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From the Editor

To judge from the number of references to the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* in this issue of the *Journal*, the one hundredth anniversary of its first performance has reawakened a lot of interest in the work. As you read through your *Journal* you will find it mentioned in several articles, letters and reviews, more than once in response to Allan Atlas's piece in the last issue about the work's early reception and performance history in New York.

The composer conducted the first performance of the *Fantasia* in Gloucester Cathedral, in a concert in which Elgar conducted *The Dream of Gerontius*. A dream of a concert, I'd say! By happy coincidence, this year's Three Choirs Festival took place in Gloucester, allowing the centenary performance to be given under conditions very close to those of the premiere. The centenary concert, in August, was conducted by Sir Roger Norrington. Sir Roger's repertoire is very wide and varied, but he is above all associated in people's minds with period performance. Period performance practice took root well over thirty years ago, and the first obvious sign was a reaction against large orchestras and slow tempi in Baroque music. The smaller forces came as something of a shock to one young concert-goer, myself. At my second ever symphony concert, in Liverpool, Sir Adrian Boult had conducted Bach's *Second Brandenburg Concerto*. (And I seem to remember being bored stiff in the second half, Elgar's *Second Symphony*. One's tastes change.) When I heard it again later I was singularly unimpressed by the tiny little string section, not to mention the recorder taking the flute's place and a horrible period trumpet splitting notes all over the place. Players have mastered the techniques required to play period instruments now, and the results can be spectacular, but even today – and as I write this I am expecting the heavens to cave in on me – I sometimes wonder if authenticity for its own sake is something to strive for. Would Bach not have preferred the sound of modern trumpets? Would Schubert not have preferred his *Lieder* accompanied on a modern concert grand? Of course we'll never know, but I do believe that those who think the reply would be "yes" should not be ashamed at wanting to take advantage of it too.

But back to Vaughan Williams and Sir Roger Norrington. In 1996 and 1997, he recorded a series of Vaughan Williams works for Decca with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. There are three discs, containing the symphonies 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, plus the *Serenade to Music* and the *Tallis Fantasia*. The series was never completed and the three discs are quite difficult to get hold of. Dear friends, believe me, this is a scandal and a tragedy. Norrington's recorded Vaughan Williams performances are notable for the remarkable transparency of the orchestral sound, for tempi which never allow the music to wallow or get bogged down, and above all for a kind of restrained passion. Lovers of Vaughan Williams should know

what I'm driving at here. Vaughan Williams' music is often extremely passionate, but there is no place for anything even approaching hysteria. Sir Roger's Vaughan Williams discs respect this. Writing in *Journal* No. 22, I referred to his recording of the *Fifth* as a "deeply moving and often revelatory performance". I regard his *Pastoral* as one of the very finest I've heard (though rivalled recently by a remarkable Boult performance issued free with the BBC Music Magazine.) Now I was not present at the centenary performance of the *Tallis Fantasia*, so I won't comment on it. The only opinions the *Journal* has received are negative ones, and they appear on pages 31 and 32. Sir Roger's recording of *Tallis* already challenged some traditionally held views, and that was in 1997. He is a conductor who looks anew at each work that he conducts. This – though I have no right to speak on his behalf – may



Sir Roger Norrington



Gloucester Cathedral engraved by J. LeKeux after a picture by W. H. Bartlett

be one of the factors that led him to period performance in the first place. But crucially, his views and ideas are constantly developing, even in music he has conducted many times, so it's no wonder that his way with *Tallis* has moved on in thirteen years. A questing mind will always disturb old habits. The results are "often revelatory".

I commend to members the submissions which have come in on the subject of "Vaughan Williams and the Musical Amateur". One of them, beginning on page 3, is the first instalment of an important piece of Vaughan Williams research. And for those with gaps on their Vaughan Williams bookshelves, I'm happy to announce that Ursula's *Collected Poems* is now available at half price. Turn to page 21 to find out more.

William Hedley

Vaughan Williams and the Musical Amateur: A checklist of English Carol Arrangements

Julian Onderdonk

Any assessment of Vaughan Williams' dedication to the musical amateur must include consideration of his folksong arrangements. Perhaps even more than the deliberately small-scale works for parish church choirs or the avowedly "functional" works for local music groups, these settings express his conviction that a nation's musical health is best measured by its amateur music-making. Folksong, after all, represented for him the *coming together* of the amateur and the national. It was created by average people under everyday circumstances, not for the purposes of material gain but out of a spiritual need to make music for themselves; emerging among those who "by race, tradition and cultural experience" formed a "homogenous community",¹ it also expressed thoughts and ideas that were ultimately national in feeling.

It is true that Vaughan Williams believed the forces of modernization and industrialization, in destroying the original oral processes of folksong, had threatened the links between folksong, amateurism and nationalism. But he also recognized that times had changed, that the old oral culture was gone forever, and that the transmission of folk material would have to proceed along different lines. Hence his focus on *arrangements*, a form of printed media that expanded performance conditions beyond the oral conditions of the home and the pub to include venues like the classroom, the church and the public concert – even recordings and radio broadcasts – that ultimately depend on the availability of printed music. Vaughan Williams saw these innovations as part of the "evolution of folksong",² developments that were necessary to restore folk music to a nation whose links with tradition had been severely compromised. Not that he wished to turn back the clock. The reintroduction of folksong by these means would, he believed, enrich modern life – by raising awareness of a common heritage, by familiarizing generations with a wealth of beautiful melody, above all by encouraging amateur musical performance. His folksong settings would help the modern nation-state rediscover its "lost" traditions of making music for itself.

The strength of Vaughan Williams' conviction in these matters is demonstrated by the sheer amount of arranging he did. A trawl through Michael Kennedy's *Catalogue*³ reveals a bewildering variety of settings for concert, theatrical, dance, school, church and domestic performance arranged for small orchestra, chamber ensemble, military and brass band, church congregation, chorus (men's, women's and mixed), solo piano, and solo voice with piano. Establishing an exact inventory is difficult, however, since Vaughan Williams left many settings unpublished, notably those he created for festivals, pageants and theatrical productions. Others, like the arrangements found in the Suite *English Folk Songs* (1923), quote folk tunes piecemeal or as a kind of contrapuntal quodlibet and are best considered "free" compositions. If we avoid these problem areas and consider only *printed* sources, however, we can arrive at a fairly reliable count

of forty-one separate publications containing 259 distinct arrangements.⁴ These numbers are for his settings of *English* folksongs and carols. If we include his published settings of Scottish, Welsh and Irish as well as continental folksongs and carols, we add a further eight publications and twenty-eight separate arrangements to this total. And if we expand our field of inquiry yet further to include composed but anonymous English carols and songs – a still-important source of national music for the composer – the total is expanded by another nine publications and twenty-one arrangements. That makes for a grand total of 308 arrangements appearing in fifty-eight separate publications, most of them intended for (or at least certainly within the reach of) musical amateurs.

Given the importance of these publications to Vaughan Williams' compositional career and philosophical outlook – he published his first settings in 1903 and they continued to appear at regular intervals right up to his death (some were published posthumously) – it is surprising that no complete checklist of arrangements currently exists. The roster posted on the Vaughan Williams Society's website is excellent so far as it goes, but its broad-brush approach means that there is little attempt to separate out different categories of arrangement. Intended as a simple introduction to Vaughan Williams' arranging activities, the website is concerned neither to differentiate between published and unpublished settings nor to distinguish between arrangements of actual folksongs, those of old English songs, those of music by other composers, or even "free" compositions that borrow folksongs piecemeal. Neil Butterworth's chronological lists of arrangements, organized by genre, does set out to map these differences but is unfortunately very incomplete and contains many inaccuracies.⁵ Only Michael Kennedy's *Catalogue* marks these differences consistently and accurately, but there the difficulty is that the listings are mixed in with Vaughan Williams' many other works: information about the settings themselves is thus scattered throughout the many pages of the book and sometimes difficult to find. The thorough indices in the back of the volume provide some help, but as they list only the titles of the folksongs he arranged and not the different arrangements he made from each, their usefulness is limited.

What is needed, clearly, is an approach that combines the thoroughness of Kennedy with a focused layout along the lines of Butterworth and the Society's website. A checklist organized both by song title and arrangement "type" is especially important, for while there are plentiful examples of Vaughan Williams setting a folksong or carol just once, in many cases he set the same song multiple times. (For an example, see the four different settings he made of the "Sussex Mummers' Carol" – nos. 72-75 in Table 1 below – or the three he made of the "Gloucestershire Wassail", nos. 29-31.) This approach also helps differentiate arrangements that share a title but are in fact set to different tunes.⁶ Mixing and

matching texts and tunes was and is common practice in the oral tradition, and in some cases only a careful comparison of sources can uncover this easily-missed but essential information. (Close examination of the various sources for “God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen”, for example – nos. 32-36 in Table 1 – shows that only three of the composer’s five settings are of the famous “London” tune everyone knows; the two others set an interesting mixolydian variant that Vaughan Williams and E. M. Leather collected in 1912 in Herefordshire.) An approach grounded in the study of the sources themselves also helps to sort out first printings of specific arrangements from later reissues and reprintings, a crucial step for anyone seeking to gain accurate data about the composer’s arranging activities.

This article offers the first installment of a checklist that I am currently compiling along the lines described above. The checklist, I believe, provides a more accurate and detailed picture of Vaughan Williams’ arranging activities than has hitherto been available. It amplifies our appreciation of the wide breadth of his knowledge of contemporary and antiquarian musical sources by identifying the actual sources he drew on when selecting songs and carols to set. It offers precise information – available at a glance – about which variant of a song or carol he used in his settings, thereby clearing up previous errors and misconceptions. Above all, it demonstrates the composer’s determination to disseminate folksong to English amateur musicians as widely as possible. The 308 items listed – a significantly higher number than previous estimates⁷ – represents a huge output of energy and effort, remarkable for any musician let alone a composer living in an individualistic age that valorized “original” work above all. The determination is especially observable in the remarkable variety of ensembles and performing forces that the checklist shows he wrote for: solo voice and piano, unaccompanied SATB chorus, unison women’s voices with keyboard accompaniment, unaccompanied TTBB chorus, SA chorus with keyboard accompaniment, solo voice and solo violin, unaccompanied SSAA chorus, SATB chorus with soprano and baritone soloists, TTBB with keyboard accompaniment, among many others. (Many of these provide for alternate forces if desired – orchestra instead of piano, unison voices instead of solo voice, SATB “ad lib.” etc. – so that the actual performing possibilities are exponentially increased.⁸ Particularly rich in this regard are the four-part SATB arrangements he produced for *The English Hymnal* and later hymnbooks. Intended principally for unison congregational performance with organ accompaniment, the format is deliberately unspecified so that different performance combinations – congregation alone, choir alone (with or without organ), or an “antiphonal” mixture of these – are possible. See R. Vaughan Williams, “Preface” to *The English Hymnal in Vaughan Williams On Music*, ed. David Manning (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 34. For a similar flexibility regarding his SATB carol

arrangements – here, Vaughan Williams adds solo vocal performance to the options listed above – see the “Preface” to *The Oxford Book of Carols*, ed. Percy Dearmer, R. Vaughan Williams and Martin Shaw (Oxford University Press, 1928), p. xxiii. Finally, by listing the many reprintings of individual settings – some reissued by the original publisher, others issued by a new publisher who had either obtained permissions or bought the original copyright outright – the checklist charts the network of contractual agreements that also contributed powerfully to the dissemination of these arrangements.⁹

This first installment of the checklist concerns Vaughan Williams’ ninety-three published settings of folk and old English *carols*. (Later installments will detail the composer’s arrangements of folk *songs*, both English and continental, as well as of old English popular songs.) Carols differ from other types of traditional song in that they have religious texts – Christmas and Easter are the

most common subjects, though the frequent invocation of seasonal metaphors means that carol texts sometimes reference maying and the harvest – and are more likely to have a burden or refrain. Vaughan Williams encountered carols in his own collecting work and entered them in his field notebooks along with secular folksongs and ballads. He was also familiar with the carols that had been collected earlier in the nineteenth century and that had been popularized through Victorian published collections like William Sandys’s *Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern* (1833) and H. R. Bramley and John Stainer’s *Christmas Carols New and Old* (1871). Considering these carols to be no less authentically traditional than those of more recent collection, he had no hesitation drawing on them for his arrangements, though he naturally selected a higher proportion of carols from his own collection and from

those of his collecting colleagues in the folk revival like Cecil Sharp and Lucy Broadwood. Altogether, he published fifty-two settings of twenty-two carols taken from his own collection, twenty-two settings of fourteen carols taken from his colleagues’ collections, and sixteen settings of ten carols taken from older published sources, making for a grand total of ninety settings of forty-six separate carols. A further three arrangements are of “old” carols – probably composed but of unknown authorship – that he found in Bramley & Stainer and in British Library manuscripts.

Table 1 lays this out. Organized alphabetically by carol title, it provides two basic sorts of information, the sources where Vaughan Williams obtained the carol melodies he arranged and the publications in which these arrangements appeared. The “Folk Carol Name” column gives the various forms of the title that the composer used in his publications, with the most common placed first. (Square brackets enclose titles that appear in manuscript or in the original published source where those differ from other titles given in the column.) The next two columns provide source information, explaining who collected the carol in question and where – in what book, journal or manuscript – Vaughan Williams



found it. Source titles are abbreviated and keyed to a list.¹⁰ The “Arrangement Description” column offers a precise account of the performing forces called for in each setting. (Note, once again, that the checklist, though organized by carol name, deliberately provides space to identify the multiple settings that Vaughan Williams often made of the same carol.) “First Publication” details the publication in which the setting first appeared, while “Separate Issues/Later Reprints” identifies other publications where that setting also appeared. Abbreviations for these last two columns are likewise keyed to the “Arrangements” list.¹¹

Note, finally, that while the checklist seeks to document the carol settings that Vaughan Williams authorized for publication, it lists some arrangements and reprints that appeared after his death. These include settings that he almost certainly would have published on his own had he lived – for example, the nine arrangements (four new, five taken from earlier publications) that appeared in *The First Nowell* (published 1959) – but also reprints issued in more recent years by publishers. My aim in listing these more recent reissues is twofold: first to document the popularity that the composer’s folk carol arrangements continue to enjoy well after his death, and second to provide a record of available publications that might prove useful to present-day musicians seeking new performance opportunities. “Reissues” by no means constitute the only arrangements that remain in print, however, and performers are advised to visit the Oxford University Press and Stainer & Bell websites for complete listings of “older” publications that are currently available.

This concludes the main portion of this essay, and general readers are encouraged to bypass what follows in order to examine the tables at their leisure. But for anyone interested in the editorial methodologies that went into its compilation, as well as the compilation of the checklists still to appear, read on. Laying these out clearly is crucial, for a checklist like this does not “make itself”. Rather, it involves making decisions which, had they gone the other way, might substantially have altered the checklist’s composition. Mostly, these relate to deciding which arrangements to include or leave out. The majority of items, of course, pose no difficulty: discrete folksong or carol settings unattached to a larger work (or, in the case of published *collections*, unconnected to a larger musical design) and appearing in publications where Vaughan Williams is cited as sole arranger, for example, clearly belong on this list. But a few others do not neatly fit into these parameters and deciding whether to include or omit them necessitates making adjustments or admitting a degree of calculated guesswork.

