also the slow march and the double. The first piece to be played to you tonight, *The Running Set*, is all at the double. *The Running Set* is a dance with a series of traditional tunes to it, some of which are well known. I remember in my army days how we were sent for a route march at seven o’clock every morning, except Sundays, and part of that route march was always at the double. How we hated it! And how we longed for a good tune to help us through the ordeal. First, then, Major O’Donnell and his players will give you *The Running Set*.”

Depending on the wishes of the conductor and the abilities of his players the piece lasts for just five or six minutes. It was written for

actual dancers taking part in a masque, which itself was part of an annual celebration for its members by the English Folk Dance Society and held in the Royal Albert Hall in London on Twelfth Night, 1934. The title ‘Quodlibet’ became attached to the music, both by Michael Kennedy in *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* and by the music critic Herbert Hughes, who used it in his account of a Promenade Concert performance later that same year. Many of us will remember school mathematics lessons with Pythagoras’ Theorem, and saying triumphantly “Q.E.D.” when we had run through the proof (quod erat demonstrandum – which was the thing to be proved). So another use for “quod” appears. “Quodlibet” was used originally to describe a philosophical or theological discussion but, according to the Oxford Shorter Dictionary, by 1845 was being used to describe a medley of tunes – “what pleases me!”

The composer presents us with a beautifully crafted medley of four bubbling folk dance tunes, played with a speed marking of *presto*. In the recording by James Judd and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra the piece is played at crotchet = 162, more than twice the speed of a normal heartbeat; and that being so, quite exhilarating! When playing for folk dancing it is necessary to give the dancers a feeling for the rhythmic speed, just before they start. Some bands have a drummer to beat out 1 2 3 4, 1 2 or 1 2 3. Some play “two notes in”. Some accordionists puff out a couple of chords, all depending on the style and speed of the dance tune. Ralph Vaughan Williams prepares his dancers with 1 – 2 – 1 2 3 4 played by the strings, *pizzicato*, and percussion, then straight into the first tune. Like all folk music there can be differences in the way the music is written due to its origin, how long it has been in existence and local usage over time. The first tune of *The Running Set* is *Barrack Hill*, played in duple time with six quavers to the bar, and in the Dorian Mode on D. There is another version of it under the title of *The Breach of Killiecranky*, also in the Dorian mode but in duple time with two crotchet beats to the bar. In David Manning’s book *Vaughan Williams on Music* (Oxford 2008), the composer writes about folk dance tunes. He gives, as always, a lucid account of the structure of a typical tune: “It is true that a traditional fiddler finds it difficult to remember a dance tune unless he watches the dance, and the dancer is at a loss without the tune.” Most folk dance tunes are built around two related parts, usually labelled A and B. (There are exceptions, but they are exceptional!) Depending on the dance patterns a typical sequence will be A+A, then B+B, returning to the As and Bs for the number of times required. Occasionally there may be a C tune as well, which takes its place in the running order. Usually this is all built into eight-bar phrases, so giving the dancers audible signals to help them differentiate the progression from one figure to the next. *Barrack Hill* is an A+B tune, and Vaughan Williams provides 208 bars with a judicious mixture of A and B segments.

ex. 1: Barrack Hill



At first the woodwind (flute, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons) play the A tune, which is then repeated over a

rhythmic accompaniment by the strings with percussion (side drum and triangle). After a conventional 2A+2B with a complete repeat, the strings are given the melody with the piccolo and oboes. The brass (2 horns, 2 trumpets) interject their harmonising notes on the first and fourth beats of the bar. The trumpet also gets to play the tune, followed by the trombone before a change takes place. Ursula Vaughan Williams in *R.V.W.* (page 68) tells us how well respected the composer was when, at only thirty-one years old, he was invited to write two articles for the new edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* covering fugue and orchestration. One element present in most fugues is augmentation, where the subject is elongated and allocated more musical space than it had at its first entry. Now, in *Barrack Hill*, the composer treats us to augmentation of the melody, first on the flute, piccolo and oboes with the first and second violins. The augmentation is in triple time over the duple time of the rest of the orchestra. Soon this distinctive rocking motion is taken up by the brass and helps to bring this section to a rousing ending, before it changes key into D major and the second tune, *Blackthorn Stick*, is announced.

ex. 2: Blackthorn Stick



This lovely tune was collected by Elsie Avril from the fiddler of the Earsdon Sword Dancers of Northumberland. The melody chatters its way up and down the scale, hardly ever stopping for breath. Our “Running Set” composer ensures that taking breaths is a very hurried action, as he writes 194 bars of energetic music requiring superb musicianship from the players who, already, have played through *Barrack Hill*. No group of instrumentalists is left out and each section, in turn, finds itself taking the constant repetitive movement of the melody. The trombones and trumpets have a brilliant “rumpty-tumpty” tune as the woodwind and strings keep up their incessant conversations. They then have their turn with the “rumpty-tumpty” tune as the woodwinds’ collective teeth chatter. Then the trombones barge in with a “bully-boy” scale-like tune which develops into a dramatic change of rhythm in response to Mr. Douglas Kennedy’s request for a distinctive change to “a well-known air” to be introduced to guide the dancers.

ex. 3: Cock o' the North



In comes *Cock o' the North* in C major and *fortissimo*, duple time with six quavers to the bar. Here, too, the composer displays his unique craftsmanship by introducing, in what was a well-known tune of the time, a completely different

harmonisation from what would have been expected. The trombones, strings and bassoons emphasise a B flat/G figure which gives a very different atmosphere to the familiar tune. This distinctive harmony clumps down the stairs with A/F, G/E, F/D, E/C, D/B flat creating an air of uncertainty. A change seems imminent, but what? It is a moment rather similar in feeling, though less quiet, to the miraculous bridge between the third and fourth movements of Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony*. Something is expected. A two-bar phrase from the flute, piccolo and trombones, echoed by the trumpets, is heard, then a rising fountain by strings and lower woodwind. The next tune is about to be announced. (Don’t forget, however, that pace of the music is still as relentless as it was in the beginning, so there is not much room for speculation.)

ex. 4: Irish Reel



Irish Reel presents me with a mystery. In the autograph score there is no indication that it is any different from the other three tunes. Extensive searches by my musician friends, the Ralph Vaughan Williams Memorial Library and some Irish musicians have failed to identify this tune in print. A large number of dance tunes has been found, but none of them corresponds to the version found here. Why did the composer use it? It would seem he had something in mind, for, in contrast to the three main tunes of the piece, he uses only one A music (eight bars) and a few bars of the B music before modifying it for the quiet and peaceful reprise of *Barrack Hill* which finishes the arrangement.

Here *The Running Set* comes to an end, still running at the double with a delicate duet from the piccolo and bassoon, followed by an answer from the oboe and clarinet. The last few notes come from the bassoon as it plays out the “augmentation melody” – a bar’s silence – the final D minor quaver chord. Absent from the CD, of course, is the ecstatic panting and gasping of the dancers who had performed this dance sequence in a packed Albert Hall. They were chosen from all over England and the programme book of the event lists twenty counties and districts. This took place seventy-six years ago, so it might just be possible that somewhere there is a dancer or a relative who still remembers that night and could tell us about it. In 1946, twelve years after this first performance, Ralph Vaughan Williams became the President of the English Folk Dance and Song Society and worked tirelessly on their behalf until his death in 1958.

Festivals of the size to fill the Albert Hall were deemed by the press to be worthy of mention, and the *Times* of 8 January 1934 printed a comprehensive report:

On the twelfth day of Christmas, the old song says, my true love sent to me twelve drummers drumming, eleven pipers piping, ten Lords a-leaping, nine ladies dancing, and a miscellaneous collection of livestock which we need not here specify, since only the first few items are applicable to the annual festival of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. There were drummers of sundry kinds – two from Portugal and various English tabors and small drums, pipes, simple whistles and a proper orchestra

conducted by Dr. Vaughan Williams and Mr. Arnold Foster. A new expedient was tried this year of combining some of the best dances and the ever popular Kentucky Running Set into a Masque. Its interest was further enhanced by the special arrangement of the music of the Running Set. The tunes were preserved intact for dancing, but they had been symphonised by Dr. Vaughan Williams into a kind of passacaglia, which promised to stand on its own feet as a piece of orchestral folk music whenever it is not used for accompanying the dance.

I would think that the use of the term “passacaglia” provoked some interesting conversations in places of musical academia at the time. It is difficult to imagine how a recurring theme, built up on chords I, IV and V or a ground bass in a minor key could exist in the material presented by Dr. Vaughan Williams, unless the journalist is thinking of the early seventeenth-century use of *Pasacalle* in Spain. This consisted of serenades performed in the streets by dancing couples. There is surely no technical similarity between *The Running Set* and, say, the *Passacaglia in C minor* for organ of J. S. Bach.

The *Times* journalist was right in one respect, however: the work did stand on its own feet when Vaughan Williams conducted it in a Promenade Concert later in 1934, on 27 September. 1933 and 1934 were eventful years which brought periods of pain, both physical and emotional to the composer. He had broken his leg walking home on a moonlight night in June 1933. Ursula Vaughan Williams tells us (*R.V.W.*, page 195) that “He spent the next few weeks in splints, and then hobbling with the aid of a crutch...by the 31st [of August] he was able to conduct the *Pastoral Symphony* at a Prom.” So, we presume he was working on *The Running Set* during the autumn ready for the performance in January. A stimulus to this activity can be found in the minutes of a sub-committee of the English Folk Dance and Song Society held on 10 October 1933, which said, “The Board has discussed a scheme, submitted by Dr. Vaughan Williams, for a symphonic treatment of the tunes played at the Festival Performance. The Board recommended that Dr. Vaughan Williams’ scheme be put into operation this year and that Dr. Vaughan Williams, Miss Imogen Holst and Mr. Arnold Foster be made responsible for the arrangement of the tunes.” Perhaps the idea for *The Running Set* began to develop during his recovery from the broken leg. Typically he decided to try to learn to play the clarinet and arranged for a teacher to visit him (*R.V.W.*, page 195). Miss Darbisher tried her best, but her pupil, in spite of regular practice, did not progress very well! So passed an autumn of great pressure with exceptional demands on his time, including conducting a performance of Elgar’s *The Dream of Gerontius* and overseeing the building work on The White Gates. As 1934 progressed Gustav Holst succumbed to increasing illness and Vaughan Williams took on some of his teaching commitments at St. Paul’s Girls’ School. Again, Ursula tells us, “[Holst] rested, saw his friends, listened to music and tried to build up his strength for the operation, but his heart was not strong enough for the ordeal, and he died on 25 May.” We can only begin to imagine the grief suffered by Vaughan Williams at the death of his greatest friend. Ursula tells us more: “Soon after Gustav’s funeral Ralph spent a day walking in Sussex...He cut his foot on a piece of broken glass or a sharp stone...it did not heal, and before long he had a poisoned abscess – unfortunately it was on the leg he had broken the year before.” He was in bed for eight weeks. For such an active musician, so much in the public eye and with so many demands

on his time, this must have been a very difficult period for both Adeline and him. However, he did conduct half of the Promenade Concert on 27 September 1934. Ursula describes the scene (*R.V.W.*, page 202): “He made a romantic appearance on the platform, leaning on a stick, and he had to sit to conduct both the *London Symphony* and the “quodlibet” which he had made of English dance tunes for *The Running Set*...The audience enjoyed the high spirits and completely danceable music, for Ralph conducted dance music in such a way that it was hard to sit still...he could not help wondering whether the “great ovation” reported by the papers was for his music or...was a tribute to a sporting effort.” The *Times* evoked the contemplative nature of the programme, which also featured the *Tallis Fantasia* and *The Lark Ascending*: “It may be the absorption of the English dances and songs which has been a source of inspiration to the composer. This side of his genius is represented by the full orchestral version of the quodlibet of tunes for *The Running Set*. Its vigour and gaiety made a point of contrast to the general contemplative character of the rest.”