Folksong and carol settings published in the hymnbooks are a case in point because the “Acknowledgements” pages of these publications do not always make attribution clear. The first (1906) edition of *The English Hymnal*, for example, references other musicians who either assisted Vaughan Williams generally in the production of the book (Nicholas Gatty and Gustav Holst) or helped “in harmonizing many of the tunes” (W. H. Bell, T. F. Dunhill, E. W. Goldsmith, W. H. Harris and John Ireland).¹² The number of tunes “specially harmonized” for the book is very large, and it seems likely that these composers were commissioned to provide many arrangements, including very possibly some for the folksongs and carols in question. On the other hand, as music editor of the volume, Vaughan Williams would have corrected his colleagues’ work and ultimately decided the final form of a setting. For these reasons, I consider all the hymn tunes taken “from a traditional melody” and not specifically attributed to someone else to be arranged by him

and have included them in the checklists. The same policy has been pursued with regard to the two editions of *Songs of Praise*, where Martin Shaw was brought in as co-editor and where a much smaller handful of folksongs and carol settings is attributed jointly to the “Musical Editors”. Shaw and Vaughan Williams were good friends and close collaborators – they composed at least one original hymn tune, *Cobbold*, together – and it seems likely that anything arranged by one would have been carefully vetted and corrected by the other.

Possibly more problematic is my decision to include the folksong and carol settings that appear in *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* (1950) and *The First Nowell*. As these are large-scale works lasting upwards of forty-five minutes each, the arrangements they contain would seem to be part of a large musical design, and for this reason perhaps best left off a checklist dedicated to individual folksong arrangements. Yet Vaughan Williams contracted with OUP to issue thirteen of the fourteen numbers from the earlier work separately, while the arrangements in the later work follow one another discretely, with clear breaks between sections and settings. Indeed, both works contain arrangements that are lifted directly from earlier arrangement publications, while they share some settings with the near-contemporaneous *English Traditional Carols* (1954), a conventional collection of twenty-one separate carols. The overall effect of *Seasons* and *Nowell*, in short, is not unlike that of an anthology, where the main focus is on each individual item and where any larger compositional pattern is ultimately incidental or secondary. This may seem an inaccurate description of two broadly-conceived works that address the seasons and the nativity story, respectively, and that strive hard to fit each arrangement into a coherent narrative frame. And yet, from a musical point of view, that frame is clearly little more than a scaffolding on which to hang a series of arrangements of traditional songs and carols. It is a very different approach from that taken in *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* (1912) or the ballet *On Christmas Night* (composed 1926), for example, works that move from one section to another without a break and that often weave tunes together contrapuntally. The arrangements included in these earlier works, consciously integrated into a larger artistic whole, have therefore *not* been included in the checklists; the arrangements found in the less artistically ambitious works from the 1950s, by contrast, have.¹³

This is not to say that “intricate” settings have been rejected as a matter of course. Nearly all of Vaughan Williams’ arrangements exhibit a level of compositional elaboration in the form of interesting harmonies, striking textures or unusual methods of passing the tune between voices. No matter how elaborate the setting, however, a clear focus on the traditional melody itself always prevails. Even settings like those found in *Five English Folk Songs* for SATB voices (1913) – described on the title page as “freely arranged” – and *Six Studies in English Folk Song* for cello and piano (1927) state the tune simply and directly, often in uncomplicated strophic format. The elaboration, if it exists, is generally in the intricacy of the accompaniment and only occasionally in the “free extension” of the melodic material. Clearly, these settings differ from those in *On Christmas Night* or the Suite *English Folk Songs* in their limited canvas and in their focus on a single tune, and I have had no hesitation in including them in the checklists. The same goes for those hymn tune arrangements, “*adapted* from a traditional melody”,¹⁴ that alter the original tune, sometimes significantly, in order to match the verbal metre with which it has been paired. But because these alterations are never so extreme as to obscure the original melody, I have again not hesitated to include these settings in the checklists.

Note, finally, that Table 1 includes only true carols – that is, folk carols that originated with a carol text, whether collected in the field or found in manuscript. This means that popular carols like “O Little Town of Bethlehem” (EH No. 15; OBC No. 138) and “Psalm of Zion” (OBC No. 132) are excluded from Table 1 since they were not originally carols and were merely fitted out with a carol text by Vaughan Williams or Percy Dearmer. They are, however, adapted from folk songs – “The Pretty Ploughboy” and “In Peascod Time”, respectively – and for that reason they, along with other “faux” carols and much else besides, will find a place in a “Checklist of Folksong Arrangements Made by Vaughan Williams” that will appear later.¹⁵

NOTES

- ¹ R. Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 1.
- ² *National Music* Chapter Five, pp. 40-52.
- ³ *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 1996).
- ⁴ “Fairly reliable” because there is a very small handful of sources I am still in the process of tracking down. Vaughan Williams sometimes provided “alternate” arrangements of a tune in a given publication, but it is not always clear from catalogue descriptions exactly how many arrangements (two or three?) those publications contain. My total of 308 is therefore subject to slight modification contingent on what I will find there – information I expect to obtain before the appearance of the third installment of this checklist. None of the unseen sources I mention contain *carols*, incidentally, so the total of ninety-three detailed in Table 1 will likely not undergo significant revision.
- ⁵ Neil Butterworth, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Guide to Research* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1990). Butterworth’s descriptions of the performing forces called for by specific arrangements are sometimes misleading, and he does not always observe the important distinction between new arrangements and publications that merely reprint these. He identifies the hymn tunes that Vaughan Williams adapted from folksongs he himself had collected but misses others that the composer arranged from folksongs collected by others.
- ⁶ Butterworth frequently, and Kennedy very occasionally, conflate arrangements that share a text but are set to different melodies.
- ⁷ Butterworth lists 248 arrangements in total – 229 of them in his list of “FolkSong Arrangements” (where some settings are inadvertently listed twice), and nineteen others in the course of his entry on “Hymns and Hymnbooks”.
- ⁸ Particularly rich in this regard are the four-part SATB arrangements he produced for *The English Hymnal* and later hymnbooks. Intended principally for unison congregational performance with organ accompaniment, the format is deliberately unspecified so that different performance combinations – congregation alone, choir alone (with or without organ), or an “antiphonal” mixture of these – are possible. See R. Vaughan Williams, “Preface” to *The English Hymnal in Vaughan Williams On Music*, ed. David Manning (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 34. For a similar flexibility regarding his SATB carol arrangements – here, Vaughan Williams adds solo vocal performance to the options listed above – see the “Preface” to *The Oxford Book of Carols*, ed. Percy Dearmer, R. Vaughan Williams and Martin Shaw (Oxford University Press, 1928), p. xxiii.
- ⁹ Sales figures are telling here. *The Oxford Book of Carols*, originally published in 1928, is still in print – it reached a thirty-second impression in 1983 – and has thus actively been disseminating Vaughan Williams’ folk carol arrangements for eighty-two years. By the same token, *The English Hymnal*, the two editions of which (1906, 1933) includes fifty-five settings of folksongs (forty-two of them English) by the composer, had reportedly sold upwards of five million copies by the mid-1950s. Though officially “supplanted” by *The New English Hymnal* (1986), it is still in print today; the 1933 edition reached its twenty-seventh impression in 1997. See also note 11.
- ¹⁰ I have not thought it necessary to provide detailed manuscript locations for the carols that Vaughan Williams took from his own collection. Interested readers may find such information by consulting Appendix B of my *Ralph Vaughan Williams’s Folksong Collecting: English Nationalism and the Rise of Professional Society* (PhD dissertation, New York University, 1998), 404-45. Roy Palmer, ed., *Folk Songs Collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: JM Dent and Sons, 1983; reissued as *Bushes and Briars: Folk Songs Collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams*; Felinbach: Llanerch Publishers, 1999) also contains detailed source information about some of the carols listed here, as does Stainer & Bell’s recent (2010) reissue of *Twelve Traditional Carols from Herefordshire*, with new commentary by Palmer (listed in Arrangements below). See also Kennedy, *Catalogue*, pp. 245-81, for information about singers and dates of collection.
- ¹¹ To determine whether an item in the last column is a “separate issue” or a “later reprint”, compare the dates of publication with those of the “parent” publication given at the bottom of the Table. Note also that I supply reprint information only for the most important hymnbooks. Oxford University Press frequently reshuffled the contents of *The English Hymnal* and *Songs of Praise* to create numerous “specialty” hymnbooks. (*Hymns Selected from The English Hymnal* (1921) and *Songs of Praise for Little Children* (1932) are representative.) Because these publications invariably included hymn tunes adapted from folksongs, they rightly belong on the checklist as playing an important role in Vaughan Williams’ efforts to disseminate traditional music to amateur musicians. And yet the sheer number of these hymnbooks – perhaps upwards of twenty or more, not even counting the hundreds of hymnbooks of other denominations that eventually adopted some of these tunes makes it impractical to include them here. The checklist therefore includes only those specialty publications that reprinted earlier arrangements while also introducing *brand-new*

arrangements – a policy that limits selection to a single hymnbook, *Songs of Praise for Boys and Girls* (1929).

- ¹² *The English Hymnal with Tunes* (Oxford University Press, 1906), xix.
- ¹³ A further complication with *The First Nowell* is that Vaughan Williams died while working on it. I have taken care to include only those settings made by him or “completed” by Roy Douglas. (Arrangements “adapted” or “added” by Douglas are not included.) The only exception to this is No. 16, a second setting of “The Salutation Carol” for TT voices and keyboard or orchestral accompaniment, melodic phrases of which Vaughan Williams appears deliberately to have omitted.
- ¹⁴ Emphasis mine. This heading is used in *The English Hymnal* and *Songs of Praise* for those folk tunes that were most heavily edited in the adaptation process. Tunes only slightly altered are generally headed “from an English traditional melody” while those that are completely unaltered use “English traditional melody”.
- ¹⁵ I would like to thank John Roberts, Roy Palmer, Dr. Dorothy De Val, Dr. Becca Ryamm and especially Tracie Meloy and Gail Dotson of the West Chester University Interlibrary Loan Department for much help and advice with this project.

See the following pages for a checklist of folk carol arrangements made by Ralph Vaughan Williams and intended chiefly for amateur performance. Table 1 (items 1 – 90) shows English traditional carols. Table 2 (items 91 – 93) shows ‘Old’ English Carols, i.e. probably composed but author unknown.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TABLE

(All publications are London and Oxford University Press unless otherwise noted)

Carol Melody Sources

- Bramley & Stainer = Christmas Carols New and Old, ed. HR Bramley and John Stainer (Novello, three series, 1871-80; complete edition 1880)
- Chappell = William Chappell, *Popular Music of the Olden Time*, 2 vols. (London, 1853-9; reprinted New York: Dover, 1965)
- EFSSA = English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians, collected by Cecil Sharp, edited by Maud Karpeles (1952)
- English County = English County Songs, ed. Lucy Broadwood and J. A. Fuller Maitland (JB Cramer and Son, 1893)
- English Traditional = English Traditional Songs and Carols, ed. Lucy Broadwood (Boosey, 1908)
- Gilbert = Some Ancient Christmas Carols, ed. Davies Gilbert, 2nd edition (John Nichols and Son, 1823; reprinted Norwood Editions, 1972)
- JFSS = Journal of the Folk Song Society (1899-1931)
- Sandys = William Sandys, Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern (Richard Beckley, 1833)

Arrangements

- ECFS = English County Folk Songs, ed. Cecil Sharp (Novello, 1961) [A reprinting under one cover of the five volumes of Folk Songs of England (Novello, 1908-1912)]
- EH = The English Hymnal, ed. Percy Dearmer and R. Vaughan Williams (1906; rev. ed. 1933)
- ETC = English Traditional Carols, ed. R. Vaughan Williams and Martin Shaw (1954)
- ETEC = Eight Traditional English Carols, Collected and Arranged by R. Vaughan Williams (Stainer & Bell, 1919)
- Five English = R. Vaughan Williams, Five English Folk Songs (Stainer & Bell, 1913)
- NCMV = R. Vaughan Williams, Nine Carols for Male Voices (1942)
- NEFSSAM = Nine English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachian Mountains, Collected by Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles, Arranged by R. Vaughan Williams (1967) [Arranged by RVW c. 1938]
- OBC = The Oxford Book of Carols, ed. Percy Dearmer, R. Vaughan Williams and Martin Shaw (1928)
- OBCS = Oxford Book of Carols for Schools, ed. Percy Dearmer, R. Vaughan Williams and Martin Shaw (1956) [Carols slightly adapted from OBC by Vaughan Williams’ student Leslie Russell]
- Seasons = R. Vaughan Williams, Folk Songs of the Four Seasons (1950) [Each item issued separately 1950; whole work reissued in 2006, with revised piano accompaniment by Michael Mullinar]
- SP = Songs of Praise, ed. Percy Dearmer, R. Vaughan Williams and Martin Shaw (1925)
- SPBG = Songs of Praise for Boys and Girls, ed. Percy Dearmer, R. Vaughan Williams and Martin Shaw (1929)
- SPE = Songs of Praise Enlarged, ed. Percy Dearmer, R. Vaughan Williams and Martin Shaw (1931) [The ‘enlarged’ edition of Songs of Praise (1925)]
- Sussex = R. Vaughan Williams, Folk Songs from Sussex (Vol. 5 of Folk Songs of England, ed. Cecil Sharp; Novello, 1912)
- TFN = R. Vaughan Williams and Simona Pakenham, The First Nowell (1959)
- TTCH = Twelve Traditional Carols from Herefordshire, Collected, Edited, and Arranged by E. M. Leather and R. Vaughan Williams (Stainer & Bell, 1920) [Reissued in 2010 by Stainer & Bell, with new commentary by Roy Palmer]
- Winter = R. Vaughan Williams, Two Songs of Winter (1990)

	Folk Carol Name	Collector	Source of Carol Melody	Arrangement Description	First Publication	Separate Issues/ Later Reprints
1	And All in the Morning, or On Christmas Day	RVW	RVW manuscript collection	Solo voice (or unison voices, SATB ad lib.) w/ keyboard accompaniment	ETEC No. 1	Stainer & Bell CH No. 152 (1919)
2			(unpublished)	Unaccomp. SATB voices	ETEC No. 1	OBC No. 17
3	Angel Gabriel, The or Hereford Carol	RVW and E. M. Leather	RVW manuscript collection	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc.	TTCH No. 5	Reissued S&B 2010
4			(unpublished)	Unaccompanied SATB voices	TTCH No. 5	OBC No. 7 Reissued S&B 2010
5	Birth of the Savior, The or The Sinner's Redemption [All You that are to Mirth Inclined]	RVW	RVW manuscript collection	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard accompaniment	ETEC No. 7	
6			(unpublished)	Unaccompanied SATB voices	ETEC No. 7	OBC No. 51
7	Cherry Tree Carol, The or Joseph was an Old Man or As Joseph Was A-Walking	Unknown (many variants)	Bramley & Stainer No. 28	Unaccompanied TTBB (w/ divisi) voices	NCMV No. 2	Oxford Choral Song No. 666 (1942)
8				Unaccompanied SA voices	ETC No. 1	
9				SATB chorus w/ piano or orchestral accompaniment	TFN No. 6	
10	Child This Day is Born, A	William Sandys?	Sandys No. 2 or Bramley & Stainer No. 17	Four-part SATB keyboard arrangement (for unison congregational singing)	EH No. 485 (tune name: SANDYS)	SP No. 361 SPE No. 652
11	Christian Mummers' Carol	Godfrey Arkwright	JFSS 4, pp. 178-9	Four-part SATB keyboard arrangement (for unison congregational singing)	EH No. 16 (tune name: NEWBURY)	SP No. 54 OBC App. 3(2) SPE No. 395(3)
12	Christmas Now is Drawing Nigh at Hand [Good People All]	RVW and E. M. Leather	RVW manuscript collection	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc.	TTCH No. 3	Reissued S&B 2010
13			(unpublished)	Unaccompanied SATB voices	TTCH No. 3	Reissued S&B 2010
14	Come All You Worthy Christians or Come All Ye Worthy Christian Men (Job)	W Percy Merrick	JFSS 3, p. 74	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard accompaniment	Sussex No. 9	ECFS pp. 210-13
15				Four-part keyboard arrangement (for unison or SATB voices)	OBC App. 6(1)	
16	Dives and Lazarus [Lazarus] (1st tune)	AJ Hipkins	English County, pp. 102-3	Four-part SATB keyboard arr. (for unison congregational singing)	EH No. 574 (tune name: KINGSFOLD)	SP No. 267 SPE No. 529
17				Unaccompanied TTBB voices	NCMV No. 9	Oxford Choral Song No. 673 (1942)
18				Unison women's voices (descant ad lib.) w/ keyboard accompaniment	ETC No. 3	
19	Dives and Lazarus (2nd tune)	E Andrews and Quinten Darling	JFSS 7, p. 125	Four-part SATB keyboard arrangement (for unison congregational singing)	EH No. 601 (tune name: EARDISLEY)	SP No. 328 SPBG No. 69 OBC App. 5 SPE No. 393(3)
20	Dives and Lazarus (3rd tune)	RVW and E. M. Leather	JFSS 14, p. 47	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc.	TTCH No. 9	Reissued S&B 2010
21			(RVW manuscript missing)	Unaccomp. SATB voices	TTCH No. 9	OBC No. 57 Reissued S&B 2010
22				Unaccomp. SSA voices	ETC No. 2	
23	Down in Yon Forest	RVW	RVW manuscript collection	Solo voice (or unison voices, SATB ad lib.) w/ keyboard accompaniment	ETEC No. 4	Stainer & Bell CH No. 106 (1919)
24			(JFSS 14, p. 63)	Unaccompanied SATB voices	ETEC No. 4	OBC No. 61 OBCS No. 11
25				Unaccompanied SA voices	ETC No. 4	

	Folk Carol Name	Collector	Source of Carol Melody	Arrangement Description	First Publication	Separate Issues/ Later Reprints	
26	First Nowell, The	William Sandys?	Bramley & Stainer No. 6	Unaccompanied TTBB voices, w/ Baritone solo	NCMV No. 4	Oxford Choral Song No. 668 (1942)	
27				Unaccomp. SSAA voices	ETC No. 5		
28				SATB (w/ divisi) chorus, Soprano and Baritone soloists w/ piano or orchestral accompaniment	TFN No. 20		
29	Gloucestershire Wassail or Wassail Song	RVW	RVW manuscript collection	Unaccompanied SATB (with divisi) voices	Five English, No. 5	Stainer & Bell Choral Library No. 132 (1914)	
30			(unpublished)	Four-part keyboard arrangement (for unison or SATB voices)	OBC No. 31		
31				Unison women's voices and Soprano descant w/ keyboard or orchestral acc.	Seasons Part IV, No. 2	Issued separately by OUP (1950)	
						ETC No. 20 Winter No. 2	
32	God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen (1st tune)	Unknown (many variants)	Bramley & Stainer No. 1	Unaccompanied TTBB voices	NCMV No. 1	Oxford Choral Song No. 665 (1942; reissued 1990)	
33				SA voices w/ keyboard accompaniment	ETC No. 6	Reissued OUP 1990	
34				SATB chorus in unison w/ keyboard or orch. accomp.	TFN No. 1a		
35	God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen (2nd tune)	RVW and E. M. Leather	RVW manuscript collection	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc.	TTCH No. 6	Reissued S&B 2010	
36			(unpublished)	Unaccompanied SATB voices	TTCH No. 6	Reissued S&B 2010	
37	Holy Well, The (1st tune)	RVW and E. M. Leather	RVW manuscript collection	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc.	TTCH No. 1	Reissued S&B 2010	
38			(unpublished)	Unaccompanied SATB voices	TTCH No. 1	Reissued S&B 2010	
39	Holy Well, The (2nd tune)	RVW and E. M. Leather	JFSS 14, p. 26 (RVW manuscript missing)	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc.	TTCH No. 2	Reissued S&B 2010	
40				Unaccompanied SATB voices	TTCH No. 2	Reissued S&B 2010	
41	Holy Well, The (3rd tune)	Cecil Sharp	JFSS 18, p. 4	Four-part keyboard arrangement (for unison or SATB singing)	OBC App. 4		
42	In Bethlehem City	Lucy Broadwood	English County, pp. 56-7	Unaccompanied SSA voices	Seasons Part 4, No. 3	Issued separately by OUP (1950) ETC No. 10 TFN No. 9	
43	I Saw Three Ships	Unknown (many variants)	Bramley & Stainer No. 64	Unaccompanied TTBB voices, w/ Baritone solo	NCMV No. 7	Oxford Choral Song No. 671 (1942; reissued OUP 1990)	
44	Joseph and Mary, to tune of There is a Fountain	RVW and E. M. Leather	RVW manuscript collection	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc.	TTCH No. 4	OBC No. 115	
45			(JFSS 14, p. 21)			TFN No. 8	Reissued S&B 2010
				Unaccompanied SATB voices	TTCH No. 4	OBC No. 115	TFN No. 8
						Reissued S&B 2010	
46			SA voices w/ keyboard accompaniment	ETC No. 12			
47	Lord at First, The	Davies Gilbert (assisted by J. Davey?)	Collation of Gilbert No. 1 and Bramley & Stainer No. 21	Unaccompanied TBariB (w/ divisi) voices	NCMV No. 5	Oxford Choral Song No. 669 (1942)	
48	May Day Carol (1st tune)	A. Foxton Ferguson	JFSS 7, p. 132	Four-part SATB keyboard arrangement (for unison congregational singing)	EH No. 638(2) (tune: SOUTHILL)	SP No. 446(2)	
						SPE No. 395(2)	
49	May Day Carol [May Song] (2nd tune)	RVW	RVW manuscript collection	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc.	ETEC No. 5	OBC No. 47	
50			(unpublished)				
				Unaccompanied SATB voices	ETEC No. 5	OBC No. 47	
						OBCS No. 7	
51			Unison women's voices and Soprano semi-chorus descant w/ keyboard or orchestral accompaniment	Seasons Part I, No. 3 (w/ Moon Shines Bright 1st tune)	Issued separately by OUP (1950)		

	Folk Carol Name	Collector	Source of Carol Melody	Arrangement Description	First Publication	Separate Issues/ Later Reprints	
52	Miraculous Harvest, The ["King Pharim" Christmas Carol] (1st tune)	Lucy Broadwood	JFSS 4, pp. 183-84	Four-part SATB keyboard arrangement (for unison congregational singing)	EH No. 488 (tune name: CAPEL)	SP No. 253 OBC No. 55 SPE No. 248	
53	Miraculous Harvest, The or Carnal and the Crane (2nd tune)	RVW and E. M. Leather	RVW manuscript collection	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc.	TTCH No. 10	Reissued S&B 2010	
54			(JFSS 14, p. 22)	Unaccompanied SATB voices	TTCH No. 10	OBC No. 53 Reissued S&B 2010	
55	Moon Shines Bright, The or May-Day Song (1st tune)	JA Fuller Maitland	English County, p. 108	Four-part SATB keyboard arrangement (for unison congregational singing)	EH No. 221 (tune: KINGS LANGLEY)	SP No. 5 SPE No. 229	
56				Unison women's voices and Soprano semi-chorus descant w/ keyboard or orchestral accompaniment	Seasons Part 1, No. 3 (w/ May Day Carol 2nd tune)	Issued separately by OUP (1950)	
57	Moon Shines Bright, The (Bellman's Song) (2nd tune)	Lucy Broadwood	JFSS 4, p. 176	Four-part keyboard arr. (for unison or SATB singing)	OBC App. 3(1)		
58	My Dancing Day [Tomorrow Shall be my Dancing Day]	William Sandys?	Sandys No. 8	Unaccompanied SA voices	ETC No. 15		
59	New Year's Carol [Christ Made a Trance]	RVW and E. M. Leather	JFSS 14, p. 12	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc.	TTCH No. 7	Reissued S&B 2010	
60			(RVW manuscript missing)	Unaccomp. SATB voices	TTCH No. 7	Reissued S&B 2010	
61	On Christmas Day or Coverdale's Carol	RVW and E. M. Leather	RVW manuscript collection	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc.	TTCH No. 8	OBC No. 131	
			(unpublished)				Reissued S&B 2010
62			Unaccomp. SATB voices	TTCH No. 8	OBC No. 131 Reissued S&B 2010		
63	On Christmas Night [the Joy-Bells Ring] (Sussex Carol)	James Culwick	JFSS 7, p. 126	Solo voice or unison voices w/ organ accompaniment	OBC App. 2		
64	Saviour's Love, The	RVW and E. M. Leather	RVW manuscript collection	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc.	TTCH No. 11	Reissued S&B 2010	
65			(unpublished)	Unaccompanied SATB voices	TTCH No. 11	Reissued S&B 2010	
66	Seven Virgins, The or Under the Leaves	RVW and E. M. Leather	JFSS 14, p. 49	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc.	TTCH No. 12	Reissued S&B 2010	
67			(RVW manuscript missing)	Unaccompanied SATB voices	TTCH No. 12	OBC No. 43 Reissued S&B 2010	
68	Sussex Carol [On Christmas Night]	RVW	RVW manuscript collection	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc.	EETC No. 2	Stainer & Bell CH No. 105 (1919)	
69			(JFSS 7, p. 127)	Unaccompanied SATB voices	EETC No. 2		
70				Four-part keyboard arrangement for unison and SATB ad lib. singing	OBC No. 24	OBCS No. 33	
71				Unaccompanied SSAA voices	ETC No. 16		
72	Sussex Mummers' Carol or Mummers' Carol or God Bless the Master	Lucy Broadwood?	English Traditional, pp. 80-83	Four-part keyboard arr. (for unison or SATB singing); unison voices w/ organ acc. for last verse	OBC No. 45		
73				Unaccompanied TTBB voices	NCMV No. 3	Oxford Choral Song No. 667 (1942)	
74				Unison women's voices and optional Soprano descant w/ keyboard or orchestral accompaniment	Seasons Part IV, No. 4	Issued separately by OUP (1950) ETC No. 18 Winter No. 1	
75				Unaccompanied SATB voices	Oxford Folk Song Series No. 52 (1956)		

	Folk Carol Name	Collector	Source of Carol Melody	Arrangement Description	First Publication	Separate Issues/ Later Reprints	
76	Truth Sent from Above, The or This is the Truth	RVW and E. M. Leather	RVW manuscript collection	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard accompaniment	ETEC No. 6	Stainer & Bell CH No. 107 (1919)	
			(JFSS 14, p. 17)			OBC No. 68	
77					Unaccompanied SATB voices	ETEC No. 6	OBC No. 68
							OBCS No. 42
78				SA voices w/ keyboard accompaniment	ETC No. 19	Reissued OUP 1990	
79				SATB chorus and Baritone soloist w/ keyboard or orchestral accompaniment	TFN No. 1b		
80	Twelve Apostles, The (1st tune)	RVW	RVW manuscript collection	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc.	ETEC No. 3		
81			(unpublished)	Unaccompanied SATB voices	ETEC No. 3		
82	Twelve Apostles, The or The Ten Commandments (2nd tune)	Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles	Sharp manuscript collection [subsequently publ. in EFFSA No. 207D]	Solo voice (or unison voices) and keyboard accompaniment	NEFSSAM No. 9	Oxford Unison Songs U.137 (1968)	
83	Virgin Most Pure, A [The Virgin Unspotted] (1st tune)	Cecil Sharp	JFSS 18, p. 24	Four-part SATB keyboard arrangement for solo or unison voices	OBC App. 1	TFN No. 7	
84				Unaccompanied SATB voices w/ Soprano solo	Oxford Choral Song X107 (1963)		
85	Virgin Most Pure, A (2nd tune)	Davies Gilbert (assisted by J Davey?)	Gilbert No. 3	Unaccompanied TTBB voices	NCMV No. 8	Oxford Choral Song No. 672 (1942)	
86	Virgin Unspotted, A (1st tune)	Samuel Smith	Chappell, p. 642	Four-part SATB keyboard arrangement (for unison congregational singing)	EH No. 29 (tune: A VIRGIN UNSPOTTED)		
87	Virgin Unspotted, A (2nd tune)	RVW	RVW manuscript collection	Unison voices w/ keyboard accompaniment	SP 438 (tune name: HARDWICK)	SPBG No. 1	
			(unpublished)			SPE No. 34	
88	Virgin Unspotted, A (3rd tune)	Unknown (many variants)	Bramley & Stainer No. 26	Four-part SATB keyboard arrangement (for unison congregational singing)	SPE No. 94 (tune name: BRAMLEY (A VIRGIN UNSPOTTED))		
89	Wassail Song or Children's Christmas Song	RVW assisted by Reginald and Ivor Gatty	RVW manuscript collection?	Solo voice (or unison voices) w/ keyboard acc., which may also be sung by SATB voices humming or vocalizing on 'ah.'	ETEC No. 8	Stainer & Bell CH No. 108 (1919)	
			(MS missing)				
90				SA voices w/ keyboard or orchestral accompaniment	Seasons Part IV, No. 1	Issued separately by OUP (1950)	

	Carol Name	Date	Source of Carol Melody	Arrangement Description	First Publication	Later Reprints
91	Coventry Carol	first notated 1591	Bramley and Stainer No. 61	Unaccompanied TBariB voices	NCMV No. 6	Oxford Choral Song No. 670 (1942)
92	This Endris Night [Thys endere Nyghth]	15th-16th century	British Library MS Royal Appendix 58	Four-part SATB keyboard arrangement (for unison congregational singing)	EH No. 20 (tune: THIS ENDRIS NIGHT)	SP No. 47
						OBC No. 39
						SPE No. 72
						OBCS No. 41
93	Salutation Carol, The [Nowell, Nowell]	15th century	British Library Sloane MS 2593; also Chappell, p. 42	Four-part keyboard arr. (for unison or SATB singing)	OBC No. 36	TFN No. 4

Music is for everyone

Linda Hayward



From the very beginning Ralph Vaughan Williams believed in the value of amateur musicians. As early as 1896, when he was a student at Cambridge, he was involved with amateur music making. He was a member of the amateur University Musical Club, and conducted a small choral society which sang Schubert masses on Sunday afternoons. By doing this he was gaining valuable experience of the repertoire of major composers and learning how to deal with the practicalities of performing a work. He did not play in an orchestra like Holst did, so he needed to find out what performers were facing when they tried to learn a piece of music.