A further report, this time in the *Saturday Review* for 6 October 1934, emphasises another aspect of that Promenade Concert. Michael Kennedy tells us (*The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, page 242) of the piece written by Herbert Hughes referring to *The Running Set* as a “gorgeous little work”. Hughes prophesied for it a future comparable with Ravel’s *Bolero*. “There was in it a gaiety, a gusty exhilaration of which I had never suspected of V.W....not until now had he shown such mastery of sheer liveliness, such brilliance of orchestration. The bringing in of “The Cock o’ the North” as the climax of the excitement was the final, unexpected and incredible Dionysian touch.” It is certain that the Greek God of Wine, loosening inhibitions and inspiring creativity in music and dance can be evoked here. The effect of generous libations can be seen in another report by a writer in the *Sunday Referee*, who alleged that the climax of *The Running Set* was “that well-known ditty ‘Chase me Charlie, Chase me Charlie, I’ve lost a leg of my drawers.’” As Michael Kennedy tells us, “This drew a letter from The White Gates protesting against the accusation of using a tune ‘with an offensive and disgusting title. I have no knowledge of a tune with this name. The “well-known air” which I introduced into *The Running Set* was “The Cock o’ the North”, a tune which I hoped would be recognised even by critics.”

On the day of the Promenade Concert the *Times*, in its column about broadcasting for the day, indicated what the Vaughan Williams Concert would contain. “The Promenade Concert, the first part of which will be relayed in the National Programme tonight, will be devoted to the music of Dr. Vaughan Williams. It will include a first concert performance of *The Running Set* (Quodlibet of Dance Tunes), an item which recalls the composer’s association with the folk song and folk dance movement.” (The rest of the column will provoke a bout of nostalgia for some, as it lists the names of various broadcasting stations – National, West National, Aberdeen, Athlone, Belfast, Bournemouth and Plymouth – before giving notice that “An excerpt of Lew Leslie’s ‘Blackbirds of 1934,’ entitled ‘Rhapsody in Blue’, will be relayed from the London Coliseum at 10.25pm. The first of a new ‘Songs of the Shows’ series will be broadcast in the London Regional Programme and will consist of a survey of film songs from the silent picture theme song to the present day ‘talkie’ successes.”)

Several authors of musical literature have mentioned *The Running Set*. Frank Howes, in his book *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (O.U.P., 1954) discusses the origin and music, pointing out the way in which the function of a Folk Dance “Caller” arose from those early days in Kentucky. This was something completely new to English folk dancing at the time, but which is now commonplace and quite essential. In *Vaughan Williams* by A. E. F. Dickinson (Faber & Faber 1963) the author outlines the events leading to the performance and to the quality of the writing of the “quodlibet”: “The sparkling arrangement calls for no further comment nor does the composer’s command of piquant orchestration.” Interestingly, he compares it with the piano duet piece *Capriccio sopra alcuni motivi russi* by Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857). A succinct paragraph in the *Oxford Companion to Music* (2001) informs us of this composer’s innovatory and influential “changing background” technique in treating folk tunes. “He counts, too, as one of the founders of the Romantic Movement in music, and of the expression of national feeling through that art.” This last characteristic corresponds, of course, to a field in which Ralph Vaughan Williams had such mastery.

Reviewing a Chandos CD in the February 2003 issue of the *Journal*, William Hedley wrote “*The Running Set* was composed in 1933...Four folk tunes...are presented in rather dizzying succession as well as in counterpoint with each other, in a rapid two-in-a-bar time which never lets up during the piece’s six and a half minutes. It is played here with that brilliant and apparently effortless virtuosity which we have come to expect from the London Symphony Orchestra and which some of us may even take for granted.” In March 2007, a member told us “My acquaintance with his music goes back to 1936 when at the age of twelve I heard a performance of *The Running Set* played by the Newcastle Philharmonic Orchestra (as it was then called) in

the Hall of the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle.” Another member, Seumas Simpson, Regional Chairman for Scotland, in October 2004 and under the title “What Ralph Vaughan Williams means to me”, wrote “In my first year at St. Andrews University I had the privilege...of singing in VW’s *Mass* and *In Windsor Forest*...Succeeding years at St. Andrews brought participation in other works by VW...I even played the orchestral piano part in *The Running Set*.”

I started this piece by trying to describe *The Running Set* in its many guises, rarely played, charm, lack of gravitas and so on. I hope that it will come to be seen as another shining facet on a priceless jewel of tremendous importance – the body of work of an exceptional composer who left this world an infinitely better place because of what he gave us to experience and absorb, to play and dance, putting us in touch with planes of consciousness to which our everyday world seldom takes us. His unique personality coped with a prodigious workload of composing, rehearsing, conducting, dealing with committees, as well as writing articles and books, yet in all this he was a man who enjoyed people of all sorts. What celebrity of our present age would have realised that an eleven year-old chorister, Eva Hornstein, was absent from rehearsal because she had mumps, and sent not just his best wishes but composed a lovely and amusing poem, each line of which rhymed with “mumps”? As Ursula Vaughan Williams said on many occasions in broadcasts and on DVD, “He was a lovely man!”

[My grateful thanks are due to my Band colleagues, Dr. Nigel A. Marshall, the Director and Staff of The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, librarians at the BBC Music Library and Surrey County Council’s Performing Arts Library, and to Mr. and Mrs. B. Somerville of “Music on Sundays”.]

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On the Reception of the *Tallis Fantasia* in New York, 1922-1929

Allan W. Atlas

As a native New Yorker and longtime *Tallis Fantasia* addict, I became interested in the early reception – roughly during the 1920s – of Vaughan Williams’ “signature” composition in New York. What I discovered held some surprises.

The *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* received its first performance in New York – and in the United States – on 9 March 1922, when Walter Damrosch conducted it with the New York Symphony Orchestra Society.ⁱ Neither the work nor the performance made much of a splash, and neither the program notes in the orchestra’s *Bulletin*ⁱⁱ nor the next day’s review by Richard Aldrich in *The New York Times* (hereafter *NYT*) even mentioned that this was the work’s first performance in the United States. About the *Fantasia* Aldrich had the following to say:

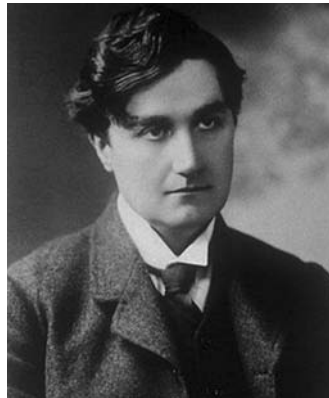
The fantasia by Vaughan Williams is based on a tune written by Tallis in the sixteenth century...Mr. Williams [sic] has carried out his fantasia quite in the mood of the tune, which strikes modern ears as very dignified, not to say gloomy and depressing. The music is skillfully written for the string orchestra, with an effective employment of the different timbres. And it is in its way imaginative, interesting and impressive up to a certain point; but Mr. Williams is so entranced with the evolution of his fancy that he forgets to stop before the listening ear is satiated with the gravity and severe decorum of the music. It was well played with a great richness of dark tone [my emphases].

(“The Philharmonic Society,” *NYT*, 10 March 1922, p. 22.)

Clearly, Aldrich had reservations about the piece (see below), and that he referred to the composer as “Mr. Williams” (as did other New York critics in the early 1920s) shows that Vaughan Williams was, at this point, anything but a household name.ⁱⁱⁱ

Particularly significant, I think, are two phrases: “up to a certain point” and “he forgets to stop”, which surely means that whatever else Aldrich thought about the piece, he considered it too long, a judgement that was seconded by Oscar Thompson, critic for *Musical America*:

The Williams Fantasia began as an engrossing and even beautiful work, but was dulled by its immoderate length...he could shorten it five to eight minutes [!] and improve it greatly.
(“Rachmaninov with Symphony”, *Musical America*, 18 March 1922, p. 13.)



Still another critic, writing anonymously in the *New York Evening Post*, was downright insulting, and compared the work to a sermon, and a tedious one at that:

...but the work has been spun out to interminable lengths. It reminds one of the classic sermon with its “fourthly, fifthly, sixthly, and in conclusion.” It seems on the verge of stopping logically again and again, only to take a long breath and start in on another peroration.

(“Rachmaninov with Symphony”, *New York Evening Post*, 10 March 1922, p. 7)

And though we might be tempted to lay the blame for the complaints about the length of the work on Damrosch’s tempos, we should note that Aldrich and Downes issued the same verdict in their reviews of Pierre Monteux and Leopold Stokowski, respectively. Thus Aldrich had the following to say about the performance by Monteux and the Boston Symphony Orchestra on 31 November 1922:

...the impression is now, as it was on the first performance of the *Fantasia*, that Mr. Williams has carried it too far. The modal harmonies...produce an effect of monotony on modern ears sometime before the end is reached. The composer would undoubtedly have strengthened his effect by greater conciseness. (“Opera...The Boston Symphony Orchestra”, *NYT*, 1 December 1922, p. 27.)

And after praising the work’s “grave and poetic beauty”, Downes continued his review of the performance by Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra at Carnegie Hall on 19 October 1926 as follows:

If memory serves, the piece was shortened, and it may be admitted that for calm analysis there is a little too much of it. It has nevertheless such invention and feeling that one would gladly have it continue longer, even though this would further injure its proportions and take away a needed measure of conciseness.

(“The Philadelphia Orchestra”, *NYT*, 20 October 1926, p. 22.)

Had he had “too much of it”, or would he “gladly have [had] it continue longer”? In the end, only W. J. Henderson among the New York music critics did not complain about the length of the work, though he criticized Vaughan Williams’ use of “modern instrumentation”. (*New York Herald*, 10 March 1922, p. 12.)

Now, what I find fascinating about the critics' constant harping about the work being too long and somewhat monotonous is that they echo, surely inadvertently, two anonymous reviews that had appeared some twelve years earlier in response to the 1910 premiere at Gloucester Cathedral. On that occasion, the anonymous reviewer for the *Gloucester Journal* complained about the "short phrases repeated with tiresome iteration...there was a feeling of relief when it came to an end...The piece took nineteen minutes in performance", while the critic for *The Musical Times* noted that the work "appeared over long for its subject matter".^{iv} Yet when we compare the British reviews of 1910 with those of New York in the 1920s we must bear in mind that the Gloucester and New York critics heard different versions of the *Fantasia*: after the 1910 premiere, Vaughan Williams took trimming shears to the work on two occasions, first in 1913 and again in 1919; the two rounds of revision resulted in cuts totaling thirty-three bars (including, near the end of the work, what would have been the fourth complete statement of Tallis's melody), which, as I've reckoned elsewhere, would have caused the 1919 version of the work to be approximately two minutes shorter than the original version of 1910.^v These cuts notwithstanding, Aldrich, Downes, Thompson, and the anonymous critic of the *New York Evening Post* still found the work too long, an opinion that Downes, despite his obvious admiration for the work, repeated in leitmotiv-like fashion in a number of reviews:

The tempo at the opening of Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia*, which is a little too long for perfection of form, but which we would fain were an hour or two longer – it is so beautiful and of the "moyen age" – was faster than we have had from other conductors.
(*"New York Symphony Opens Season"*, *NYT*, 1 November 1924, p. 10.)

The fantasia of Vaughan Williams, though it might benefit by a few cuts because of the luxuriant invention, is surely one of the most beautiful and poetic outpourings of the modern English school of which Williams is so distinguished a representative.
(*"Philharmonic Plays Beethoven"*, *NYT*, 25 March 1927, p. 25 – a review of a performance by Willem Mengelberg.)

In all, the New York critics' verdict about the earliest performances of the *Fantasia* in New York was virtually unanimous: it was beautiful, even "luxuriant", but it was in need of some cuts.

If to this point, the early New York performances of the *Fantasia* came and went without much hubbub, things changed with Damrosch's performances – now with the post-merger New York Philharmonic (see note i) – on 25-26 October 1928. Although the program notes for the two evenings fail to provide even a hint of what was in store,^{vi} Damrosch had dared to "compose" a brief introduction for the *Fantasia*: three strokes on the chimes. Reviewing the concert of the 25th, Downes objected to the interpolation in no uncertain terms:

One rises...to ask by what authority Mr. Damrosch saw fit to introduce the poetic *Fantasia* that Vaughan Williams has written on the Theme by Thomas Tallis by three strokes of the bell in the orchestra? These bell tones are not in the score; they are not mentioned by Mr. Gilman's list of the instruments required by

the composer for his purpose. Presumably the conductor intended to suggest a Gothic or medieval atmosphere. If so, he need not have employed the bells. The atmosphere is inherent in the music, which must be ranked as some of the finest and most imaginative that has come from the modern English school.
(*"Damrosch Conducts Eroica"*, *NYT*, 26 October 1928, p. 30.)

And after referring to *Tallis* as one of the "masterpieces of contemporary music", the unsigned review in the *New York Herald Tribune* also took issue: "But it would be interesting to know by whose authority Mr. Damrosch introduced bells as a preface to this austere composition. The idea was scarcely a happy one." (*New York Herald Tribune*, 26 October 1928, p. 20.)

It was the Downes review in particular that provoked Damrosch, who fired off a letter to the editor of the *NYT* the same day:

Your critic in his very kind notice of the Philharmonic-Symphony concert of yesterday afternoon asks by what authority I introduce a few notes on the chimes before the Vaughan Williams's [sic] *Fantasia* on a Theme by Thomas Tallis. I take pleasure in answering this question. I have done this entirely on my own authority and for the following reasons: The work was placed by me at the beginning of the second part of the program after an intermission of ten minutes. It is deeply religious in character and breathes the spirit and resonance of the old vaulted English cathedrals. I therefore introduced a few soft strokes of a church bell, first, in order to quiet the audience and, secondly, to create the proper setting for the music that was to follow. I was pleased with this slight innovation and do not think that the work suffered by it. But this is a matter of taste.
(4 November 1928, p. 124.)

Although Damrosch was probably right in noting that the *Fantasia* did not suffer from his "slight innovation", the introductory chimes seem not to have caught on; at least I know of no subsequent performances that included it.^{vii}



I would like to return to Olin Downes, since he, perhaps, played the most important role in shaping opinions about *Tallis* – and Vaughan Williams in general – in 1920s New York. (Note that Downes succeeded Richard Aldrich as chief music critic for the *NYT* in 1924.) And if his early reaction to the work was that its "luxuriant invention" could stand a few cuts, it was also his judgement (expressed in the same breath) that it was "one of the most beautiful and poetic outpourings of the modern English school". That Downes truly came to cherish the piece is evident from a lengthy review of a performance by the Dutch-born (though of German descent) conductor Willem Mengelberg and the New York Philharmonic on 26 December 1929, a concert at which the cellist Gregor Piatigorsky made his New York debut:

Once more the work wove its incomparable spell. The score is a real renaissance of old English music, created when England was one of the foremost nations of the world in this art. But if this is a "renaissance," it is a renaissance with the mists and reveries and melancholy of centuries shrouding the rebirth in a medieval gray which irresistibly captures the imagination. Here is a beauty more profoundly affecting, and, one believes, more durable than other beauty being created today, because of the

fact that its origins traverse so many centuries. It is not of today and not of yesterday but of a spirit that always was and always will be. When the theme of Tallis, the Elizabethan, is heard, the listener realizes that ancient stones and towering Gothic structures, seen through the mists of the years, are not dead; that in some mysterious way we and they are associated and mutually conscious. How otherwise explain the felicity with which Vaughan Williams has employed the old modes, and even counter-point of the old kind, and written with a naturalness and an elevation of style which are the purest heritage of his race? Such music has no program, of course; makes no explanations. It can be called a theme with free variations. But everything that is most treasurable and enduring in the spirit of the man who wrote that particular music, and of the race which stored it in the man's deepest consciousness, is present and articulate in a way that defies verbal explanation. There is no need now to comment upon the masterly writing in the old style, the superb and instinctive expression in the old modes. It is a noble, most beautiful, most mysterious music. ("Philharmonic Plays Ancient Music", *NYT*, 27 December 1929, p. 28.)^{viii}

To conclude: what, in the end, does this parade of reviews tell us about the reception of the *Tallis Fantasia* – and Vaughan Williams in general – in New York during the 1920s? Clearly, the New York critics initially received the work with some reservation: it was too long and somewhat monotonous. Yet within just a few years, it had taken on an aura that can, perhaps, best be characterized by the term "sacralization", so much so that not even the influential Walter Damrosch was permitted to tinker with this "noble, most beautiful, most mysterious music".^{ix} And as the *Fantasia* went, so went Vaughan Williams' reputation. From the little-known "Mr. Williams" of 1922, he rode the support of Richard Aldrich and, especially, Olin Downes to a position of eminence: "a great tonal poet", as Downes called him (along with Sibelius and Ernest Bloch in the same breath) in 1934.^x In fact, if we measure Vaughan Williams' reputation in terms of the number of times that the New York Philharmonic programmed his music during the period 1922-1929 – he was, during those eight years, the most frequently performed British composer, more than doubling the number of appearances by Elgar and almost doing so in comparison with Holst^{xi} – we may say that New York had, by the end of the 1920s, come to recognize Vaughan Williams as the leading representative among contemporary British composers. And even today, among British composers, he stands second only to Elgar (who had more than a two-decades head start) – and well ahead of Britten – in terms of the number of New York Philharmonic programs on which his music has been included.^{xii}

Appendix The *Tallis Fantasia* at the New York Philharmonic, 1922-1929

What follows lists the eight occasions on which the New York Philharmonic programmed the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, 1922-1929, with dates, orchestra (NYS = New York Symphony Orchestra prior to the merger with the New York Philharmonic (NYP) in 1928 [see note 2]), venue, and conductor. The data comes from the New York Philharmonic's "Performance History Search", online at www.nyphil.org/carlos.

9/10 March 1922	NYS	Carnegie Hall	Walter Damrosch
26 March 1922	NYS	Aeolian Hall ^a	Walter Damrosch
31 October 1924	NYS	Carnegie Hall	Walter Damrosch
7 December 1924	NYS	Aeolian Hall	Walter Damrosch
24 March 1927	NYS	Carnegie Hall	Walter Damrosch
3 April 1927	NYS	Mecca Auditorium ^b	René Pollain ^c
25/26 October 1928	NYP	Carnegie Hall	Walter Damrosch
26/27 December 1929	NYP	Carnegie Hall	Willem Mengelberg



Willem Mengelberg



Walter Damrosch

- ^a Located at 29-33 West 42nd Street (between Fifth and Sixth Avenues), Aeolian Hall was the venue at which George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* had its premiere on 12 February 1924. Beginning in the mid-1960s, the site served as the home of The Graduate Center of The City University of New York (where I teach); today it houses the School of Ophthalmology of the State University of New York.
- ^b Located at 131 West 55th Street (one block south of Carnegie Hall, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues), the Moorish-looking building once called Mecca Auditorium is now the New York City Center, known especially as the home of several world-famous dance companies.
- ^c At the time, an assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic. He served as music director of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra from 1929 to his death in 1940 (in his native France, where he had visited in 1939, only to be stranded there owing to the war.)

NOTES

- ⁱ The program, repeated the next day, included two movements from Respighi's *Ancient Airs and Dances, Suite 1*, the Franck Symphony in D minor, and the Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No. 1, with Rachmaninoff as soloist; see the *Symphony Society Bulletin*, 15/no. 2 (2 March 1922), [unpaginated]; the *Bulletin* usually appeared a few days before the concert to which it refers. On this occasion as the work's American premiere, see John H. Mueller, *The American Symphony Orchestra: A Social History of Musical Taste* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1951), 231. Note that the New York Symphony Orchestra Society (founded 1878) merged with the New York Philharmonic (founded 1842) in 1928, the combined, post-merger orchestra officially being called The Philharmonic-Symphony Society of New York; on the merger, see Howard Shanet, *Philharmonic: A History of New York's Orchestra* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 253-56.
- ⁱⁱ The program notes, by Ernest La Prade (1889-1969) run on for sixty-one lines, of which no fewer than forty-eight deal with Thomas Tallis's psalm setting of 1567 (made famous, of course, by Vaughan Williams). La Prade, who worked for the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), is best known for his *Alice in Orchestralia* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1925), which teaches children about the orchestra, and as a member of the three-person committee that devised the three-note "chime motive" (g - e - c) with which all NBC radio programs signed off from 1929 to 1971; see John Schneider, "The NBC Chimes Machine", online at www.bayarearadio.org/schneider/chimes.shtml.

- iii Among Vaughan Williams' major orchestral works, the *Fantasia* had been preceded in New York only by *A London Symphony* on 30 December 1920; it was soon followed by both *A Sea Symphony* and the *Pastoral Symphony* on 5 April 1922 and 24 November 1922, respectively. See the New York Philharmonic's remarkable website "Performance History Search" at www.nyphil.org/carlos; I must express my gratitude to Mr. Richard Wandel, Associate Archivist, at the New York Philharmonic Archives, Lincoln Center, New York, who provided me with a list of all of the New York Philharmonic's performances of works by Vaughan Williams long before the website became available in the summer of 2009.
- iv For the review in the *Gloucester Journal*, see Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 94, and Anthony Pople, "Vaughan Williams, Tallis, and the Phantasy Principle", in *Vaughan Williams Studies*, ed. Alain Frogley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 57; the *Musical Times* review appears in vol. 51, no. 812 (1 October 1910), 650; see also my article, "On the Structure and Proportions of Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*", *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 135/1 (2010), 139-40. Though it is possible that one or another of the New York critics had come across the review in *The Musical Times*, there is no evidence to support such an assertion.
- v The cuts are discussed in detail in Pople, "Vaughan Williams, Tallis, and the Phantasy Principle", *passim*; for my calculations of the effect of the cuts on performance time, see "On the Structure and Proportions of Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*", 139.
- vi *The Philharmonic-Symphony Society of New York*, Program Notes for 25-26 October 1928; in addition to the *Tallis Fantasia*, which, appeared just after intermission, the program included the Beethoven Symphony No. 3 in E flat, Op. 55, the *Eroica*, and Albeniz's *Fête-Dieu à Seville* and *Triana*, both arranged for orchestra by Enrique Fernández-Arbó from the original piano pieces that formed part of Albeniz's *Suite Iberia*. In later years, the Philharmonic seems most often to have placed *Tallis* at the beginning of a program.
- vii My efforts to locate Damrosch's conducting score have come to naught, and I do not know either what pitches the chimes struck (though we can probably assume that they did not clash with the tonal center on G with which the *Fantasy* opens) or if Damrosch even bothered to notate them. In view of Damrosch's use of the chimes in part to "quiet the audience" after the intermission, can we credit him with inadvertently inaugurating a practice still used in many a present-day concert hall: sounding chimes to signal the end of intermission?
- viii In some respects, Downes had anticipated this assessment in a review of a performance by Monteux and the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the *Boston Globe*, 28 October 1922; see *Olin Downes on Music: A Selection from his Writings during the Half-Century 1906-1955*, ed. Irene Downes (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 71-72.
- ix My thanks to Professor Leta Miller, University of California at Santa Cruz, for suggesting so apt a term as "sacralization". For the quotation, see above and note 8.
- x "Bloch's Artistic Creed", NYT, 18 March 1934, sec. X, p. 5. A note on the context: Downes referred to Vaughan Williams as "a great tonal poet of his race", which Downes intended as a compliment in that it underscored Vaughan Williams' reliance on "national" music in contrast to the "anti-romanticists, neo-classicists, expressionists..." On Aldrich and Downes as supporters of Vaughan Williams, see Barbara Mueser, "The Criticism of New Music in New York: 1919-1929", Ph.D. dissertation, The City University of New York (1975), 78, 175-76.
- xi During the years 1922-1929, the New York Philharmonic (I include the New York Symphony Orchestra prior to the merger in 1928 – see note i), included music by Vaughan Williams on nineteen separate programs: *Tallis Fantasia* = 8, *A London Symphony* = 9, and the *Sea* and *Pastoral* symphonies = 1 each; Elgar appeared on eight programs (the *Enigma Variations* = 5), while Holst was programmed on ten occasions (*The Planets* = 4, but only once complete). Two other near contemporaries of Vaughan Williams who figure on Philharmonic programs: Bax (1883-1953), *Tintagel* = 1, and Quilter (1877-1953), *Children's Overture* = 4. The information is drawn from the New York Philharmonic's "Performance History Search" (see note 2).
- xii The numbers, derived from the New York Philharmonic's "Performance History Search" (see note 2): Elgar = 151, Vaughan Williams = 102, Britten = 72. I have adjusted the numbers that appear on the website in such a way that I count only separate and distinct "programs" as opposed to individual "concerts" that presented the same program on, say, successive evenings. Further, I do not include performances of individual movements or sections of works. On the other hand, the numbers do include concerts by the pre-merger New York Symphony Orchestra, present-day New York Philharmonic-related chamber ensembles, Young People's Concerts, and tours.