Vaughan Williams explained this in his musical autobiography when he wrote, “If a composer cannot play in an orchestra or sing in a choir the next best thing he can do in self education is to try his hand at conducting, and really find out what the performers are up against.”

This makes it seem as if Vaughan Williams was only involved with amateurs for his own ends, but it was more than that. He agreed to conduct the Leith Hill choirs from 1905 because he believed in music being for *all* people.

Everyone should have the opportunity to make music to the best of their ability.

Ralph Vaughan Williams proceeded to put this precept into practice. In 1902 he joined the London Bach Choir as a bass singer, three years before he first conducted at the Leith Hill Musical Festival. He also helped out at Morley College, where Holst was working with adults who wanted to learn to sing or play

music. The practicalities of dealing with untrained would-be musicians who needed to be encouraged and raised to a high standard meant that Vaughan Williams adapted his approach accordingly. He found that he needed to “go round the choirs’ regular practices” at Leith Hill, to help the conductors as much as the singers. He held a conference for the conductors of the individual choirs in 1911, which was so successful and helpful that it became an annual event. He didn’t believe in auditions and insisted that there should be an “un-auditioned chorus of singers”. In that way new singers would not be daunted by the prospect of auditions and their enthusiasm could be harnessed as they learned to become a member of a choir.

During his time in the army in the Great War, Vaughan Williams took every opportunity to make music. He made friends with a fellow private soldier in the Royal Army Medical Corps, Harry Steggles, who remembered how Vaughan Williams became “intrigued with my mouth-organ playing, especially the improvised notes, for it was a suck-blow instrument not the modern type of harmonica used by virtuosos today.”

Steggles also remembered how the composer had formed a choir from the Field Ambulance personnel and they sang Christmas carols that Steggles had never heard before. There were other times when music making was possible. They were lucky to be billeted with the Machray family in 1915. The family were very musical and a variety of instrumentation was available. Harry made up a percussion section from “flower pots, fire irons, and a borrowed drum” as well as singing with a Private Edwards. Harry and Ralph performed the popular music hall song *When Father Papered the Parlour* at Divisional concerts and later at reunions, Harry later recalled. At Ecoivres, in France, Ralph trained another choir made up of his fellow soldiers, who had survived from Saffron Waldron days.

In 1921 Ralph Vaughan Williams was appointed conductor of the London Bach Choir, when he took over from Sir Hugh Allen who was now Director of the Royal College of Music. By this time the

new conductor was considerably experienced in conducting amateur choirs as well as dealing with a mixture of amateur and professional orchestral players. He loved Bach, as he said “Bach remains for me in a niche by himself.” So this appointment gave him opportunities to conduct a lot of Bach’s music as well as music by living composers he admired.



Bach cantatas were often part of the choir’s programme together with the *St. Matthew Passion* and the *Mass in B minor*. Vaughan Williams conducted the *Passion* six times in 1923 at various



Above: **Ralph Vaughan Williams conducting at The Leith Hill Music Festival, 1947**

Previous page bottom: **Vaughan Williams with Private Harry Stegges in 1916**

venues within London. Although the Queen's Hall was a standard venue, as well as the Royal College of Music, from time to time the choir had endeavoured to bring their music to poorer parts of London, including Bermondsey, Hackney, and the People's Palace in the Mile End Road. The first time Vaughan Williams conducted the *St. Matthew Passion* was at St. Dunstan's-in-the-East on 14 February 1923, and was followed by performances throughout February and March. The venues included Holy Trinity Sloane Square, Toynbee Hall, the Queen's Hall, Central Hall, Westminster, and Bermondsey Central Hall. In March 1924 he conducted the *Passion* at St John's-at-Hackney, St Giles in the Fields, and again at Central Hall, Westminster, which was also the venue for a performance of the *Mass in B minor*. The *Passion* was performed at the People's Palace Mile End Road in February 1925 with Vaughan Williams again conducting. He was being true to his premise that "music should be offered to all, although it will not be accepted by all." He was also gaining valuable conducting experience, which would stand him in good stead for the first performance of the *St. Matthew Passion* at Leith Hill in 1931.

During his tenure as Musical Director of the London Bach Choir Ralph Vaughan Williams widened the choir's repertoire by programming twentieth-century living British composers' works, including those by Warlock, Whittaker, Walford Davies, Delius, Mullinar, Rubbra and Holst.

In the Second World War, as part of encouraging music making Vaughan Williams would organise an hour of "Informal Music" at the White Horse hotel in the high street in Dorking. He would gather local musicians and get them to play or sing, so that anyone who wanted to forget the war for an hour by entering the land of music could do so. This was just another example of Ralph Vaughan Williams spreading the gospel of music.

As can be seen Ralph Vaughan Williams dealt with amateurs throughout his life. The music was the most important thing. In an article of 1955, Dr. William Cole, Vaughan Williams' successor at Leith Hill, wrote as follows: "He has a wonderful gift for extracting the very best out of his singers and players. He

has a great love and respect for the musical amateur and, this feeling being reciprocated, he is able to draw more music from them than they themselves are aware that they possess."

Vaughan Williams himself wrote about the importance of the musical amateur. He wrote: "The humblest member of a choral society, the shy beginner who takes his place in the back desk of the 2nd violins in an amateur orchestra, the child who plays the triangle in a percussion band, if they sing or play with understanding and purpose, they are all creators."

He also likened the art of music to a great pyramid where, near the base, the amateurs were the "musical salt of the earth" who supported the professionals and great artists at the pinnacle, and only wished to "spread the gospel of music by precept and practice."

To Ralph Vaughan Williams the art of music was to be propagated and spread as far as possible by whatever means, whether as listeners, amateur performers, or professional singers or players. The possibility of making music at any and every opportunity was not to be missed.

To all who make music, it is the music that matters most. Their love of music is shown at all levels. As Holst said, "If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly", by which he meant that the main thing is to try, have a go! He was right, because whatever standard one achieves in making music, having tried will give an understanding of any music one listens to from then on, and therefore more enjoyment.

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The Base of the Pyramid: Vaughan Williams and the Musical Amateur

Renee Stewart



David McFall *Bronze Relief*

In the 1959 edition of the *Royal College of Music Magazine*, Keith Falkner writes: “Uncle Ralph often described music as a huge pyramid; the amateurs at the base, the great musicians at the top. He emphasised the fact that without the base there could be no top.” Vaughan Williams certainly showed his support of amateurs in many ways and particularly in all that he did for the Leith Hill Musical Festival over a period of some fifty years.

Inspired by a visit to the Petersfield Festival in 1904 Margaret Vaughan Williams, Ralph’s sister, and Lady Evangeline Farrer, a musical friend who had taught the piano before her marriage, invited a group of music loving friends to a meeting in the library of Abinger Hall, Evangeline’s home, to discuss the possibility of having a similar festival in Dorking. The meeting ended with a committee being formed to proceed with arrangements for choral competitions to be held in Dorking the following spring. Lady Farrer was elected President and Chairman and Margaret Vaughan Williams, Secretary. On 20 January 1905 the committee met for the third time and decided to ask Mr. R. Vaughan Williams “if he would conduct the evening concert, and would coach the various choirs in the combined music beforehand.” Vaughan Williams accepted and the first Festival was held on 10 May 1905 in the Public Hall, West Street, Dorking.

At the first evening concert the massed choir, formed from the seven competing village choirs, sang a “Selection from *Judas Maccabaeus*”, as well as a chorus from *Elijah* and a madrigal. The concert also included solos and short orchestral pieces. The orchestra was a mixture of professionals and “gifted amateurs”. Nearly all the soloists were professional, but the choirs were entirely amateur. Vaughan Williams’ involvement was not only on the day but throughout the year. He chaired a very small committee which chose the music, he selected the soloists and rehearsed the choirs individually and en masse, and nearly every year he wrote the programme notes. There was just one rehearsal on the day which involved everyone, and this rehearsal grew from the forty-five minutes allowed for in 1905 to at least two hours.

Vaughan Williams had very definite ideas about the music he was conducting and he used any means – orthodox or not – to get the results he wanted. For instance he used a trumpet to strengthen the *ripieno* part in the *St. Matthew Passion*, and he chose a small chorus, which he rehearsed separately, to sing some particularly difficult parts of the *B minor Mass*. He was surprisingly practical about getting the best out of the available performers.

It emerges from his programme notes and other writings that he felt that music was so important that it should be experienced by as many people as possible. This went with his desire and determination to achieve the best possible standard of performance and he worked hard to achieve this. It is remarkable the amount of time and effort he put into his work for the Leith Hill Festival – it was certainly an important part of his life.

When he died a committee was formed in Dorking to decide how he should be remembered locally. This committee decided that there should be both a visual and aural element, and they commissioned two bronzes by David McFall – one in the foyer of the Dorking Halls and the other in the porch of St. Martin’s Church. They additionally said that the Leith Hill Musical Festival should represent a living memorial to its first conductor. LHMF flourishes and the fine bronzes continue to please the eye.

A Significant Find

Alan Tongue

Has any reader been present at the world premiere of a substantial nineteenth-century work by Vaughan Williams? Here at last is the chance.

I'm a conductor whose work is mostly overseas, and one of my specialities is taking English music around the world. I've given the Hungarian premiere of *The Dream of Gerontius* and the Argentinean premiere of *Belshazzar's Feast*. I've conducted *The Planets* in three countries in Eastern Europe where the orchestras had never heard the piece, let alone played it.

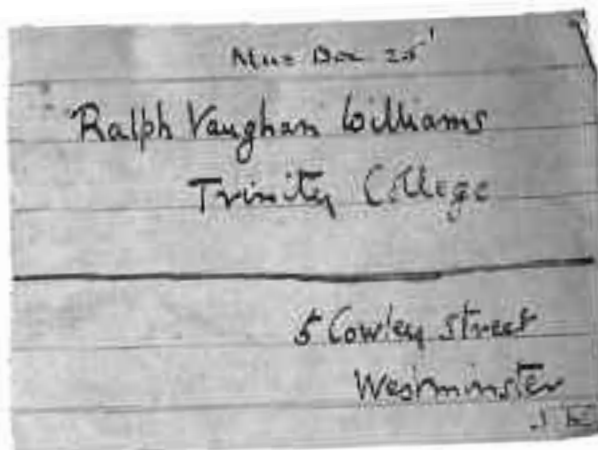
Now I'm revealing some British music in my own country: in the depths of the Cambridge University Library I have come across Ralph Vaughan Williams' Doctor of Music exercise. The first page is reproduced on the right.

This is the start of a twenty-minute Credo, for soloists, double chorus, organ and orchestra, culminating in a five-minute Amen chorus set as a double fugue. This is followed by an Offertorium for orchestra alone, a Sanctus for double chorus accompanied by brass, timpani and organ, leading into a Hosanna for chorus and full orchestra, a Benedictus for the four soloists accompanied by a reduced orchestra, and finally a repeat of the Hosanna.

The mass was completed in October 1899 and has never been performed. Now, with the backing of the Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust, it will be heard at last. It is entirely appropriate that The Bach Choir, of which Vaughan Williams was first a singing member, then a committee member and finally conductor, will be singing in the premiere, with the New Queen's Hall Orchestra and four soloists. The venue is the Fairfield Hall, Croydon, and the date, Thursday, 3 March 2011.

The clues to this work are in the University Ordinances for 1896: "The Exercise be a composition on a sacred or a secular subject, written for the occasion; that it should occupy not less than forty nor more than sixty minutes in performance, and fulfil the following conditions:

- a: that it comprise some portion for one or more solo voices, and some considerable portion for a chorus of eight real parts;
- b: that it comprise some specimens of Canon and of Fugue;
- c: that it comprise an instrumental Overture, or an Interlude, in the form of the first movement of a Symphony or a Sonata;
- d: that the whole (except some single piece be for voices alone) have an accompaniment for a full Band."



After two years at the Royal College of Music, four years at Cambridge, and another period at the College, Vaughan Williams was ready to show what he had learnt. Within five years of completing this work he had written the article on fugue for the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

The work will be published later this year by Stainer and Bell, and has officially been given the title *A Cambridge Mass*.

Finally, I am doubly lucky, in that the Trust has allowed me to be the sole conductor of this remarkable work for its first two years. In its first outing you can hear it alongside Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens* and Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, a work that emerged in the same year as this one. I hope to see you there!

Vaughan Williams circa 1897



Credo R. Vaughan Williams

Andante maestoso

2 Flauti
2 Oboi
2 Clarinetti in B \flat
2 Fagotti
4 Corni in F
3 Trombe in F
3 Tromboni
1 Tuba
Tympanum q. A. D.
Organo
Viola Primo
Viola Secondo
Viola
Coro Primo Sop.
Alto
Ten.
Basso
Coro Secondo Sop.
Alto
Ten.
Basso
Violoncello
Contrabasso

Ralph Vaughan Williams: Images in Art

Jeffrey Davis

Vaughan Williams was one of Britain's greatest composers and also a remarkable looking man; as with the granitic features of the older Sibelius, his craggy/visionary appearance seems to go well with the music. Vaughan Williams was photographed hundreds of times and there have been three collections of photographs published since his centenary celebrations in 1972. Around that time I first discovered and fell in love with his music, and when I attended any concert at the Royal Festival Hall would always make a point of going to see the wonderful bronze head of the composer by David McFall, which then (but sadly not now) was situated on the red staircase. I developed a lifelong interest in sculpture as a consequence and in the sixth form at school even persuaded my kindly art master to allow me to produce my own "Head of Vaughan Williams" in clay – not illustrated!

In view of Vaughan Williams' great stature as a creative artist it is unsurprising that he came to the attention of painters and sculptors, and in this article I will be discussing what are generally considered to be the most significant portraits of the composer, produced in his presence during his lifetime. This is not then a comprehensive survey of the many paintings, drawings, cartoons and sculptures of the composer, as I take the view that it is better to write in some detail about a few key works rather than to attempt a superficial survey of everything.