[Allan Atlas teaches at The Graduate Center, The City University of New York]

Ralph Vaughan Williams

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From the Publicity Officer

■ Advance information from O.U.P.

Hugh Cobbe's *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1895-1958* will be available in paperback from September of this year. See <http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/product/9780199587643.do>. Society members are eligible for a 20% discount from O.U.P. on Vaughan Williams-related books, so this title will be available at £24.00. The full web address for ordering once the book becomes available is <http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/category/academic/promotions/humanities/websocrvw.do?code=websocrvw>.

■ *The Poisoned Kiss* in Birmingham

There is to be a student performance of *The Poisoned Kiss* on 11, 12 and 13 June at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts Concert Hall, University of Birmingham. Details can be found at www.barber.org.uk/summerfestival2010.html, or telephone 0121 414 7333 or telephone 0121 414 7333.

■ Proms 2010

It is disappointing to see that Vaughan Williams is not featuring much this year, though members will surely be interested in hearing David Matthews/Vaughan Williams: *Dark Pastoral* – based on the surviving fragment of the slow movement of Vaughan Williams' *Cello Concerto* (1942) (BBC commission: world premiere) (c11 mins).

Talk of the unfinished *Cello Concerto* by Vaughan Williams has pervaded the cellist fraternity for some years. Amongst the sketches for the three-movement work, a rather more extended fragment of what would have been the slow movement has attracted the attention of composer David Matthews, who, with the full approval of the Vaughan Williams Estate, has incorporated it into his own new, eleven-minute work. The work will be performed in Prom 67 which, entitled "Last Night of the 1910 Proms" reproduces, with the exception of Matthews' piece, the programme from Henry Wood's "Last Night" of one hundred years ago. This concert is free, and tickets are available from 9 July.

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■ New publication: *Let Beauty Awake*

Let Beauty Awake is a collection of papers from the second joint seminar of the Elgar Society and the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society, which was held at the British Library. The 160-page hard-back book, edited by Julian Rushton, includes a CD recording of Stephen Connock's on-stage interview with Richard Hickox, recorded the day before Richard's death.



Contents:

- Parry, Elgar, and Vaughan Williams: influences and aspirations (Michael Pope)
- Elgar's literary choice (Stephen Johnson)
- There is music in the midst of desolation (Andrew Neill)
- Character as form: Elgar's *Falstaff* (David Owen Norris)
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- "O Farther Sail": Vaughan Williams and Whitman (Alain Frogley)
- "Music in the Air": Vaughan Williams, Shakespeare, and the construction of an Elizabethan Tradition (Byron Adams)
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- Epilogue: "The light we sought is shining still" (Michael Kennedy)
- CD: Stephen Connock talks to Richard Hickox Available at £10 (instead of £15) plus postage from the Society's website, www.rvwsociety.com.

■ New Recordings

The new Naxos disc coupling *Dona Nobis Pacem* with *Sancta Civitas*, conducted by David Hill, may well be the most significant Vaughan Williams recording this year. It is particularly pleasing that these works will find a new audience thanks to distribution on the budget-priced label, Naxos. We hope that the exposure will also encourage more choirs to perform the works.

Naxos together with the Bach Choir hosted a launch in the Parry Rooms at the Royal College of Music. The recording was introduced by Anthony Anderson, M.D. of Naxos' U.K. distribution company, Select Music, and conductor, David Hill, who spoke about his appreciation of Vaughan Williams, at one stage turning to the piano to play the opening chords of *The Lark Ascending*, which first introduced him to the composer's music.

Another significant Naxos release features the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, under conductor Timothy Brown. Vaughan Williams' sublime *Mass in G minor* reveals the composer's absorbing interest in using the modal harmonic language and contrapuntal textures of the English late Renaissance to achieve a huge emotional and dynamic range.

Undoubtedly the most technically demanding work on this disc is *A Vision of Aeroplanes*, a virtuosic motet for mixed chorus and organ. Several neglected works also feature, including

The Voice out of the Whirlwind, an anthem for mixed chorus and orchestra or organ, and *Valiant-for-truth*, one of several works based on Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

(Both discs are reviewed in this issue of the *Journal*.)

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We will celebrate the centenary of the first performance of the *Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis*, which was conducted by Vaughan Williams, on 10 August, 1910 during this year's Three Choirs Festival at Gloucester Cathedral. Details are enclosed with this issue of the *Journal*. You are advised to book your tickets as soon as possible to avoid disappointment: www.3choirs.org/home.html.

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Philippe Graffin, violin
Sir Roger Norrington, conductor

■ **Other concerts around the UK**

12 JUNE, 7.30pm and 19 JUNE, 7.30pm

Kings Hall, Ilkley, Yorkshire,

The Great Hall, University of Leeds
Sinfonia of Leeds
Andy Long, violin
Vaughan Williams: *A London Symphony*
Bernstein: *Overture, Candide*
Dvorák: *Violin Concerto*
£12 (£8 concessions)
www.sinfoniaofleeds.org.uk

27 JUNE, 7.30pm

Blackheath Halls, London

Vaughan Williams: *A Sea Symphony*
Wagner: *Overture, The Flying Dutchman*
Stanford: *Songs of the Fleet*
Blackheath Choir
Eltham Choral Society
Sidcup Symphony Orchestra
Patricia Williams & James Ross, conductors
Deborah Stoddart, soprano
David Kirby-Ashmore, baritone

10 JULY, 7.30pm

Ely Cathedral

Cambridge Philharmonic Society
Vaughan Williams: *Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis*
Vaughan Williams: *Dona Nobis Pacem*
Verdi: *Overture, I Vespri Siciliani*
Verdi: *Te Deum*
Verdi: *Stabat Mater*
Joan Rodgers, soprano
Roderick Williams, baritone
<https://tickets.elycathedral.org>.

10 JULY, 7.30pm

Snape Maltings Concert Hall

Vaughan Williams: *A Sea Symphony*
Walton: *Belshazzar's Feast*
The Eye Bach Choir
The English Arts Chorale
Stowmarket Chorale & Orchestra
Leslie Olive, conductor
www.englisharts.org
www.eyebachchoir.co.uk/index.html
www.stowmarketchorale.org.uk

31 JULY, 7.30pm

The Borough Hall, The Headland, Hartlepool

Vaughan Williams: *A Sea Symphony*
(Centenary performance)
Madeleine Pierard, soprano
Dawid Kimberg, baritone (South Africa representative in BBC Cardiff Singer of the World 2009)
Britten: *Peter Grimes – Sea Interludes*
Elgar – *Sea Pictures*
Anna Stephany, mezzo-soprano (England representative in BBC Cardiff Singer of the World 2009)
The Mowbray Orchestra
Cleveland Philharmonic Choir
John Forsyth, conductor
Tickets from Hartlepool Tourist information Centre, 01429 869706, or John Hillier 01740 630736
www.cleveland-philharmonic-choir.org.uk
www.hartlepooltallships2010.com

3 AUGUST

London, Royal Albert Hall

BBC Prom 23 (tickets already very limited but there may be returns)



Vaughan Williams: *Serenade to Music*

Vaughan Williams: *The Lark*

Ascending

Elgar: *Symphony No. 1*
Foulds: *Dynamic Triptych*
Sixteen vocal soloists
Ashley Wass, piano
Nicola Benedetti, violin
BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra
Donald Runnicles, conductor

5 SEPTEMBER

London, Royal Albert Hall

BBC Proms – “Last Night of the 1910 Proms”
See above

11 SEPTEMBER

London, Royal Albert Hall

BBC Proms – Last Night
Vaughan Williams: *Suite for viola and small orchestra – Prelude, Galop*
Maxim Rysanov, viola
BBC Singers
BBC Symphony Chorus
BBC Symphony Orchestra
Jirí Belohlávek, conductor

20 NOVEMBER

Leeds, Town Hall

A concert to commemorate the first performance of the *Sea Symphony*, as conducted by Vaughan Williams in Leeds Town Hall on October 1910.
Vaughan Williams: *A Sea Symphony*
Vaughan Williams: *Five Mystical Songs*
Elgar: *Overture, Cockaigne*
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
Joan Rodgers, soprano
Roderick Williams, baritone
David Hill, conductor

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see our webpage:
<http://www.rvwsociety.com/concerts.html>

If you know of a Vaughan Williams work being programmed, particularly out of London, why not let us know so that we can list details? Please send concert details in the same format as that on our webpage to rvwinformation@hotmail.com.

Publicity-related enquiries should be sent to me at archerypromos@btinternet.com

Karen Fletcher

Some thoughts on legacies

Preparing a will is one of the most personal things we can do, and the process has a way of concentrating our minds on what matters most to us.

At some time we all have to consider how we would like to distribute our worldly goods among our friends and family. But for those who appreciate music, what a worthwhile exercise this can be. If you have a love of music, you can make a real difference to the future of charities such as the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society by leaving a legacy.

Arts organisations are often overlooked and it's important that they receive ongoing funding and support to be able to continue their activities. Whatever the sum, it really does make a difference. Other arts-based charities you could consider include orchestras, festivals, music societies, trusts, funds and schools.

Creative legacies

It is easy to include your favourite charities in your will and your solicitor can advise the correct wording for this. You might like to include a charity within the residue of your estate, so that once individual gifts have been taken care of, anything left can go to the charities or organisations that are important to you.

You may prefer to specify how your bequest should be used: for example, a special event such as a recording or a performance, a lecture, research towards a publication, to benefit young people and so on. A bequest could also be made in memory of someone who was dear to you.

You might want to support the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society's recording activities, and any legacy left to the Society for that purpose would be applied to our recording subsidiary and own label, Albion Records. Gifts to registered charities such as ours are free of inheritance tax.

Alternatively, you may prefer to leave an item or collection of musical interest to a society or collection. With Vaughan Williams in mind, who knows what opportunities the future will bring? We plan one day to have a permanent Vaughan Williams collection and live performance area, so if you have an item associated with the composer and would like it to go to a home where other devotees can appreciate it, our Treasurer, John Francis, can suggest wording that may be suitable (in confidence) and which can then be discussed with your solicitor.

It is only by raising awareness of the possibilities that we can help to secure the future of live and recorded music, so that new generations can be inspired as we have been. I would welcome your thoughts or experiences via the Letters pages or direct to me.

Karen Fletcher

If you would like to discuss, in confidence, a gift to the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society or to Albion Records, please contact the Society's Treasurer, John Francis, at john@lffuk.com.

The Ralph Vaughan Williams Society strongly recommends seeking the advice of a solicitor who will be able to ensure that any wording fits in with the rest of your intentions in your will.

HUGH THE DROVER OR LOVE IN THE STOCKS

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Letters

THE JOURNAL...AND OTHER MATTERS

I was sorry to read of the Editor's dashed expectations of a lively response to the new look of the *Journal*, and I take my share of any blame for not so responding. But then I am no great writer of letters to publications.