By far the most important artist to attempt a likeness of Vaughan Williams was the sculptor Sir Jacob Epstein (1880-1959), a contemporary of the composer and one whose career in some ways paralleled that of Vaughan Williams (although Epstein was a far more controversial figure.) As with Vaughan Williams in music, Epstein was one of the giants of the British art world in the inter-war period and beyond. Epstein likewise suffered a critical reaction against his work following his death in the late 1950s, followed by a revival of interest in more recent times. In much the same way as Vaughan Williams' music was eclipsed (unfairly, I believe) by that of Britten (a more international figure), Epstein's work was eclipsed by that of Henry Moore (who acknowledged his debt to Epstein) at a time of increasing abstraction in art (paralleling that of atonality in music.)

Vaughan Williams sat for Epstein in early 1949 through an intervention from the pianist Shula Doniach, an acquaintance of Ursula Wood and a friend of the sculptor. Shula Doniach had told Ursula that Epstein, who had recently finished a fine portrait of the composer Ernest Bloch, was keen to do a bust of Vaughan Williams. Adeline Vaughan Williams was enthusiastic about the idea and Vaughan Williams was "submissive". The progress of the sittings is described by Ursula in her biography of the composer. She quotes an extract from a letter to her from Shula Doniach:

A lovely letter from E; 'I had not thought of a fee but of course you will want to keep the bronze – I will put the fee at 200 guineas' and

then he suggests R's coming to the studio next Monday!

Well, the first sitting went happily, Epstein seems to work with intense concentration – R imitates him beautifully – this suits R and now that the work has started he is keen to get it finished...Epstein says six sittings – and perhaps 1 or 2 more at the end...There doesn't seem to be much comfort [in Epstein's studio], the stove is allowed to go out – on the other hand R needn't sit still and could sit in his coat wh. I have urged him to do.



Sir Jacob Epstein Bronze 1950

Epstein himself remembered these sittings with pleasure, and the composer with affection, in this revealing extract from his autobiography, published in 1955:

Soon after this [the Bloch portrait] it was suggested that I should sculpture our great English composer Dr. Vaughan Williams, a person equally impressive in a different manner. Here was the master with whom no one would venture to dispute. He reminded me in appearance of some eighteenth-century admiral whose word was law. Notwithstanding, I found him the epitome of courtesy and consideration and I was impressed by the logic and acuteness of everything he discoursed upon and was made aware of his devotion to an art as demanding as sculpture. It seemed to me characteristic of this great man that at a mature stage in his creative development he decided to study composition with Ravel in Paris in order to balance his hitherto German training. We were received with charming hospitality by the Master at his country home in Dorking, from where we went at his invitation to hear his annual performance conducting the Bach *St. Matthew Passion*.

The finished portrait is itself rather controversial, but it has been seen as one of Epstein's most important portraits. Stephen Gardiner, for example, in his 1992 biography of Epstein refers to it as follows:

He [Epstein] made something remarkable of it: two great minds produced a great sculpture – an organic mass like a cliff, a craggy creation of ledges and overhangs, something with a power akin to his head of John [The Baptist] years earlier.

Admirers of Vaughan Williams tend, however, to see the work as something of a failure – Michael Kennedy is especially scathing in his biography of the composer:

Of all this [the personality and character of Vaughan Williams] Epstein's bust reveals nothing...

In my opinion the most balanced view comes from James Day:

Epstein's bust has not met with universal favour as a complete portrait of the subject: the "eighteenth-century admiral" aspect of his sitter seems to dominate the end-product, but it undeniably catches the immense rugged power, the solidity and the dignity that are so much a part of RVW's character and his music.

A few years later, in 1952 Vaughan Williams sat for Sir Gerald Kelly (1879-1972), the President of the Royal Academy and the most eminent painter to paint a portrait of Vaughan Williams. This was a result of a commission from the Royal Academy of Music who wanted a portrait of the composer. The composer George Dyson brought Sir Gerald to meet Vaughan Williams and the composer, according to Ursula "could not think of any excuse for not being painted".



Sir Gerald Kelly Oil on Canvas 1958-61

Unlike during the sittings with Epstein, Vaughan Williams (who was positioned in a large chair on a small platform) was required to remain still, although occasionally he nodded off to sleep, much to the amusement of the painter. The finished painting may be familiar from those who own a copy of Bryden Thomson's boxed set of the symphonies or Boult's old LP of *In the Fen Country*, where Kelly's striking portrait adorned the cover. The portrait attracted considerable attention at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition of 1953.

Six years later Kelly painted what I think is the finest painted portrait of Vaughan Williams; he had attended the rehearsal of the *Ninth Symphony* at St Pancras Town Hall and had commented to Ursula, "He is much more beautiful than he was – I must paint him again." The composer was not very enthusiastic about this, commenting, "Oh dear, I can't go and sit still again and he doesn't like any of my ties." Nevertheless, despite the composer's objection, the sittings took place and the result fully justified Gerald Kelly's perseverance. Once again, the composer is seated, dressed in an uncharacteristically smart suit. This rather owl-like portrait, influenced perhaps by Ingres' magnificent nineteenth-century seated painting of the journalist

Bertin, fully conveys the wisdom, humanity and visionary qualities of the composer. The hands in the portrait remained unfinished at the time of the composer's death. Vaughan Williams wrote to Kelly in November 1957, quoted in Hugh Cobbe's recent *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, to explain that he had been ill with phlebitis and was therefore unable to grant the sitting necessary to complete the hands, but adds, "As a matter of fact I think the portrait, hands and all, very good as it stands." The hands were completed from photographs after Vaughan Williams' death.

Kelly's 1958 work is the most familiar of the painted or sculpted images of the composer, having appeared on the sleeve of Boult's EMI LP of *Symphony No 8* and the *Concerto for Two Pianos*, in the CD booklet for *Epithalamion* and *Riders to the Sea*, as well as providing a striking cover image for Hugh Cobbe's book mentioned above. (The earlier Kelly portrait can be seen on the cover of the most recent edition of James Day's biography in the "Master Musicians" series.)

But perhaps the finest portrait of all is the bronze head of 1956 by the sculptor David McFall (1919-1998). The circumstances of its creation are described in Ursula Vaughan Williams' biography of her husband:

Cordelia [sister of Adeline] was most anxious for her friend, the sculptor David McFall, to do a head of Ralph, who strenuously opposed the idea. Cordelia persisted, and eventually David was invited to come to the house. Ralph told him that he must do the work while he himself was working; so David arrived with a bucket of clay and a bust peg for the first sitting on 22 August [1956]. During the five days on which he came Ralph told me that he had worked harder than usual himself. "I mustn't let the young man see me slacking," he said. It was a perfect arrangement, for David caught the private face, known to very few people, of Ralph absorbed in his work. The likeness is extraordinary: the grave beauty of the bronze captured the truth in strength and intimacy.

David McFall's own account of the sessions with Vaughan Williams was recorded in the Royal College of Music Magazine:



David McFall Bronze 1956

The hall at 10 Hanover Terrace contains Epstein's bronze of VW – quite an intimidating sight to another sculptor and more especially to myself, as I well knew the technical brio of the modelling of this head. [McFall had initially been reluctant to consider making the bronze because Epstein had already done one, but fortunately

changed his mind after Epstein had been critical of McFall's sculpture of Pocahontas.] Shown into the composer's study I felt an intruder with my bucket of wet clay and bust peg. There were no time-wasting preliminaries. VW declared his attitude with a peremptory sweep of his hand – "I'm not 'sitting' – you must make the best of it, young man." That was that. From then on he ignored my presence and settled down to his scores at the desk. But this suited me admirably in so far as I was to be spared polite



Sir Robert Vere ('Robin') Darwin Oil on canvas circa 1922

conversation with which many first sittings get going. Working on my knees on the floor and using a corner of his desk instead of a tripod, I glued my eyes upon this beautiful face – he seemed lost in deep contemplation – his inward eyes were down-cast and I saw in a flash the supreme humility of the man. I worked as fast as my fingers would go, fearing that he might not tolerate a repetition of this performance (I was hoping for five one hour sessions at intervals)...a flying start it was, already I had registered his brooding mood; and when he said I could come back another day, I cleaned up and made off in a high state of elation. I was to get my five sittings; they all took place at his desk in the same trance-like state of contemplation...VW steadfastly refused to look at what I was doing, saying that he'd wait 'till I'd finished.

David McFall's wonderful head of Vaughan Williams was completed during the period when the composer was working on his *Ninth Symphony*, and, as Michael Kennedy wrote in his note for Boult's EMI recording of the work, reflects the serenity and wisdom of that visionary score.

Admirers of Vaughan Williams who collected recordings in the LP era will remember the striking contribution that David McFall's bronze made to the cover of the boxed set of the symphonies, conducted by Sir Adrian Boult, that was released to coincide with the centenary of Vaughan Williams' birth in 1972. Oddly enough, it has not featured again, as far as I know, although it did appear on screen, movingly accompanied by an extract from the *Ninth Symphony*, in Ken Russell's much maligned 1984 television documentary on the composer.

Viewing the images of Vaughan Williams

It is a shameful fact that none of the paintings or sculptures discussed in this article is currently on permanent display in any of our national museums or galleries. The McFall head has long

disappeared from the Festival Hall as, to my recent surprise when researching for this article, has Sir Gerald Kelly's later portrait from the walls of the National Portrait Gallery. His earlier painting for the Royal College of Music has never, to my knowledge, been on public display. Epstein's head is locked away somewhere in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery. At the time of writing, David McFall's head of Vaughan Williams can be seen at the National Portrait Gallery in a temporary exhibition, until December 2010, "Great British Composers from Elgar to Adès". The exhibition also features a photograph of Vaughan Williams. The National Portrait Gallery actually holds thirty images of Vaughan Williams – including the later Kelly portrait and the McFall and Epstein heads – many of which are photographs. Fifteen images can be viewed online



Joy (Joyce Amy) Finzi Pencil and Chalk 1947

at the National Portrait Gallery website, including a remarkable painting, by his eleven year-old relative, Robin Darwin, of Vaughan Williams conducting, and a more familiar drawing of the composer by Joy Finzi, wife of Gerald. In response to a letter of mine expressing incredulity at the absence of any painting or sculpture of Vaughan Williams in its public collection, Paul Moorhouse, the Curator of Twentieth-Century Collections, reassured me that the National Portrait Gallery "will, of course, return the Kelly portrait to our display at the earliest possible opportunity."

SOURCES AND FURTHER STUDY

Connock, Stephen, Vaughan Williams, Ursula & Wells, Robin: *There was a time...Ralph Vaughan Williams. A pictorial journey from the collection of Ursula Vaughan Williams* (Albion 2003). [See page 67 for a striking close-up image of Epstein's bust of Vaughan Williams in the composer's study at the White Gates in Dorking.]

Day, James: *Vaughan Williams* (Master Musicians Series, OUP 1998)

Epstein, Jacob: *Epstein: An Autobiography* (Vista 1955)

Gardiner, Stephen: *Epstein* (Flamingo 1993)

Kennedy, Michael: *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (OUP 1964)

Lunn, John E. & Vaughan Williams, Ursula: *Ralph Vaughan Williams: a pictorial biography* (OUP 1971). [See page 76 for a glimpse of Epstein's head in the background, with Ralph and Adeline, shortly before her death, in the big room of the White Gates in Dorking; see also page 108 for a photograph of David McFall's 1956 head.]

Vaughan Williams, Ursula: *R.V.W. A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (OUP 1964)

www.npg.org.uk – website of the National Portrait Gallery, fifteen online images of Vaughan Williams available

www.davidmcfall.co.uk – features some fine images of the 1956 portrait head, and the sculptor's account of his sessions with the composer

Vaughan Williams and Thomas Hardy

Michael Gainsford

In the Writers' Gallery of the Dorset County Museum in Dorchester, there is displayed the first page of an undated letter from Vaughan Williams to Thomas Hardy. The address, however being 10 Barton Street, Westminster, fixes the date it was written as some time between 1899 and 1905.

The text of this first page is as follows:

Dear Sir,
I am taking the liberty of sending you the enclosed two songs. They are, as far as I know, the first attempts to set Barnes to music. It can only be a matter of surprise...

and there it ends.

My interest was aroused. Were these two of the three published Barnes settings, or did the letter refer to other, possibly unknown, songs which never reached the publisher? Also, why did Vaughan Williams send them to Hardy?

A request to the museum for copies or transcripts of the rest of the letter was promptly dealt with. Probably thinking better of attempting to decipher the composer's notoriously bad handwriting (if he hadn't taken up composing he had at least part of the requirements to be a medical practitioner!) the curator sent photo copies of the two missing pages. I attempted the decoding myself, only one word eluding my efforts.

the letter continues:

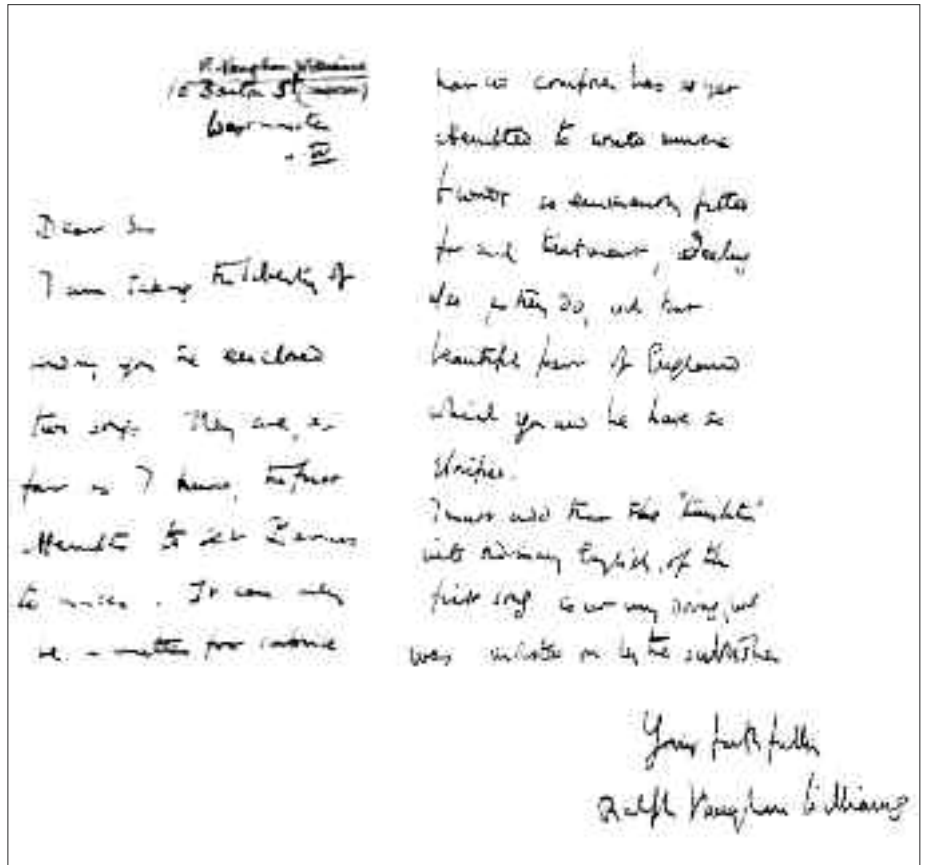
...that no composer has as yet attempted to write music to words so eminently fitted for such treatment; dealing also as they do, with that beautiful part of England which you and he have so glorified. I must say that the "translation" into ordinary English of the first song is not my doing, but was insisted on by the publisher.