May I belatedly say, then, that I think the appearance of the *Journal* is admirable. There was indeed nothing wrong with it before, but its appearance now is of a well-established and thoroughly professional production, attractive but nonetheless dignified and without any meretricious gimmicks. In brief I find it worthy of the great man to whom it is dedicated and of the Society members who are committed to honouring his work and his memory. Well done and thank you!

Having for once lifted finger to keyboard, I turn to another matter.

I was pleased to see the publicity given to Sir Charles Stanford and the information that a Stanford Society existed. My enthusiasm for Stanford's music is only a little less than that for his greatest pupil's work. Thinking of the two composers, it seems to me that there is an aspect of the work of both that I have hardly seen mentioned in critical accounts of their music.

Vaughan Williams once made a remark, "Stanford's beautiful thoughts expressed in his own beautiful way". I have just been listening again to the *Irish Symphony* and recalling comments by writers as eminent and sympathetic as Lewis Foreman and Jeremy Dibble, comments which refer to the first movement as "somewhat academic in form" and to its "dutifully text-book structure". Such faint commendation overlooks what is, in my view, the first thing that will strike the ordinary, non-academic music-lover on hearing this music for the first, or any, time – its sheer gorgeous beauty. The poignant minor-key first theme is lovely and memorable in itself; but the long, exquisitely orchestrated second subject is surely one of the most beautiful passages in the whole symphonic canon and deserves recognition as such. And the symphony as a whole maintains and merits Vaughan Williams' tribute quoted above.

And this is the factor that seems to me to be missing from nearly all of our commentary on music, no matter by whom. In all the attention that was given to Vaughan Williams' music in the fiftieth anniversary year, in all the discussion of various aspects of his achievement, I heard and read no word about his supreme genius in creating sheer 24-carat, heart-easing beauty. It appears from beginning to end of his career and in every genre of his music. To pick up instances almost at random: *Silent Noon*; "Love bade me welcome" from *Five Mystical Songs*; "In the night-time" from *Hugh the Drover*; "Reconciliation" from *Dona Nobis Pacem*; "Beauty clear and fair" from *Sir John in Love*; "Sweet was the song" from *Hodie*; *Serenade to Music*; *An Oxford Elegy*; *The Lark Ascending*; the *Fifth Symphony* – I could go on and on.

I think that Robert Browning's Fra Lippo Lippi got it just about right:

*If you get simple beauty and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents:
That's somewhat: and you'll find the soul you've missed,
Within yourself, when you return him thanks.*

The Revd. R. James Tayler,

Salares, Málaga, Spain.

MORE...

In response to reading "From the Editor" in the February *Journal*, I want to say that I very much like the new design! It looks clean and professional, and it does a good job of organizing and communicating the material that it contains.

I have read every issue of the *Journal* straight through ever since I started subscribing to it, and I've been thinking about what kinds of articles I most like to see. I live in California and have only once visited the U.K., but, anglophile as I am, I greatly enjoy and appreciate the articles that provide historical background and context to RVW's life and music. The October 1999 issue featured several articles about RVW's military service in the Great War, for example, and there have been various detailed articles about his field trips to the British hinterlands to collect folk songs at the source (and thank God that he did, before some of them were lost forever!) Then, selected at random, I particularly enjoyed Stephen Connock's June 2006 article and photos about the composer's stay in Sheringham, North Norfolk, in 1919 following his military service; photos and articles about Charterhouse School or Cambridge; the students and faculty of the Royal College of Music, and so on. All of this is rich and valuable material that supplements the magisterial books about RVW by Ursula Vaughan Williams and Michael Kennedy.

I like the issues that focus on particular works, such as the October 2005 issue about the concertos and those issues that deal with individual symphonies and operas. I even like these articles when they are extremely detailed, such as the article in a recent issue about the *Viola Suite*, which inspired me to purchase the score.

I very much enjoy the concert reviews and information about upcoming concerts. If it had not been for the *Journal*, I would not have realized several years ago that an extremely rare American performance of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was planned for a venue in my own back yard, presented by a newly-formed opera company, and would have missed this moving and memorable event. More recently, I had an "Oh, to be in England" moment when I looked at the articles and photos in the February 2010 issue about the English Music Festival and Woodbridge Chamber Concerts. I would dearly love to attend some of these events.

The record reviews are very useful in helping me find new CDs to add to my RVW collection. I even enjoy the more provocative articles, such as Eric Seddon's June 2006 piece about religion which, although it pushed a bit beyond the available evidence, stimulated some very interesting discussion on this important topic.

In summary, I greatly appreciate the *Journal*, and I am thankful for the ways in which it enhances my appreciation of Vaughan Williams' life and music.

Let me close with a random thought. Has the *Journal* ever printed an article about Robert Holdstock's fantasy novels *Mythago Wood* and *Lavondyss*? *Mythago Wood* includes a very sympathetic portrait of RVW on a summer holiday in the hinterlands in 1957, touching on the topics of folk song and ancient British mythology. It's apparent that Mr. Holdstock liked RVW's music and that he had re-imagined the *Ninth Symphony* as a kind of soundtrack to these dark, convoluted novels. (I note, from reading the Wikipedia entry, that Mr. Holdstock passed away in November of last year.)

Kerry Lewis,
Santa Clara, California.

MORE...

I was saddened to read that so few people had written, hence my sixpenn'rth.

I can make no claim to musical knowledge, despite the best efforts of my late music teacher (a delightful retired R. M. Bandmaster Captain and Jutland veteran) to teach me to play the bassoon. Instead I am the archetypal Englishman who knows what he likes.

I started listening to classical music some fifty years ago when in my late teens, and started buying Decca Ace of Clubs LPs – great value – my choice usually based on the photograph on the sleeve, starting a long love of the music of Sibelius. I discovered RVW through his work on English folk songs and would always find articles on that subject of interest: perhaps someone from the English Folk Dance and Song Society could write something?

I try to read the more technical articles on specific compositions, and although I often end up baffled, there is always something of interest to add to my enjoyment of the music.

I like the articles on what I would call, "People and Places", filling in the details of RVW and his contemporaries. The recent article on his army service in the Great War ("Regeneration") I found of particular interest, and I would have liked to know more. I will be passing it on to the Western Front Association.

In summary, I enjoy the variety of articles and like the new format. One thing I would greatly appreciate would be a series of articles along the lines of Radio 3's "CD Review", looking not just at new releases but at all available recordings, especially of the major works, to help those as much in need of help as I to choose between the good, the bad and the indifferent.

Please keep up the good work.

Michael Parker,
Cove, Farnborough, U.K.

THE NINTH...

In issue 47 of the *Journal*, Alan M. Watkins asks, "Am I alone in loving Vaughan Williams' Symphony No. 9 to pieces?" Well I can assure him that he is not and he can now come in from the cold. There are many admirers of this great symphony, but the trouble

is they haven't until recently had much opportunity to turn out in force. In 2008 there were two London performances which attracted large and enthusiastic audiences. Richard Hickox at the Royal Festival Hall and Sir Andrew Davis at the Proms were both stunning. The latter was broadcast on BBC2 and even Jane Asher was overwhelmed by it! This year the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, no less, are playing it four times.

The symphony has been jinxed since its first and, by all accounts, rushed performance under the baton of Sir Malcolm Sargent, and it has taken a generation to emerge as the powerful and visionary work that it is.

So I am completely with you in admiration of the symphony but can't agree with your favoured recording by Bryden Thomson and the London Symphony Orchestra, which is even quicker than Sargent. My article in issue 39 of the *Journal* explains why.

Robin Barber,
Crewkerne, Somerset, U.K.

...AND OTHER MATTERS

Alan M. Watkins' letter expresses his love of Vaughan Williams' *Symphony No. 9* (*Journal*, February, p.18). I love it as well but when I first came across it in my teens, I thought it very "advanced", modern and above my head. At that time, I was a member of the World Record Club and one of the monthly issues was Sir Adrian Boult's recording of this work for Everest (1958). I still have this LP, with its wonderful photo of David McFall's bust of the composer on the sleeve (so much more true to the man than Epstein's horrid bronze). The back reprinted Vaughan Williams' own hilarious programme note which includes images of demented cats and instruments being obliged to "sit up straight" and play in the proper manner.

I was at the Grieg Piano Concerto stage of my musical development, so it is not surprising that the symphony should pose difficulties. Years later, I still found it more difficult than all the other works but the last decade has seen a radical change in my view of the work. I now regard it as possibly the greatest of the cycle and the ending, with those great washes of orchestral sound building, crashing and receding, like huge waves breaking on a beach and then fading to nothing, always floods me with emotion. Knowing it is the last symphonic creation of this great man makes it even more poignant. Over recent years, a number of commentators have taken the view that the stature of the *Ninth* is gradually but steadily increasing, and its present status has never been higher. So Alan Watkins is not alone.

If I may be allowed to change the subject and comment on something else featuring in recent *Journal* correspondence, I disagree with some who have criticised the Proms for not doing justice to Vaughan Williams and other British composers, recently at least. Before explaining, I would say I have done my share of writing in vain to various BBC Controllers of Music bemoaning the neglect of various composers, especially Edmund Rubbra. I received the usual patronising and unhelpful replies which imply you must have questionable taste to champion such second-rate stuff. Nicholas Kenyon's rather illogical attitude to Bax (play an unknown composer and wonder why the audience is small) is capped by what Steven Isserlis related on Radio 3 a year or two ago. In conversation with Kenyon in which Isserlis mentioned the inexplicable neglect of

Frank Bridge's *Oration*, Kenyon replied that he couldn't get cellists interested, seemingly oblivious to the occupation of the person he was talking to, and his admiration of the work. Robert Simpson had to smuggle Rubbra's *Symphony No. 1* on to the air waves by including it in his *Innocent Ear* programme. He got away with it and escaped the dire punishment that Radio 3 saved for tonal "revisionists" at that time. When Rubbra's *Fourth Symphony* was played at the Proms a few years ago, the description in the official programme seemed rather to refer to the first movement of the *First*. I took this up with the BBC who referred me to the author of this nonsense. He claimed he had heard Rubbra's own recording of the *Fourth* (Proms, 1942), which I have been unable to locate in the BBC archive or the British Library sound archive, though there is a recording by Boult and the BBC Symphony Orchestra from 1953. He claimed that Rubbra's interpretation of the music was more like...well, his description of it in the programme. He did not reply to further enquiries. When the audience heard the work, they must have been completely flummoxed, expecting *Sturm und Drang* and getting, instead, a beautiful and lyrical work.

These are just a couple of examples of the way the BBC, such a wonderful patron of music in our country, can, at times, be so crass when it comes to our own composers. It really depends on who has decisive influence at the time. The music world is packed with opinionated people, some of them employed at Radio 3. But when Roger Wright took over, things did improve in this direction. Look at the Proms 2008 (the fiftieth anniversary of Vaughan Williams' death). The following were performed: *Serenade to Music*; Symphonies 4, 6, 7, 8 & 9; the *Piano Concerto*; *Flos Campi*; *Job*; *Five Variants of "Dives and Lazarus"*; *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*; *The Lark Ascending*; *On Wenlock Edge* (in the original piano quintet version). Two films were shown at the Royal College of Music, *Scott of the Antarctic* and Tony Palmer's *O Thou Transcendent*. And don't let us forget the far better BBC film about his love affair with Ursula shown on BBC4 and the rare archive recordings of the composer himself. That's pretty good, isn't it?

Finally, last year we had the first performance in decades of Moeran's wonderful symphony. We are getting the big works and not just the short and often insignificant ones which used to tick the box and salve the consciences of the Prom planners.

Let's be fair!

Gavin Bullock,

Kings Worthy, Winchester, U.K.

C.V.S.