Yours faithfully,

Ralph Vaughan Williams

Reference to a publisher in the letter put paid to the possibility that previously unknown songs were being referred to.

According to Michael Kennedy's *Catalogue*, three Barnes songs that would fit the dates are: *Linden Lea*, composed 1901, published April 1902, first performed 4 September 1902; *Blackwore by the Stour*, composed 1902, published May 1902, first performed 4 September 1902; and *The Winter's Willow*, composed 1903, published November 1903.



It seems clear to me that the letter refers to the first two of the three above, and that the composer probably thought of them as a pair, although *Linden Lea* is now far better known than its partner. This has always struck me as a pity.

According to Ursula Vaughan Williams' biography, Vaughan Williams was fond of Hardy's novels, and presumably sent the author copies of the songs as a sort of "thank you". I know of no other correspondence between the two men apart from that related to the setting of "Buonoparty", from *The Dynasts*. I understand that setting Hardy's poems to music is notoriously difficult, and that the only other setting by the composer occurs in *Hodie*. Vaughan Williams' friend, Gerald Finzi was, however, bold enough to set lots of Hardy poems, mostly very successfully.

On the Albion Records release *Kissing Her Hair* (ALBCD002), the baritone Roderick Williams makes a creditable attempt to sing these two songs in a Dorset accent. At least one reviewer commented adversely upon this. But going by the letter above it seems that the composer would have preferred the words as Barnes wrote them.

I would like to express my thanks to David Tolley, who first spotted the letter, translated the problem word, "glorified", and enhanced the quality of the copies; and to Jasmine Metcalfe, curator of the Dorset County Museum.

Discovering Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1970s style

John France

A few days ago a friend of mine mentioned to me that her introduction to Ralph Vaughan Williams was a performance of his *Fifth Symphony* at the Royal Albert Hall back in 1975. I agreed with her that this was one of the composer's finest works and was a terrific way to begin to explore his music. Hardly surprisingly, she inquired as to how I had discovered his music: I confessed that my path to his corpus of works was somewhat convoluted and involved a few backwaters.

It must have been about 1971. I had just landed a part in the Coatbridge High School production of *The Pirates of Penzance*. I was one of the tenors (struggling to reach the top Gs) and cast to play a pirate. My local church choirmaster heard that I was a new "singer", and press-ganged me into the back row of the choir. One day, a friend and I were invited to a special Women's Guild (the Scottish equivalent of the Mother's Union) meeting, in spite of the fact we were both young men. It turned out to be a cine film show about famous hymns and their stories. The president of the Guild felt that as aspiring musicians we would be (or ought to be) interested. Although I was a wee bit embarrassed being in the presence of some three dozen matronly ladies, I did enjoy the evening and the cup of tea and biscuits. One scene in the film captured my attention: a visit to the church at Down Ampney. The commentator pointed out that Ralph Vaughan Williams was born there in 1872, and although he did not live there for long, thirty-four years later he wrote a hymn tune and called it after his birthplace. *Come down, O love divine* was duly given an airing, accompanied by fine colour film of this idyllic village. I was bowled over. After the film show I rummaged through my father's LP collection. Amongst the Vera Lynns, Handel's *Messiah* and Paul Robeson's I found the *Fantasia on "Greensleeves"*. It was part of an old *Reader's Digest* "classical" collection. I played this piece over and over again. To me it seemed to epitomise the English landscape as shown in the cine film.

Coatbridge had an excellent public library with a comprehensive collection of music. It was near to my school. I was browsing amongst the piano music when I discovered Vaughan Williams' *The Lake in the Mountains*. I did not know then that it was derived from the film score *49th Parallel*: I guess I thought it was another piece of English pastoral dreamt up in the Gloucestershire countryside. I borrowed the score, but to say I played my way through the music on my piano is an understatement. It was a challenge and it reminded me how much I had enjoyed the *Fantasia*. There was something strangely haunting about the parallel chords, juxtaposed perfect fourths and fifths and the music's slow-paced development. I remember that I was disappointed when I discovered that this music was an evocation of the Canadian landscape and not that of the Home

Counties! For the curious, *The Lake in the Mountains* was published as a piano piece in London by the Oxford University Press in 1947. It is dedicated to Phyllis Sellick.

At my school in the early nineteen-seventies, Britten, Berg and Bartók were the favoured composers. Anyone professing a liking for Elgar, Rachmaninov or Vaughan Williams was generally laughed out of court. Alas, I had fallen in love with the *Introduction and Allegro*, the *Second Piano Concerto in C minor* and the above-mentioned small pieces by Vaughan Williams. It was a difficult secret to bear.

One day I was talking to a former pupil at the school: he has since become a professor of music at a leading Scottish university. Amongst a lot of discussion about Berlioz's *Trojans*, *The Ring* and the music of the French harpsichordists, he offered me a loan of an LP of music by Vaughan Williams. It was the EMI recording of *An Oxford Elegy* with John Westbrook narrating, Kings College Choir singing and the Jacques Orchestra conducted by David Willcocks. The couplings were *Flos Campi* and the *Five Variants of "Dives and Lazarus"*. These last two pieces had to wait a few more years before they became part of my Vaughan Williams "Desert Island Dozen": it was *An Oxford Elegy* that "blew me away", as we used to say in those days.

Just why this work impressed and inspired me would take a fair few pages to expound, but three things spring to mind. Firstly, the words of the poem (actually two poems redacted) appealed to my fond imaginings of the English landscape. Although I had not actually been further south than Manchester, I had a well-defined notion of what I expected or hoped to find when I eventually arrived in the "Land of Lost Content". I had read A. E. Housman and W. H. Davies' *Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*. I was into the novels and short stories of H. E. Bates and the artwork of John Constable and John Piper. But the words of Matthew Arnold's *A Scholar Gypsy* and *Thyrsis* struck the right chord, and they remain two of my favourite poetic works. Secondly I was seriously impressed by the music: it is a subtle combination of choir, both wordless and employing text, impressionistic orchestral writing and beautifully recited poetry. It is a near perfect fusion of words and music. And thirdly, although at that time I had not "close-read" the poem and was little interested in the spiritual crisis that beset the author, I enjoyed the exposition of the "oft-read tale" from Glanvil's book about the Scholar Gypsy and his wanderings in the Oxfordshire countryside. I too wanted to "roam on!" through this landscape.

There are too many purple passages in this text but perhaps this extract will serve as an example of the sheer magic of the words:

Too quick despaire, wherefore wilt thou go?
 Soon will the high Midsummer pomps come on,
 Soon will the musk carnations break and swell,
 Soon shall we have gold-dusted snapdragon,
 Sweet-William with his homely cottage-smell,
 And stocks in fragrant blow;
 Roses that down the alleys shine afar
 And open, jasmine-muffled lattices...

Very shortly after hearing *An Oxford Elegy*, I wrote to ITV to ask what music had been used in the drama set during the nineteen-forties, *A Family at War*. I discovered that it was a theme from the first movement of Vaughan Williams' *Sixth Symphony*. A few days later I bought the Decca Eclipse recording of Sir Adrian Boult conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra. It was to be my introduction to a more sinister side of the composer's music. This was no rural idyll but a bleak landscape once believed to be a premonition of a nuclear winter. It was a strange symphony with which to begin an exploration of the genre, but at least it made me understand the sheer emotional breadth of Vaughan Williams' music.

A year or so later, I made my way up to London for the first time. Certainly, much of the rural idyll seemed to exist as the Royal Scot sped its way through the countrified parts of Staffordshire, Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire. But this soon gave way to suburban London and then the marshalling yards of Willesden and the carriage sidings of Euston Station. However, an hour or so after arriving in London I stood amazed and awestruck in the centre of Westminster Bridge looking down the river towards the South Bank, the Festival Hall and the Shell building. Walking across the road, I saw the Mother of Parliaments and the embankment heading down towards Lambeth and Pimlico and, out of sight, Cheyne Walk. That day I

bought a recording of Ralph Vaughan Williams' *London Symphony*: this too was a very different landscape from that I had imagined the composer specialised in creating. The journey had truly begun.

Leith Hill Place (Photograph: Robert Shave)



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Taken by Surprise

John Treadway

“Do you think I have paid through the nose for this?” I asked my son and son-in-law, both computer experts, when I opened the box containing my new computer. Amazingly it had come with a free flight to America as part of the deal. Their response was that the computer had a good specification and if I had paid £50 over the odds for it, where else would I get a flight offer like this?

With the time I had at my disposal, I chose to fly to New York, spending five days there before moving on to Washington. With guide books showing so much to see in both cities, and with my usual determination to see the lot, any connection with Ralph Vaughan Williams was really the last thing on my mind. Imagine then my surprise when on making an early evening visit to Washington’s John F. Kennedy Centre, I found that the free foyer concert at 6pm was to include a performance of the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* played by the Punahou School Symphony Strings from Honolulu! This very large orchestra of teenagers performed the work with great enthusiasm and passion. They could have done with far more performing space, but it was a very creditable performance and certainly far more than “getting all the right notes in the right place”.

Speaking to the players afterwards, I was surprised to learn that this wasn’t their first encounter with Vaughan Williams’ music. Bearing in mind that they had also played Vivaldi and Tchaikovsky in the same concert, I wondered what they honestly thought of the *Fantasia*. “We love playing it...it’s such a great piece”, was their genuine response, as it also was of their conductor.

Another surprising Vaughan Williams connection occurred a few days later when I visited Washington’s National Cathedral, a building constructed in stone, following the practice of the great European cathedrals. One of its enthusiastic guides, discovering that I was from England, decided I was ripe for the “full treatment” which included not only a long and full history of its construction, but also an explanatory tour of the great array of its stained glass windows. I wasn’t surprised by the beautiful rose window at the west end, nor to see one dedicated to the heroes of space exploration, with its wonderful array of colour and light, but what I did not expect was the content of the musicians’ window above the south aisle. Here the Virgin Mary was the predominant figure, and above her head was a dove descending as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Beneath her, the shepherds were listening in rapture to the heavenly choir announcing Christ’s birth. Below that, in the left lancet, there was the figure of J. S. Bach, standing beside a pipe organ, composing his great *B Minor Mass*, and there, to my utter amazement, immediately below him, was Vaughan Williams depicted conducting a concert in a church. How he would have loved that connection with his great musical hero! Apart from other religious symbols in the right lancet, the only other composer represented was the sixteenth-century composer John Merbecke. I couldn’t help thinking that Tallis would have been a better choice!



As you can see from the picture I took, the figure bears no resemblance to Vaughan Williams at all, and one can’t help wondering why the designer, Napoleon Seth, had decided on his inclusion. Was it as the result of a piece of music he admired, or simply some knowledge of the man himself and his great humanity? Whatever the reason, it does seem a pity that his enthusiasm had not resulted in his taking the trouble to obtain a true likeness, which would certainly not have been difficult to find. On reflection, though, I have to say that I am glad Vaughan Williams is present in such a great national building.



In the footsteps of Ralph Vaughan Williams

Tadeusz Kasa

In his quest to save some of our rapidly disappearing folksongs, Vaughan Williams often seized the chance to gather a few when travelling or on short breaks, such as those with Adeline in Cambridge and Yorkshire. But neither did he neglect the opportunities available to him closer to home. From his collection of around 803 songs, some were sung to him by his own estate workers at Leith Hill Place and by residents of local villages and towns around the Leith Hill area.

One such place from which he collected songs was on the outskirts of Horsham and Dorking. In Rusper, the Plough Inn is a delightful, timber-framed 16th century building, with half rendered walls. An impressive roof is clad with huge tiles cut from Horsham stone. Signs outside the pub warn visitors to mind their heads, and to save them from serious injury the lowest beams have been generously padded. It is unlikely however, that such luxury would have been afforded to Vaughan Williams during his visits in 1907 and 1908. In his army days, Vaughan Williams' height was recorded as being six feet, so it is almost certain that his noble head would have come into contact at least once with one of those murderous oak beams. The inn almost certainly looks a little different today from how it did in 1907, but if he were to return, Vaughan Williams would have no difficulty in recognising it. The stone floors, the old fireplace and those lethal ancient beams have survived intact.

There must have been many pubs around the Leith Hill area in 1907 from which to harvest material, and yet only relatively few are documented as having been visited, which begs the question "Why so few?" Vaughan Williams himself admitted:

"...it is only a small part of each county which I have searched for songs, and the time spent has been of necessity very short. What results might be obtained from a systematic and sympathetic search through all the villages and towns of England!"

(Ursula Vaughan Williams, *RVW: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams*)

Undoubtedly his time was limited, and so, rather than making speculative trawls, it was more likely that he would have asked around for information. A ready source of local knowledge would have been on his own doorstep, from estate workers in and around Leith Hill Place.

At the Plough Inn, Vaughan Williams heard the landlord, Mr. Penfold, sing *What Hurricane Wind*, *Green Broom*, *The Miller of the Dee*, *The Turtle Dove* and *The trees they do grow high*. A certain Mr. Miles sang *Henry Martin*, which was also notated and phonographed. In addition there were contributions by an unnamed singer, who sang *Pull the String* and an untitled song.

On 13 August 1908, Vaughan Williams paid a return visit to the Plough to hear its musical landlord, Mr. Penfold, sing *Hurricane Wind*, and someone by the name of "David" sing *Pretty Ploughboy*.

It is interesting to speculate exactly where in the Plough Inn Vaughan Williams would have sat, and where Mr. Penfold and others performed their songs. The two most likely places would have been in front of the fireplace or propping up the bar. At the time, Vaughan Williams was a keen cyclist and we could also enjoy speculating how he got home!



Top left **The Plough Inn 1909**

Top right **The Plough Inn 2010**

Bottom left **The old fireplace as it is today**

Bottom right **The interior today**

* National Archives Certificate of recommendation for admission to an Officer Unit.

** *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* Michael Kennedy.

From the Publicity Officer

■ Commemorating the Tallis Fantasia

Over a hundred people attended the drinks reception organised by the Society during the Three Choirs Festival in August to commemorate the centenary of the first performance of the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, and to hear Michael Kennedy speak about the work and his memories of Vaughan Williams.

Society members travelled from around the country, as well as from abroad, to join the commemoration, which took place in the marquee next to Gloucester Cathedral. We were also particularly pleased to welcome twenty-six members from Ace Cultural Tours, who were attending the day's concerts and had managed to add the reception to their busy schedule at fairly short notice. They were delighted to have the opportunity to join us and hear Michael on this special occasion.

BBC Radio Gloucester recorded a short interview with Michael for their Sunday morning programme, which was broadcast the following week.

Also on display was the Society's new promotional banner. This will be displayed at RVW Society events, and at others where the Society has a presence, to help raise awareness of our organisation and its aims.

■ Vaughan Williams' Letters out in paperback

Members will be pleased to hear about this more affordable paperback version of Hugh Cobbe's highly acclaimed book, which would make an ideal Christmas gift.

Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1895-1958

Edited by Hugh Cobbe

Winner of the C. B. Oldman

Prize, awarded by the International Association of Music Libraries
Oxford University Press
Price: £30.00

Society members are eligible for a 20% discount on OUP music books, and so this title will be available at £24.00. More information can be found at <http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/product/9780199587643.do>

■ Ralph Vaughan Williams: A genius arrives on the British Music Scene

Friday 19 – Sunday 21 November, 2010: Farnham House Hotel, Surrey

Most members will be aware of Terry Barfoot's RVW weekend, taking place in Surrey during November and announced in the previous *Journal*. Terry has advised that although all initial residential places have sold out, there are still non-residential places available, and for those requiring accommodation, a residential alternative is being offered at a nearby hotel in Alton (a drive of about 15 minutes).

Another residential weekend also features Vaughan Williams, amongst other English composers:

English Idyll,
Friday 4 to Sunday 6 February, 2011, at the Georgian House Hotel, Haslemere, Surrey

This weekend will explore a varied and representative selection of paintings and music associated with images of England and its landscape, with recorded musical illustrations and visual equipment:

"Larks and Cuckoos", including music by Vaughan Williams and Delius
"Folk Music and Art Music":
Vaughan Williams and his

contemporaries
"Country Life": Constable, Gainsborough and Stubbs
"The Romantic Imagination": Palmer, Turner, Nash and Sutherland
"English Idyll": a living tradition
Parry: Symphonic Variations
Holst: Somerset Rhapsody
Delius: Brigg Fair
Vaughan Williams: Hugh the Drover
Elgar: Variations on an Original Theme, "Enigma"

Price: £275.00 per person (twin/double rooms), £299.00 (single rooms), to include all meals, wine, beverages, course fees and accommodation.
Booking: Arts in Residence, 25, Mulberry Lane, Cosham, Portsmouth, PO6 2QU.
£50.00 per person deposit with booking. (Cheques payable to Arts in Residence.)
Enquiries: 02392 383356, info@artsinresidence.co.uk

Details at www.artsinresidence.co.uk/weekend-breaks-future.html

■ RVW in the news

Vaughan Williams has been obtaining coverage in the newspapers recently, firstly with the commemoration of the *Tallis Fantasia*, which was taken up by Rob Young in *The Guardian*: www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2010/jun/12/vaughan-williams-fantasia-theme-tallis

In the *Times*, Emma Pomfret thought it time to "plug into pastoral" in *Sublime sounds or cowpat music?*, available to view if you subscribe to The *Times* website.

The latest Albion Records recording inspired Simon Heffer to write about the two-piano arrangement of the *Sixth Symphony* in the *Daily Telegraph*: www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/simonheffer/7783

238/Varieties-of-darkness-that-lit-up-my-life.html

And in the *Sunday Times* recently the premiere of the cello concerto fragment featured in a piece by Arts Editor Richard Brooks, again available to view if you subscribe to their website. It was very good to see such a high profile piece in the main news pages.

I will bring some copies of these articles to the A. G. M. for members to take away with them if they wish.

■ Publicity in the future

The team continues to develop contacts with orchestras, publishers, and recording labels to raise awareness of the Society and to push for recordings and performances of Vaughan Williams' works. I am particularly keen to arrange free advertising or editorial for the Society in concert programmes as well as distributing membership leaflets for display and circulation at key concerts and events. If you are programming a Vaughan Williams work or are involved in an associated event, why not encourage membership by asking me for a copy of our professionally-produced advertisement or some membership leaflets?

Do we have your correct e-mail address?

Finally, if you would like to receive quarterly publicity updates from me, please send your email address to David Betts, Membership Officer, or myself. In this way we can keep our records up to date. If you have not received publicity updates this year and would like to, please supply your current email address now!

Karen Fletcher

Letters

RVW in NEW YORK

I was very interested to read Allan W. Atlas's article on the reception given to the *Tallis Fantasia* in New York (June issue) and in particular the review of Leopold Stokowski's Carnegie Hall performance on 19 October 1926. It was Stokowski's usual custom to give a pair of concerts in Philadelphia and then he and the orchestra would take the same programme to a neighbouring city a few days later. I have a copy of the *Musical America* review that covered the Philadelphia programme on 15 and 16 October. The concert consisted of Stokowski's transcription of Bach's *Chorale Prelude, "Wachet auf"*, followed by Brahms' *Symphony No. 1*. After the interval came the *Tallis Fantasia*, and the concert concluded with the U.S. premiere of Ernest Pingoud's symphonic poem, *Le Prophète*. (I wonder how often that's been played since?)

The *Musical America* critic, H. T. Craven, wrote:

Mr. Stokowski's quest for novelties led him on these occasions into some rather unbeaten roads. Although Thomas Tallis has been termed the "Father of English Cathedral Music", the ordinary concertgoer, in this country at least, scarcely includes him in the list of musical familiars. The gifted English composer died when Shakespeare was just approaching maturity.

Mr. Williams (sic) obviously aimed at recreating in a work suitable for a specially arranged orchestra the essential flavor of some of the finest Elizabethan music. Choice was made of one of eight tunes, which Tallis wrote in 1576, each in a different one of the ecclesiastical modes. The second, which "doth rage and roughly brayeth", was utilized by the modern composer as the basis of his set of skillful variations. To present-day ears there is little suggestion of tempest or fury in the Tallis theme. It is, rather, grave, somber and melancholy. The adaptor has displayed much ingenuity in the scoring for double string orchestra with four solo strings. The second orchestra consists of ten players which Mr. Stokowski placed at the back of the stage. This orchestra often played in a higher register than the main body of strings, producing in contrast a kind of plaintive woodwind effect. The many divisions of the strings are developed with marked resourcefulness. The variations as they were presented did not, however, achieve many contrasts of flavor or character. The work, therefore, despite its form, was suggestive chiefly of a single mood – that of gravity and tristful calm. Sincerity of workmanship, both in original material and in adaptation, is a marked merit of the score, which builds up to a solemn and impressive climax.

The *Tallis Fantasia* was to remain in Stokowski's repertoire for the rest of his life. He and Vaughan Williams had been fellow organ students at the Royal College of Music in the 1890s, though neither can have foreseen that Stokowski would conduct seven of Vaughan Williams' symphonies in America over the succeeding decades, making the first recording of *No. 6* in 1949 with the New York Philharmonic and giving the U.S. premiere of *No. 9* in 1958.

Stokowski also made the first American LP of the *Tallis Fantasia* in 1952. (It had previously received only one other U. S. recording, made on 78s in 1945 by Dimitri Mitropoulos and the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra). For his own first recording,

Stokowski's LP was labelled as being by "his Symphony Orchestra," a specially assembled *ad hoc* recording ensemble drawn from among New York's finest musicians. They came mostly from the N.B.C. Symphony and New York Philharmonic, whose first desks provided three of the four soloists, David Rosensweig, William Lincer and Leonard Rose. Stokowski's interpretation was a far cry from those by such British maestri as Boult and Sargent, and can probably best be described as "voluptuous"!

I was also interested in Mr Atlas's reference to the various timings of the work, because as far as I know it is the New York Philharmonic which has provided the fastest and slowest recordings on CD: Mitropoulos's 1958 remake came to 12.45 while Leonard Bernstein's 1976 reading lasted 18.04 – quite a big difference!

Of course, both Mitropoulos and Bernstein made splendid recordings of Vaughan Williams' *Fourth Symphony* with the NYPO, and I've always thought it a matter of regret that no American orchestra has ever recorded a complete cycle of the symphonies. The foreign conductors who have done so – Previn, Haitink, and Slatkin – have all recorded their cycles with British orchestras. Indeed, I recall that when Leonard Slatkin was planning his own Vaughan Williams cycle there were discussions as to whether to record it with the St. Louis Symphony, of which he was then principal conductor, or with the Philharmonia. In the end it was with the latter that the cycle was made.

Apparently there seems to have been a feeling on the part of record companies that only British orchestras can play English music, which I think is a shame. Bernard Haitink recorded Mahler's nine symphonies with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra but without any disrespect to the London Philharmonic Orchestra it would have been fascinating if he'd recorded Vaughan Williams' nine in Amsterdam instead, so that we could have heard a great Dutch orchestra in this music. In fact, unless I am mistaken, not a single Continental orchestra has ever made a commercial recording of any of Vaughan Williams' symphonies, apart from a single CD of a live performance of *No. 9*, recorded at its Portuguese premiere in 1958 with the National Symphony Orchestra of Portugal under Pedro de Freitas Branco.

Edward Johnson,
London.

MORE...

The centenary performance of the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* at this year's Gloucester Three Choirs Festival makes timely Allan Atlas's article in the June *Journal* about the work's New York reception.

The lack of imagination on the part of the critic Richard Aldrich, as quoted by Mr. Atlas, stands out like an out of tune instrument in a symphony orchestra. "The fantasia by Vaughan Williams...strikes modern ears as very dignified, not to say gloomy and depressing." And later, "The modal harmonies ... produce an effect of monotony on modern ears some time before the end is reached."

Maybe Vaughan Williams could be forgiven if his *Fantasia* sounded as gloomy and depressing as Tallis. The tune was set to part of a poem by Joseph Addison beginning “When rising from the bed of death.” Sombre words! Instead, his antiphonal composition for two orchestras and a solo quartet is a rich blend of colours in its great blocks of shifting chords, swathes of counterpoint and sense of freedom in the flow of solo strings.

To my ears, and eighty-eight years on, gloomy is glorious, depressing is dignified and monotony is majestic. Thank goodness for the critic Olin Downes, who championed the work in several publications, praising the work’s “grave and poetic beauty”.

I first heard the *Tallis Fantasia* many years ago in my twenties, and the sound of the music struck me as profound and mighty, and seemed to take root and establish itself in the earth, thence to grow.

E. Anne Webb,
London.

ANOTHER VIEW...

Perhaps my experience with the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams is not unique.

I was born in New Jersey in 1931, so I was nine years old when the Battle of Britain began. As a Cub Scout and then Boy Scout, I collected newspapers, metals, even milkweed pods for use in life jackets, all to try and help in the war effort which was not going well at that time. We lived thirty miles from New York City, and the general feeling was that if England fell, we would be next.

Those of us of British descent had many connections to relatives under aerial attack. If you want to know what it was like, look at the first ten minutes of the DVD *Chronicles of Narnia, The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. Even seventy years later I cannot watch it without feeling the terror of a nine year-old child. Echoes of the air raid sirens can be heard when the wind whistles through tree branches. Lightning flashes remind me of the searchlights stabbing the sky.

One constant uplifting aid was the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams, especially the *London Symphony*. Vaughan Williams did for London and England what Ottorino Respighi did for Rome and Italy. Both painted multidimensional sound pictures of these cities for us. Local classical station WQXR would play Vaughan Williams and we would be connected to the great city now under siege. Those anguished chords that start the fourth movement, could the composer somehow have foreseen the grievous wounds that the city would suffer?

Then, a few minutes before the end, you can hear the Westminster chimes of Big Ben. The enemy tried to silence them, but did not succeed. “Still there,” my mother whispered to my sister and me, after hearing them on the shortwave, “it’s still there.”

Twenty years later, when I was the first Chief Engineer of the first classical music station on the East Coast to broadcast in stereo – we beat WQXR by three hours – I played as much Vaughan Williams as I could get away with. He knew the horrors at first hand in WW1. It is my belief that he helped us to victory in WW2 with his immortal music.

Chris Franks,
Austin, Texas, U.S.A.

THANKSGIVING FOR VICTORY

The June 2010 issue of the *Journal* contained a letter from Liz Luder asking for further information about a recording of *Thanksgiving for Victory*. She reproduced a letter from Mr. George Willows to the old boys’ magazine of the Bedford Modern School, who remembered taking part in a recording of the work in the Bedford Corn Exchange with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC Singers and a children’s choir consisting of girls from Dame Alice Harpur School, Bedford and boys from Bedford Modern School. He remembers that the work was conducted by Sir Adrian Boult and that the composer sat in the balcony. He remembers also that the recording took place on a Sunday “just before or just after the end of the war”.

Michael Kennedy’s *Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* gives the date of the first performance of the work as 5 November 1944, a Sunday, in a BBC studio in London. The work was recorded for use when victory had been achieved and was eventually transmitted on 13 May 1945. A second performance was given on 13 September at the Proms. The performers in 1944 are listed as Elsie Suddaby, soprano, Valentine Dyall, speaker, the BBC Chorus, Choir of Children from the Thomas Coram Schools, George Thalben-Ball, organ, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Adrian Boult. For the Prom in 1945 the performers were the same except for substitution of BBC Chorus by BBC Choral Society and the Croydon Philharmonic Society.

I have made enquiries at the BBC written archives centre at Caversham to try to find out more about the circumstances of that first recording. Jeff Walden, archive researcher, has looked up the programme-as-broadcast log for the 1945 transmission of the 1944 recording. He says the performers are listed as follows:

BBC Symphony Orchestra
BBC Singers
(cond. Boult)
Boys of the Luton Choir
Boys from Bedford School
Elsa (sic) Suddaby
G. Thalben-Ball
Valentine Dyall (narrator)

He says that the log for the 1945 Prom performance – incorrectly dated 14 September – shows that the Thomas Coram choir was used on that occasion. It is this, probably, that has led to the confusion about the children’s choir in the 1944 recorded premiere.

In 1944 the BBC Symphony Orchestra was still based in Bedford, so it would seem that Mr Willows’ recollections are indeed of the first performance. The girls’ choir he mentions does not feature in the log, however, and the recording (see below) certainly sounds like a mixed choir.

When I first read Mr. Willows’ letter I remembered that I had an early recording of *Thanksgiving for Victory*. In the early 1990s a number of CDs were issued in the U.K. by a company called Intaglio, based in Italy but distributed in the U.K. by Koch International. The catalogue consisted entirely of off-air recordings, including many BBC broadcasts issued with dubious copyright clearance, and many with very little information about recording dates and venues. Amongst their list was a disc containing a recording of *Thanksgiving for Victory* coupled with *Four Tudor Portraits*, both conducted by Sir Adrian Boult. The performers in *Thanksgiving for Victory* are listed

as Elsie Sudaby (sic), soprano, BBC Chorus and Children's Choir, BBC Symphony Orchestra. The speaker is not identified, but sounds like Valentine Dyall. No recording information is given for either work, and I thought initially that the *Thanksgiving for Victory* performance could have been either of the two previously discussed. Then I remembered the recent Dutton CD entitled *From Vaughan Williams' Attic*. Amongst other treasures is a copy from Vaughan Williams' own collection of the Transcription Service disc of the 1944 premiere. It is evidently the same performance as that on the Intaglio disc. Lewis Foreman, in his typically informative sleeve note, presumes the recording was made in Bedford, but the sleeve repeats the erroneous statement that the children's choir was from the Thomas Coram Schools. Happily I have been able to confirm to Mr. Willows that the copy of the Intaglio disc that I sent him is indeed the performance in which he took part so long ago, and I hope that listening to it brings back happy memories.