Chris Cope, in introducing the Stanford Society, lists a rich repertory for exploration yet, rather to my surprise, manages not to mention that Stanford was also prolific in chamber music and songs. As a clarinettist I'm indebted to him not only for the concerto but for a sonata and a brace of quintets. A selection of over forty songs is in Vol. 52 of the *Musica Britannica* edition, edited by the late Geoffrey Bush, including the powerful Keats setting, *La belle dame sans merci*.

I wonder if anyone can confirm my hunch that Stanford instructed his students to write Brahmsian chamber music as a kind of graduation exercise, examples being Ireland's enjoyable sextet (clarinet, horn and strings) and the early quintets by

Vaughan Williams, works with glimmers of his later musical personality and (of course) a high level of competence.

Julian Rushton,

Emeritus Professor of Music, University of Leeds

CANADA

I am the rector of St Bartholomew's Anglican Church in Ottawa. We had a magical moment in a service last week that I wanted to share with Society members. At a memorial service, in which I was officiating, we celebrated the life of a distinguished Canadian artist, Robert Hyndman. After flying 155 Spitfire missions with the 411 Squadron of the R.C.A.F. in 1943-44, Hyndman was appointed an official War Artist for the Canadian Air Force. One of his greatest paintings, now in the Canadian War Museum, is *Dive Bombers*. The museum curator brought the painting, about four feet square, to the church for the service.

In the Order of Service, the famous Canadian poem *High Flight* was printed. It was a favourite of the deceased, and written by another Spitfire pilot who died in 1941. It begins with these words:

*Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds...*

After several short speeches by the curator and family I was about to begin my homily. I asked everyone to look at the picture and the words of the poem while I played "Hudsons take off from Iceland" from Vaughan Williams' *Coastal Command Suite*. The music begins with planes clearly flying through dark clouds and danger while the harmony is always rising. And then the music comes into the clear sunlight, changes its metre and "dances the skies on laughter-silvered wings." Together the painting and the music showed one brief moment of joy in the midst of such danger and destruction.

The Revd. David Clunie,

Ottawa, Canada.

A CANADIAN SPEAKS

I was in the Royal Concert Hall in Glasgow last night to hear Peter Oundjian conduct the Royal Scottish National Orchestra in a performance of Vaughan Williams' *Fourth Symphony*. The man sitting next to me turned out also to be a member of the Society. I had not heard the symphony live before, and so I was comparing it to the two recordings – Boult and Handley – that I have. It was fantastic, and was very well received – the applause lasting a good five minutes. Oundjian is a Canadian, being Music Director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. He is an RVW enthusiast, and is taking RVW symphonies to American audiences. In the pre-concert talk he said that "Vaughan Williams shows more inventiveness/creativity than Shostakovich, both within each symphony, and across the range of all nine of them. Not one of them's the same." And later, talking to the audience from the podium, before the performance, he had this to say: "The *Fourth Symphony* is one of the masterpieces of twentieth-century music".

Ian K. Watson,

Carlisle, U.K.

“TRUE EMOTION” REVISITED

I was disappointed that there were no letters printed in the February issue disagreeing with Sean Beirne’s article on the danger of relativism for music. Personally, I love the Grateful Dead as much as I love Vaughan Williams, and life would seem all the poorer to me without Bob Dylan’s *Visions of Johanna*, Miles Davis’ *Nefertiti* or James Brown’s *Funky Drummer*. While I agree that classical music undoubtedly requires more effort on the part of the listener than pop music does, I don’t believe it is inherently better.

One point that instantly sprang to mind when reading Sean’s article, particularly the sections on Vaughan Williams’ “Britishness”, was that a great deal of Vaughan Williams’ inspiration came from folk music, “The Voice of the People”, as the Topic record label’s series of field recordings has it. I wondered quite how inherently British Vaughan Williams’ music would have sounded had he not wasted his time “being fooled by the deception of this forged emotion in [this] lesser music”.

I also take issue with the concept of “classical music” being referred to as a homogeneous unit. Is Lehar as worthwhile as Beethoven? Furthermore, to return to the alleged superiority of classical over other music, can Philip Glass’s *Music in Twelve Parts* really be said to convey as much “true emotion” as the Staple Singers?

Steve Conway,

Leigh on Sea, Essex, U.K.

THE UNQUIET SMYTH

I was recently listening to a recording of Dame Ethel Smyth’s opera *The Wreckers*, which I found very atmospheric, but without any recognisable or notable tunes.

One particular part of the libretto drew my immediate interest. In Act 1, Scene 5, the hero, Mark, sings the following, off stage:

*The wind is cold, the sky is sad,
And wet my brow with drops of rain.
The first true love that e’er I had
In yonder wood lies foully slain!*

*I’ll do for the love I bear him
All that a fair young maiden may,
Sit beside his grave and mourn him
Twelve long months and a day!*

Now, where have you heard something very much like that before?

The libretto for the opera was by Harry Brewster, an American domiciled in France and was written around 1902. He wrote it first in French, then translated it into German for a performance in Leipzig in 1906, and eventually into English for Beecham’s performances in 1909 and 1910.

The earliest *The Unquiet Grave* appears in Vaughan Williams’ oeuvre is in 1912 in *Folk Songs of England*, with a note that it was collected in Sussex – no date – by W. Percy Merrick. Merrick was active before 1890. Vaughan Williams notably heard it with Ella Mary Leather in a gypsy encampment in

Herefordshire in September 1912. This could have been to a different tune from the one Merrick collected.

Brewster possibly got the words from Cecil Sharp’s edition of Merrick’s collection and originally translated it into French. But the Smyth tune is quite unremarkable. No doubt if Vaughan Williams had been the composer he would have used one of the original tunes.

On another subject, I may have been mistaken, but did I hear amongst the background music to David Dimbleby’s programme *Seven Ages of Britain – Age of Empire*, on BBC1 on 14 March, a snippet of *Heroic Elegy and Triumphal Epilogue*? If so, the producer of this series certainly didn’t waste any time!

Mike Gainsford,

Burbage, Leicestershire, U.K.

AN RVW ENTHUSIAST

The first performance of Ralph Vaughan Williams’ *Sea Symphony* took place, to wide acclaim, in Leeds Town Hall on 12 October 1910, conducted by the composer. Members and friends, especially in the West Riding, will be delighted to know this will be commemorated with a performance by the Leeds Philharmonic Society Chorus, with Joan Rodgers and Roderick Williams as soloists, and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under David Hill, on 20 November 2010, again in Leeds Town Hall. The programme will include the *Five Mystical Songs* and Elgar’s overture, *Cockaigne*.

The *Sea Symphony* persuaded me that symphonies were a “good thing” and need not be boring. I was in Germany in the Royal Artillery 58 Medium Regiment for National Service around 1957 when, after playing rugby against a Royal Canadian Artillery Regiment whose barracks were not far from ours in Menden (Sauerland), we were entertained to a meal in their version of the N.A.A.F.I – the Maple Leaf Services. Afterwards, I browsed through the record racks in the shop where, sharing space with Elvis Presley, Joe Loss and his band, Frankie Lane and so on, was Vaughan Williams’ *A Sea Symphony* (the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Boult, with Isobel Baillie and John Cameron, on two LPs) as well as the third and fifth symphonies. They cost 20/- (£1!) when LPs in England were 37/6 (£1-87½). When I played the *Sea Symphony* on my record player in barracks I was overwhelmed with sound, words and mind-blowing scoring. If symphonies could sound like this I would love them all! It set me on over fifty years of Vaughan Williams enjoyment – and efforts to publicise him and all British composers.

My interest in Vaughan Williams started earlier when my love of the *Fantasia on “Greensleeves”* prompted my mother to take me to a concert in Beverley Minster which included *The Lark Ascending* played by Jean Pougnet and, I think, the BBC Northern Orchestra, conductor unknown. I wish I had kept the programme. The sound soared and echoed around the high vaults of the Minster, and my mother told me many years later that tears rolled down my cheeks. I still have Jean Pougnet’s recording with the London Philharmonic and Boult on a 10 inch Parlophone LP, with the pale green sleeve bound with the original linen tape! Over the years I have concluded that, for me, the finest overall performances of *The Lark* have been produced by violinists who are leaders of their orchestras, who are used to

playing solos that emerge from the orchestral sound, just as the lark emerges from the meadow. I am thinking of Hugh Bean with the New Philharmonia in 1967, Bradley Creswick with the Northern Sinfonia and Hickox in 1984, Iona Brown with the Academy of St. Martin's under Marriner in 1983, and David Greed with the English Northern Philharmonia under David Lloyd Jones in 1995 and recorded in Leeds Town Hall.

I was awestruck with a concert performance of *The Pilgrim's Progress* at the Festival Hall on 3 November 1970, and have been urging Opera North for many years to perform a Vaughan Williams opera. Whilst *Pilgrim* would be my first choice, *Sir John in Love* would give an opportunity for members of the superb Opera North Chorus to undertake the many minor roles. The nearest to any success was a charming letter from their then Music Director, Paul Daniel, explaining the difficulties of "selling" Vaughan Williams to the opera-loving public, moved only, it seems, by Mozart, Verdi or Puccini. I hope we may see Vaughan Williams' operas regularly performed before I am unable to visit an opera house.

Christopher G. Seller,

Leeds, U.K.

RESURRECTING THE RHYMER?

I'd like to bring up the subject of the elusive opera *Thomas the Rhymer* that Vaughan Williams left unfinished at the time of his death, the subject of which seems to have come up only once or twice in the *Journal*, and as far as I can tell has never garnered full discussion.

At the composer's death the work was left in piano score but never revised or orchestrated. Unrevised as it may be, this is hardly fragmentary stuff we're talking about, and it seems too extensive to merit its complete neglect from all conscious thought of VW. So why have we not seen nor heard anything of this?

I speak as someone (and I know I'm not alone) who sees the operas as major works with some of Vaughan Williams' most ravishing and inspired music and refuse to believe this one has been completed in vocal score form and holds nothing worth listening to. I'm not suggesting someone "recomposes" the work or finishes it for our beloved Ralph, but surely there is an aria or an interlude or two worth uncovering to the joy (I'm sure) of hundreds. Failing that, some discussion on behalf of someone in

the position of studying the score or somehow in the know would be almost just as appreciated.

Christiaan Light,

High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, U.K.

A PLEA

This letter from Mr. George Willows was published recently in *Eagle News*, the magazine of The Old Bedford Modernians Club. This club is for former students of Bedford Modern School, a fine school with which I have been connected for some years, both as Governor and parent.

In Mr. Willows' time the school was for boys only. The other school referred to in his letter is Dame Alice Harpur School, the girls' equivalent. I am happy to say that both schools are still very much in existence, highly successful and going from strength to strength, with Bedford Modern recently becoming co-educational. Both schools have flourishing music departments. Readers will remember that the BBC Music Department was stationed in Bedford during the War. The Corn Exchange is a popular concert venue where the Philharmonia Orchestra has a residency and plays regularly to capacity audiences.

Mr. Willows writes: "I was a boy treble in Mr Colson's school choir, which often recorded hymns in St Paul's Church – Bedford's main Parish Church – for wartime BBC broadcasts. Just before or just after the end of the War, the School Choir took part in a Sunday recording at the Corn Exchange of a special anthem which Ralph Vaughan Williams had composed for the declaration of peace. I can remember RVW sitting in the balcony. The orchestra was the BBC Symphony, conducted by Sir Adrian Boult. The BBC Singers and the D.A.H.S. Choir were also involved. Neither the BBC nor Classic FM can find a copy of that recording. I know that it was recorded some years later by the Luton Girls' Choir, but that isn't the one I would like to hear. I am now seventy-eight and would like to hear it while I have time!"

Can any RVW Society members help?

Mr Willows' address is 40, Victoria Street, Newark, NG24 4UT.

Liz J. Luder,

Bedford, U.K.

The Garden of Proserpine and Fen and Flood

Albion Record 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.

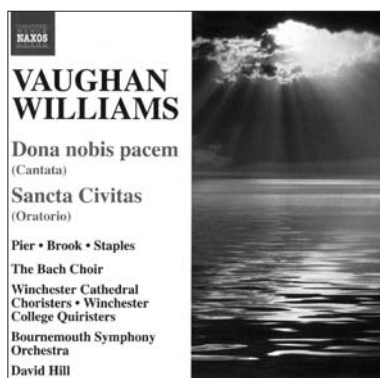
Please help! Members sponsoring the recording for £100 will receive a free copy of the CD and their name in the booklet notes. Special dedications are possible.

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!

CD Reviews

Vaughan Williams: *Dona Nobis Pacem; Sancta Civitas*
Christina Pier (soprano); Andrew Staples (tenor); Matthew Brook (baritone); The Bach Choir, Winchester Cathedral Choristers, Winchester College Quiristers; Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra conducted by David Hill
NAXOS 8.572424



This budget price disc is an excellent introduction to these two highly contrasted and perhaps greatest of Vaughan Williams' choral works (though in my view *Hodie* should also be considered.)

Dona Nobis Pacem is a heartfelt plea against war and a prayer for peace, interweaving texts from the Bible, Walt Whitman and John Bright (a speech before Parliament evoking the Angel of Death). David Hill directs a brisk and exciting performance with excellent singing from the Bach Choir and playing from the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. The second movement's "Beat! beat! drums!" is a real tour de force, without doubt a *Dies irae*. The heart of the cantata's anti-war message is of course the fourth movement, *Dirge for Two Veterans* (Whitman). This was composed originally in 1908 and resurrected for the 1936 work where it has a telling effect, evoking the trenches and "the pity of war", the funereal tread of this highly emotional music is wonderfully realised here. The ending of the work, with its hope and optimism, is well judged and very satisfying. The important soprano part that arches over this score is beautifully sung by Christina Pier, but I have some reservations about the baritone, Matthew Brook, who to my ear is not as powerful or authoritative as Bryn Terfel on the earlier EMI performance.

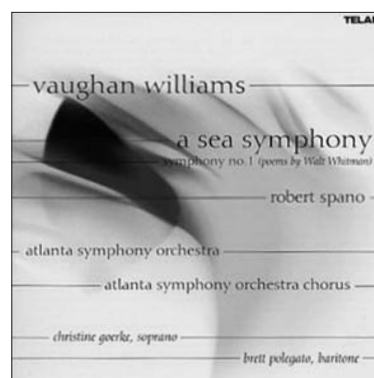
The apocalyptic oratorio, *Sancta Civitas* is a strange, mystical work that was given its first performance in 1926, the composer conducting the Bach Choir. The text is taken from the *Book of Revelation*, and depicts the age-old battle between good and evil. David Hill has the measure of this work's architecture and using the three separate choirs, builds in layers a huge cathedral (should that be temple?) of sound to evoke the composer's vision of something beyond the ordinary senses. Once again the orchestra is on top form and mention should be made of the superb violin solo from the unnamed leader that ushers in and then adorns the *Adagio* ("And I saw a new heaven"). The choirs are magnificent but again I have slight reservations about the baritone and the fleeting but dramatic tenor passage ("Behold I come quickly") at the very end of the work. This apart, it is a great performance.

The recording from the Lighthouse Hall in Poole is excellent with an attractive package and useful notes from Andrew Burn. As usual with Naxos, the texts have to be downloaded from their website, essential to enjoy both these scores to the full.

I think members will find this recording a very safe investment either as a supplement or for first-time listening to these essential works. Richard Hickox, on EMI, does have better soloists overall, but his reading of both works is less urgent so perhaps both versions should be on your shelves.

Robin Barber

Vaughan Williams: *A Sea Symphony*
Christine Goerke (soprano); Brett Polegato (baritone); Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Chorus conducted by Robert Spano
TELARC CD-80588



Writing in the October 2007 issue of the *Journal*, I was not very enthusiastic about a new CD of the Fifth Symphony from Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. This performance of the *Sea Symphony* was recorded in November 2001 and released the following year, but for some reason it has never been reviewed in these pages. It's a very fine performance indeed, and is still available, so I'm glad to be able to draw members' attention to it.

The opening is stunning, with tremendous sweep and drive, rich and sonorous and featuring, quite obviously, a large choir. The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus was founded in 1970 by the late Robert Shaw and quickly established itself, under his inspired direction, as one of the finest choirs of its kind. As such one might expect that the choral singing, prepared in 2001 by Norman Mackenzie, would be a particularly strong point of this performance, and so it turns out to be. It is full-blooded, unanimous in attack, and with very clear words where the composer's writing allows it. The orchestral playing is magnificent too, as is the recording with, in particular, an ideal balance between choir and orchestra. Then, as the work progresses, one comes to realise that the conductor's view of the work is a totally convincing one. He is scrupulous about following the composer's markings, and this pays off handsomely. Overall, the performance of this first movement marvellously brings out its very particular blend of exuberance and grandeur.

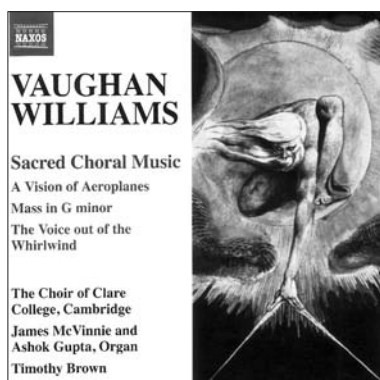
The soloists are hardly household names on this side of the Atlantic. Brett Polegato's voice is clear and focused. Members used to singers such as John Shirley-Quirk or Bryn Terfel will feel less "at home" with him, but his is a beautiful voice which he puts to most expressive use. Every word is clear, and one warms to his singing immediately. He is particularly successful in the slow movement, where he brings out with great skill the loneliness at the heart of the poet's meditations. Then there is a certain resolution at the end of the movement, to which he brings an extra vocal warmth. Christine Goerke's voice might initially strike the listener as a little cold, but it settles in with a most attractive mezzoish timbre which nonetheless does not diminish the splendour of her top B. The long, closing duet with the baritone is beautifully done, passionate, the two singers brilliantly complementing each other. I don't think I have ever heard the passage beginning "O we can wait no longer" launched quite so impetuously as it is here. The scherzo, by far the weakest music in the work in my opinion, is dispatched with stunning vocal and orchestral virtuosity, but it is to the opening pages of the finale that one should listen in order to gauge the quite remarkable quality of the choral singing in this performance.

It was apparently members of the chorus who suggested to the conductor that they should perform the *Sea Symphony*. It is wonderful to sing, I know, but if I were to arrange the nine symphonies in my personal order of preference, the *Sea Symphony* would only clock in at number eight. In fact, for a long time, I was unable to get on with it at all, finding it overblown and terribly text-heavy. This last criticism still stands: I don't know how any listener can really follow what Whitman and Vaughan Williams are trying to tell us unless substantial preparation work has been done. This performance has convinced me more than any other of the work's merits, and I warmly recommend it to Society members.

William Hedley

Vaughan Williams: *Mass in G minor; A Vision of Aeroplanes; The Voice out of the Whirlwind; Valiant-for-Truth; Three Choral Hymns; Nothing is here for tears; The Souls of the Righteous; A Choral Flourish*

James McVinnie and Ashok Gupta, organ; Choir of Clare College, Cambridge conducted by Timothy Brown
NAXOS 8.572465



Apart from the superb singing and playing to be heard on this disc, one of its main attractions for Society members will be a programme featuring several lesser-known works. Indeed,

thanks to this disc, two pieces make their first appearance in my supposedly comprehensive Vaughan Williams collection. *Nothing is here for tears*, a unison song to a text from Milton, was written following the death of George V. Its melody is pure Vaughan Williams, and once heard will haunt most devotees of the composer for the rest of the day. *A Choral Flourish*, on the other hand, is a brief and brilliant setting in Latin of the final verse of Psalm 32. It is unaccompanied apart from a tiny, clarion-like introduction.

The Voice out of the Whirlwind, wherein the composer adapted the "Galliard of the Sons of the Morning" from *Job* to fit a challenging text from the *Book of Job*, is given here in its original version for choir and organ. Most of the organ-accompanied works on this disc exist also in orchestral versions, and listeners interested in the orchestral arrangement of this work, which Vaughan Williams prepared for the Leith Hill Musical Festival, can hear it on the superb Naxos companion disc featuring the first recording of *Willow-Wood*. You will be able to follow the words on that disc too, though not with the present performance as, sadly, none of the texts is provided. (Purchasers are directed to the Naxos website instead.) *The Souls of the Righteous* is one of the composer's less well known unaccompanied motets, but a most beautiful one. The excellent soloists are named in the booklet.

Any lover of Vaughan Williams' music – especially if he or she is also an amateur choral conductor – will probably quibble at this or that detail of interpretation in some of these performances, so if I say that there are aspects of this reading of the sublime *Valiant-for-Truth* that I might have preferred otherwise, let me underline that it is, nonetheless, as beautiful a performance as all the others on the disc. A pity, though, about the momentarily intrusive male alto timbre at "Who now will be my rewarder", one of the most beautiful passages in the work, as well as what sounds like an edit during the silence which follows this passage.

Like *Valiant-for-Truth*, *Three Choral Hymns* is a minor masterpiece. It was one of several works Vaughan Williams composed to celebrate the jubilee of the Leith Hill Musical Festival in 1930, and according to Timothy Brown's booklet notes, this is the first recording of it in its organ-accompanied form. All three pieces are marvellous, but the third, "Whitsunday Hymn", is pure balm. I only know one other performance, that by Matthew Best conducting the Corydon Singers on Hyperion, the orchestral version and thus with slightly greater claim to the collector's attention. As regards the choral contribution, however, there is nothing to choose between the two performances. I had not listened to this work for a long time, and I'm looking forward to returning to both performances many times over the coming weeks.

Vaughan Williams is in many respects an enigmatic composer. Whilst much of his music may be taken, as it were, at face value and enjoyed as such, obstacles arise when one starts to ponder on its meaning. (The composer himself would have argued that the question was irrelevant.) Few of his works pose questions so intractable as *A Vision of Aeroplanes*. The words, chosen from the first chapter of the *Book of Ezekiel*, tell of bizarre, humanlike figures which appear out of a whirlwind and fire, of wheels that rise and fall with them, of the noise of the beating of the creatures' wings "as the voice of the Almighty" and a throne upon which sits "the likeness of the glory of the Lord." The main part of the work

is Vaughan Williams at his most violent and uncompromising, the choral parts highly challenging technically, and the organ part even more so. This is a magnificent performance, though as frequently seems to be the case in this work, the huge organ part coupled with the church acoustic prevents some of the choral dissonances from being heard. I've never quite been able to come to terms with this piece, with its tritone and whole tone harmonies, so alien to most of the composer's output, but once again this is a performance to which I will return with renewed determination in the hope of doing so. I do wonder, though, what those listeners without access to the internet, and therefore without the text in front of them, will be able to make of it. The virtuoso organ part is brilliantly played by James McVinnie. The excellent organist in the other accompanied works is Ashok Gupta, a final-year student at Clare College.

And so to the main work in the programme, the *Mass in G minor*. Westminster Cathedral Choir with Martin Baker on Hyperion are marvellous in this work, as are Laudibus and Michael Brewer on Delphian. My favourite, though, is that conducted by Richard Hickox, with a choir called the Richard Hickox Singers, and issued alongside his Chandos performance of the Fourth Symphony. This is to cite only three of the many fine recorded performances available, and to that group we may now add the present one from Clare College. The echoes of Tudor church music are particularly strong in this performance, and at certain points one is almost transported back through the centuries, such is the purity of the singing and the vision. The solo parts are particularly convincing, as they are throughout the disc, and Brown gets as close as any conductor I have heard to a real triple *piano* in the final cadence. A few technical points might trouble some listeners. For some reason the altos take a beat out of the third bar before the end of the *Kyrie*. Then there is a strange noise – another edit? – just before the word “passus” in the *Credo*. This might only bother those who listen on headphones, but few people would miss the artificially extinguished reverberation between the intonation to the *Gloria* and the first notes from the choir. But none of that should deter collectors from acquiring this most desirable disc.

William Hedley

[This is a slightly edited version of a review which first appeared at www.musicweb-international.com]

A Concert Of English Music

Vaughan Williams: *Concerto for Oboe and Strings*

With Handel (arr. Harty): *Water Music Suite*; Elgar: *Falstaff*
Mitchell Miller (oboe); Columbia Broadcasting Symphony
conducted by Bernard Herrmann

Historical recording from 9 September 1945

PRISTINE CLASSICAL PASC 202AS

This is a quite superb historical discovery, taken from the acetates of an American radio broadcast in 1945. I am addicted to tracking down off-air material from long ago, but I have to say few broadcasts from this date survive in such good sound and with so little surface noise. Here too we can understand why conductor-composer Bernard Herrmann acquired his reputation for pioneering unusual repertoire, especially British, with his Columbia Broadcasting Symphony, for everything about the performances is fizzing with energy and given remarkable impact and definition over the microphone. The announcements (which are tracked separately) give added period context for it as a document. The

programme, which was broadcast on 9 September 1945, consisted of a very symphonic rendition of the Harty suite from Handel's *Water Music*, a terrific *Falstaff* by Elgar and the second American performance of Vaughan Williams' *Oboe Concerto* with the same forces as the first 'Mitch' Miller and the Columbia orchestra conducted by Herrmann. The announcer tells us that Miller's American premiere of the Vaughan Williams had been in a broadcast in June 1945 also on CBS. So far as I know that first American performance – referred to by the announcer, Sidney Berry – some three months before, does not survive, certainly not in this kind of sound quality.



Mitchell ('Mitch') Miller started his career as an oboist – on this showing a remarkably distinctive one – but soon migrated to the production side of the recording industry, becoming Head of A & R at Columbia Records. He became a significant figure in American popular music as well as classical repertoire. This is only a mono recording but this in no way detracts from the impact of the Vaughan Williams or the Elgar. The solo oboe is quite beautifully caught by the microphone, and of course, it is a live performance before the possibility of retakes had entered our consciousness. 'Mitch' Miller characterises the music as if with easy familiarity – perhaps not surprising as he had broadcast it only three months before.

The concerto has a spoken introduction from which I cannot resist quoting this: "...the seventy-two year-old master Ralph Vaughan Williams, his latest composition to reach the United States...the foremost English composer of his generation, completed his oboe concerto and his fifth symphony during the recent period of wartime stress. However, both works share one thing in common, they breathe a spirit of peace and repose far removed from a world of unrest. We may say of the oboe concerto what one critic said of the symphony, that in this unsteady, restless, perplexing world of music, it came to restore faith and confidence."

Falstaff is a gripping performance that quite carries one along with an edge and impetus all its own. Herrmann never allows it to bed down, and when it needs to swagger there is no restraint. The mono orchestral sound is clean and well focused – terrific for a broadcast. And how good to have a CD start with the voice of the announcer saying "Good afternoon"! I suppose this will become irritating in time; fortunately it is tracked separately.

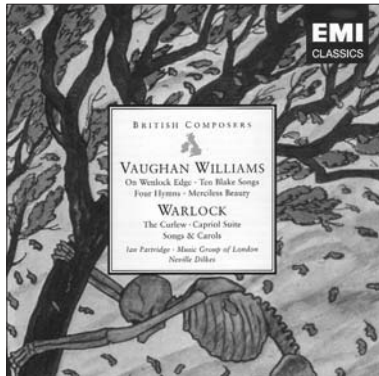
This is available as a download or on disc and I recommend the second option. This sort of material never lasts long, particularly with the threat of the copyright date being extended, so my advice is get it now, you will not regret it.

Lewis Foreman

Vaughan Williams: *On Wenlock Edge; Four Hymns; Merciless Beauty; Ten Blake Songs; The Water Mill; The New Ghost*

With music by Peter Warlock, including *The Curlew* Ian Partridge (tenor); Jennifer Partridge (piano); The Music Group of London etc.

EMI BRITISH COMPOSERS 9 68939 2 (2CDs)



Ian Partridge's reading of *On Wenlock Edge*, long the preferred reading of many Vaughan Williams enthusiasts, forms the centrepiece of this valuable reissued collection. Most members will already know the performance, but for those who don't, Partridge is not to be missed. He sings with enormous musicality and intelligence, and his tone, plangent or consoling by turns, seems ideally suited to this early work. And what a work it is, Housman's poetry perfectly realised in music – whatever the poet's own feelings – and scored with all the “French polish” Vaughan Williams had acquired from his studies with Ravel, whilst retaining the character and individuality resulting from his own acute ear. The other Vaughan Williams works are no less desirable. *Merciless Beauty* is an exquisite curiosity, and the very late Blake songs, for the unpromising combination of voice and solo oboe – wonderfully played here by the late Janet Craxton – is one of his most haunting and moving works. Partridge is as satisfying as he is in the Housman cycle, and his performances of the shorter songs, in which he is eloquently accompanied by his sister, Jennifer Partridge, are equally compelling.

The second disc contains fine performances of fourteen orchestral, vocal and choral works by Peter Warlock, including Partridge's celebrated performance of *The Curlew*.

Snap up these two very cheap CDs while you can, as they have been issued with little or no publicity and will surely disappear from the catalogue as quickly and as mysteriously as they arrived.

William Hedley

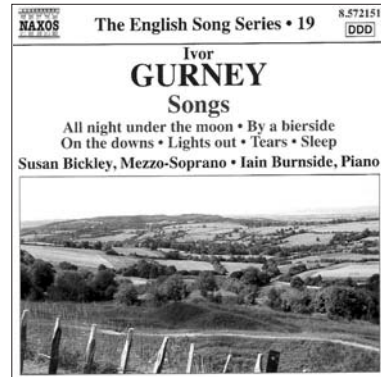
The English Song Series, Vol. 19: Ivor Gurney

Susan Bickley (mezzo-soprano); Iain Burnside (piano)

NAXOS 8.572151

I have long sought to include in my collection the complete recorded works of certain composers, amongst these being Vaughan Williams, Finzi and Ivor Gurney. The recent release by Naxos of Volume 19 in their “English Song Series” has enabled me to fill three gaps in my Gurney collection, as well as obtaining versions of several of his songs for mezzo-soprano which I did not previously have.

Ivor Gurney (1890-1937) was, in my estimation, one of the greatest of English song composers; a sort of home-grown Schubert if you like, with dozens of songs to his credit, some as yet unpublished. His genius was recognised by Stanford (his teacher). Vaughan Williams (with whom he studied for a short period after World War I) and, especially, Finzi, were tireless in getting his songs published after Gurney was probably wrongly committed to a mental institution in 1922. Gurney's life was both tragic and chaotic because of his mental condition. But he was a master of song composition as well as being a notable poet (as was Thomas Campion more than three hundred years previously). It never ceases to amaze me that some of his songs were conceived and written during active service on the Somme and at Passchendaele.



If any Society members are unfamiliar with Gurney's songs, this latest CD presents an excellent and, being Naxos, inexpensive opportunity to get to know thirty of them in superb performances by Susan Bickley and Iain Burnside. The latter of course we know from his performances on Albion CDs.

Susan Bickley has a pure clear voice. The fact that the CD omits the text of half of the songs “for copyright reasons” is of relatively minor importance in view of the singer's excellent diction. Thus, in the premiere recording of *The bonnie Earl of Murray* the lines come over correctly as “They hae slain the Earl of Murray, and laid him on the green” rather than “They hae slain the Earl of Murray, and Lady Mondegreen” as it sometimes seems when the poem is read out. (A search for the identity of this mysterious lady and the reason for her murder will always draw a blank!)

Incidentally the omission of the words is rather strange because they are included in the sleeve notes of other Gurney recordings in my possession.

It is impossible to single out any one of these thirty songs for special attention. All demonstrate an amazing gift for melody and word setting on the part of the composer. Two performances are announced as premiere recordings, the one mentioned above together with *The Cherry Trees*. But I suspect a third, as I have found no evidence of any previous recording of *Fain would I change that note* (also set by Vaughan Williams). But I may be wrong.

I can thoroughly recommend this CD. If you do not know Gurney's work, a modest £5 or so is little enough outlay to discover how beautiful it is.

Mike Gainsford

From the Chairman

Over the past years many of you have expressed concern at the lack of a Vaughan Williams museum or centre, and even more of you have questioned the future of Leith Hill Place. I am now in a position to reveal – tentatively and with a warning that plans are in their very early stages, and a plea not to get too excited about this and keep it reasonably quiet – that the Society is in discussions with the National Trust about the possibility of having a Vaughan Williams room in the house. As you may be aware, until



Leith Hill Place

recently Leith Hill Place – the childhood home of Ralph, and the family house of the Wedgwoods for several generations – acted as boarding accommodation for Hurtwood House Boys' School, but the school's lease has expired, and the National Trust has been considering the best new use for the property. It is important to the National Trust that, as well as bringing in income so that the building can pay for itself, the plans also include preserving the heritage and history of the house. A proposal has therefore been submitted by the National Trust to a regional council (and will then go on to a national council) that include a Ralph Vaughan Williams Society room. This room – the wood-paneled West Drawing Room, with views out over the Downs – would be the Society's, to display letters, scores and artifacts, show films of Vaughan Williams, sell Albion discs and books, play music, and recruit new members to the Society. The South Drawing Room would also be available to the Society for recitals, seminars and other events on a regular basis throughout the year – so that Leith Hill Place really could become a centre for Vaughan Williams again!

Although the lead time is, of course, long (about three years), we already have a dedicated team working on plans for the room, considering displays and materials. If you would like to be involved in this exciting project, please get in touch with me. We need people of all skills both to help us decide what to do with – and put in – the room, and also, when the time comes, to volunteer to man it. We will also be on the look-out for letters, scores and any other artifacts to display in the room, so if you have anything that you feel you might be able to lend us in due course, I would love to hear from you now.

I do hope that you will be as excited by the prospect of these developments as I am, and that you will give us your wholehearted support for the project. This is an amazing opportunity for us to do some vital educational and promotional work on behalf of the great man and his music – as well as the possibility of providing some sort of "home" for the Society.

In the meantime, I hope to see you at some of our forthcoming Society events – the Drinks Reception at the Gloucester Three Choirs in August, when we are absolutely delighted to have Michael and Joyce Kennedy joining us – and then at the A.G.M., where Penelope Thwaites, Stephen Varcoe and James Gilchrist, following the success of their superb St. John's, Smith Square recitals, will no doubt thrill and delight us with their performances of Vaughan Williams songs. Until then I wish you all a very happy – and hopefully sunny! – summer.

Em Marshall

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS SOCIETY

PRESIDENT

Michael Kennedy C.B.E.

VICE-PRESIDENTS

Stephen Connock M.B.E.

Roy Douglas

CHAIRMAN

(for general correspondence)

Em Marshall M.A. (Oxon), M.C.I.J.

The Red House,

Lanchards Lane,

Shillingstone,

Dorset, DT11 0QU.

Tel. 07808 473889

em.marshall@btinternet.com

TREASURER

John Francis

john@lffuk.com

MEMBERSHIP OFFICER

(for membership and subscription enquiries)

David Betts

Tudor Cottage,

30, Tivoli Road,

Brighton,

East Sussex, BN1 5BH.

Tel. 01273 501118

davidbetts@tudorcottage.plus.com

INFORMATION OFFICER

(for information relating to Vaughan Williams and his music)

Robin Wells

RobinRWells@aol.com

PUBLICITY OFFICER

Karen Fletcher

archerypromos@btinternet.com

WEB DESIGN & INFORMATION

Tadeusz Kasa

rvwinformation@hotmail.com

JOURNAL EDITOR

(for all matters relating to the Journal)

William Hedley

68, rue Mauléon

11400 Castelnaudary,

France.

Tel. 00 33 468 60 02 08

rvwsocjournal@orange.fr