In investigating all this I have listened to the recordings a number of times and my appreciation of the piece has increased to the extent that I now consider it to be one of Vaughan Williams' greatest works, the words so apt and magnanimous and the music so lacking in triumphalism.

David McBrien,

Holyport, Berkshire, U.K.

RESURRECTING THE RHYMER

Christiaan Light's letter in the *June Journal* about *Thomas the Rhymer* was very interesting. Having read about this unfinished work, I too became very curious about it and wrote to Ursula Vaughan Williams in 1993, raising the matter of the possibility of its completion. Her reply came by return of post:

10 March, 1993

Dear Mr. Whittaker,

Thank you very much for your letter, and I am glad that you like RVW.

As to Thomas – I'm sorry, but it's absolutely NO. A first draft is very far from what the finished job would have been and I loathe pastiche Ralph. It was a great sadness, but everything has to break somewhere, so that, and the cello concerto, remain unfinished. If there had been a very small bunch of works it might be different – but as there are so many, including five operas, which opera houses ignore – I'd rather Thomas remained a might-have-been. We would both have been making alterations & adjustments, and so forth – it was far too embryonic – no orchestration – for completion – so I think, and of course I have discussed all this with Roy Douglas and Michael Kennedy, & the British Library's Keeper of European Music mss. – and we all came to the same conclusion.

I've done so much libretto work with other composers, and know what a lot one does after a first draft, that I am convinced it is a proper decision for both Ralph's and my part in the work.

But enjoy the other operas. There's a splendid C.D. of the superb production of *Pilgrim's Progress* that the Royal Northern College of Music put on last year, which might cheer you.

With many thanks –

Yours,

Ursula Vaughan Williams

In response to Christiaan Light's suggestion that there might be an aria or an interlude in this work, from what I remember, having had the opportunity to see the manuscript of the draft piano score, there

is nothing in the score that really fits the bill. My impression is that it is quite a lightweight work – which might well have been scored for quite small orchestral forces – without the memorable “big tunes”, and probably not quite in the same sort of league as his very many finished and more powerful works. No doubt the day will come when the temptation to complete the opera will be too strong – but unless Roy Douglas and Michael Kennedy now feel otherwise, perhaps at present we should respect the views of Ursula Vaughan Williams who, we must remember, wrote the libretto.

John Whittaker,

Reading, U.K.

RVW and FOLK MUSIC

How interesting that there should be a letter in the *June Journal* about *The Unquiet Grave*.

I am assuredly not the only Society member who attended the Finzi Friends English Song Weekend in Ludlow in June 2010. There were many fine pieces, but for me the unexpected star of the whole weekend was the performance by Elizabeth Watts, Ian Burnside and Matthew Denton of *The Unquiet Grave*. It induced one of those moments when you go very still and the whole world seems to lose focus around you. I hardly knew this work at all before, but I do wish it could be recorded in an arrangement for mezzo with piano and violin. I have it on CD in two choral settings, and also performed by Robert Tear, sensitively enough, but I am not a fan of his voice.

In the same concert, Howells' *Come Sing and Dance* and Rubbra's *Hymn to the Virgin* were also delightful revelations to me.

Paul Davey,

Brighton, U.K.

MORE...

Following Michael Parker's letter in the *June Journal*, the area of Sheffield in which I live is celebrating one hundred years since Cecil Sharp recorded the “Grenoside Sword Dance” this year. Sharp saw the dance at Hilltop Farm barn on 27 August 1910, and included it in *Sword Dances of Northern England, Vol. I* in 1911.

Since then it has been performed a number of times each year, alongside other dances, and using various tunes. I recently saw it performed again, with the usual precision and enthusiastic audience at the Grenoside Gala on 19 June 2010. There were a number of dance groups also present at the event (from as far afield as Essex – just as strong in its folk traditions now as when Vaughan Williams was there over a century ago) and the dancing mingled with the other stalls and activities in a way which showed a living tradition and not a quaint anachronism. That many of the onlookers (and at least one of the dancers) were under forty, was a heartening proof that some links with the past are worth preserving no matter how little some would say they benefit modern existence.

Anyone wishing to catch this dance later in 2010 can see it at the Sword Dance Union's annual tournament to be held in Grenoside on 16-17 October, at its traditional time – Boxing Day morning on Main Street in Grenoside.

On a second, but related theme, Prom 23 this year was one of only two concerts giving Vaughan Williams a platform. It was a very fine concert, pleasing when so little of the great man's music is being played this year.

Donald Runnicles was leading his new orchestra, the BBC Scottish Symphony, and the concert got under way with John Foulds' brilliant piano concerto *Dynamic Triptych*. This was performed by Ashley Wass with just the same sense of touch that he had brought to the Vaughan Williams concerto in the thunderstorm two years ago, and which he has so magnificently realised recently with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and James Judd on Naxos. Then came the *Serenade to Music* and *The Lark Ascending*. The *Serenade* allowed young singers from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama to showcase their talents before a packed hall. The orchestral introduction was full of very warm string tones – a feature of the whole evening – and then the voices entered as one. The ensemble was well balanced and each was also a strong soloist. The piece was given a very positive reading and a warm reception. Donald Runnicles said before it was performed that he had known the work since childhood. The *Lark* was played by Nicola Benedetti, a very talented artist who gave the piece the kind of reading one hopes for. The concert ended with a strong reading of Elgar's *First Symphony*.

The whole evening gave a good account of English music and Scottish performers (to nearly quote Byron). Indeed, the warmth of the playing and the quality of soloists engaged suggests that this music is viewed with due value and significance. Katie Derham's statement that the hall was full shows that there is an audience there for it too, so let's hope for more Vaughan Williams next season, and more British music in general.

Michael Williams,
Sheffield, U.K.

MORE...

In his interesting article on *The Running Set* in the June 2010 *Journal*, Roy J. Lidstone quotes the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* as stating that the term "quodlibet" was "being used to describe a medley of tunes" by 1845. It certainly was. In another edition of the same dictionary it says "early nineteenth century", but the word was well established at least by the time of Bach. The manuscript of Variation 30 of the *Goldberg Variations* is marked as "a 1 Clav. Quodlibet." In this movement Bach uses two popular folk songs.

Mozart's *Galimathias musicum* (K.32), composed in 1766, is described by his father as "a quodlibet for two violins, two oboes, two horns, obbligato harpsichord, two bassoons, viola and bass". All the instruments have their solos, and at the end there is a fugue on a Dutch song called Prince William.

Michael Rogers,
Kinver, Staffordshire, U.K..

MORE...

The *Oxford Book of Carols*, edited by Percy Dearmer, Martin Shaw, and Ralph Vaughan Williams was first published in 1928.

Number 48 in the book is "May Day Garland", and a footnote states "The words and music were taken by Geoffrey and Martin Shaw from an English girl (now Mrs. Betambeau), in the Boro' Polytechnic, London, c1917; she had brought them from Northamptonshire." From a search of ancestry web sites the girl's maiden name was probably Dorothy Garland, an odd coincidence! The words and music are identical to those sung to me by my late mother when I was very young. My mother, whose maiden name was Lilian Ashby, was born in 1902 in Northampton. Although the

Ashby family hailed from Towcester, my mother told me that she was taught the words and music at school and that they used to sing it on May Day. This must have been between about 1910 and 1912.

Vaughan Williams said that he was keen that traditional songs did not die out and in several publications looked to schools to preserve them. It seems that Kingsthorpe Grove School in Northampton had beaten him to it.

It was still being sung in the town in the 1920s as part of the 'May-Garlanding' ceremony.

Incidentally in my mother's class at the school was the composer Edmund Rubbra. By another coincidence my father, a keen amateur violinist, when a lad had the same violin teacher as Rubbra, Mr. Tysoe.

Mike Gainsford

Burbage, Leicestershire, U.K

A SATISFIED CUSTOMER

I was surprised and honoured to find my musings in such honoured company in the latest edition of the *Journal*. I read it from cover to cover and bought three more CDs. as a result. There would have been more but storage is becoming a major problem.

I especially enjoyed the article on *The Running Set*: quite fascinating. I wonder if a copy should not be sent to the Folk Music Department at Newcastle University (RVW would have made a superb visiting fellow there) to see if they cannot organise a performance, musicians and dancers, to rival Twelfth Night 1934 at the Royal Albert Hall. I cannot help thinking of the reel superbly described by George Macdonald Fraser in *The General Danced at Dawn!*

I would also agree wholeheartedly with Revd. R. J. Tayler on the "creating of heart-easing beauty" in music. It is something that has disappeared from contemporary composition. The news this morning reported on someone who had developed a "successful" computer programme that had "written fifty Bach cantatas" or some-such. I fear that the insane have taken charge of the asylum. I will not be listening to any computer-generated mathematically-formulated music: life is too short to waste on such rubbish. I will listen to some of the works of RVW that so perfectly capture the spirit of this lovely summer day in England, not a million miles from Leith Hill, probably starting with the *Tallis Fantasia* followed by the *Norfolk Rhapsody* and the *English Folk Song Suite*, and then as the mood takes me!

Michael Parker,

Cove, Hampshire, U.K.

ANOTHER?

Ian Watson's letter in the June edition reminds me of a concert I attended some years ago in London. The *Fourth Symphony* was programmed to follow Bartók's *The Miraculous Mandarin*. After a truly terrifying performance of the Bartók, my neighbour turned to me and said "I never thought I would turn to Vaughan Williams' *Fourth Symphony* for light relief." I have to say that, on that particular occasion, I echoed the sentiment.

Paul Wakefield

Oxford, U.K.

Concert Reviews

***A SEA SYMPHONY* in MELBOURNE**

Performances of Vaughan Williams' symphonies are all too rare in Melbourne. A complete cycle promised a few years ago came to nothing, though we did hear the first two. Since then, nothing, even in 2008, the fiftieth anniversary of the composer's death! So there was a real sense of excitement to learn that the Monash University Choral Society and Orchestra planned a single performance of *A Sea Symphony*, a monumental undertaking for a student body.

The concert took place on 22 May in St Andrew's Anglican Church in the seaside suburb of Brighton, a vast, cavernous building which I thought might rob the performance of immediacy. Not so. Although both the choral and orchestral forces were smaller than the composer envisaged, they produced an impressive body of sound. The organ was used effectively to underpin the climaxes without ever becoming intrusive. Vaughan Williams would surely have approved: his scores contain many alternatives for those occasions when his original intentions cannot be fully met. If the performance lacked the final polish of familiar recordings, it was every bit as committed – and that is essential if this huge, sprawling work is to sound convincing. The audience was visibly caught up in the drama of the music and responded enthusiastically.

The conductor, Pat Miller, is yet another successful product of this country's Symphony Australia Conductor Development Program. He completed a Master of Music at the University of Melbourne, studying under John Hopkins and has since been active, conducting choirs and orchestras at both the amateur and professional level. It was during his time with Hopkins that he discovered the Vaughan Williams symphonies, and hopefully he will in time conduct all of them. The *Antartica* has already been done and the *London* is next on his list.

Soprano Jacqueline Porter and baritone Michael Leighton-Jones were the soloists. She has emerged as one of Australia's finest young sopranos. Leighton-Jones, as well as being a fine singer, is Director of Music at Trinity College in the University of

Melbourne. Under his guidance, the College choir has established an international reputation, and the music of Vaughan Williams forms an important part of the repertoire.

This was, on all accounts, a memorable occasion.

Hector Walker

***THE POISONED KISS* – WITH A STUDENT PRINCE**

If you're reading this *Journal* on the bus to Dewsbury, you might like to leave this review for now. Wait until you get home and, equipped with a box of tissues and a nice cup of tea, listen to Richard Hickox's recording of *The Poisoned Kiss*. Skip the introduction and start with disc 2, track 4. Wallow for a few minutes and ask yourself whether music was ever more romantic, more beguilingly beautiful, than this.

On Sunday 13 June 2010 it was my privilege to catch the third and final performance of the University of Birmingham's production of *The Poisoned Kiss* – yes, the one with the iffy libretto, and that nobody ever performs. And what a fantastic evening it was! I was accompanied by my wife, as well as my sister and her spouse, who were surprised to learn that

their duties did not end with the provision of cheap accommodation and that they were actually coming to the opera with us.

A student production does not suffer from the same financial constraints as a professional job. So, compared to New Sussex Opera's excellent production (with some financial support from the RVW Society) two years ago, there were more singers, including a chorus, more orchestral players (in a proper pit), more thunder and lightning (just like your CD), and better lighting (because the show did not have to tour). If there were economies they were mainly applied to the costumes and the set, which were varied and cheerful even if the set owed much of its existence to an expired tumble dryer and a good deal of silver spray paint. The role of the chorus (of Day and Night Voices, Hobgoblins, Witches and Forest Creatures, Milliners and Messenger Boys, Flower Girls and Lovers) was adapted (and, I suspect, somewhat reduced) for a modest stage. They were to be thought of as "bodiless observers" of events rather than active participants, though I don't think the word "bodiless" would have occurred to me had I not read it in the programme.

I think the director, Chris Parnell, a medical student who also sang in the chorus, had studied the opera thoroughly and understood it from top to bottom. A crew

(l to r) Chiara Lisowski, Naomi Pelkiewicz & Isobel Pyrke In *The Poisoned Kiss*



member suggested to me that they had modernised it – but I disagreed; a few modern touches, such as the television screen which was used to conjure up an absent face, fitted in well with the theme of sorcery and spells, and nothing seemed out of place. The opera was about as faithful to the plot as you can expect any opera to be these days – and it benefited immensely from that.

The standard of singing was really very good. Alex Aldren was first on as Gallanthus, and the women all fell in love with him immediately; he also had a lovely, rather gentle, baritone voice which suited the part. Mitesh Katri sang Prince Amaryllus, and I loved his clear tenor – despite one point (immediately before the fateful kiss) when he simply forced the voice too hard. Perhaps you expect a student voice, not yet fully developed, to do that, but he still fully deserved his applause at the end.

Sophie Levi was a wonderful Angelica, and Kathryn Walker superb in every way as Tormentilla. Joseph Kennedy was crisp and authoritative as the evil Dipsacus. Write the names down somewhere – you are going to be hearing from some of these people again! I am inclined to agree with the *Birmingham Post*'s verdict that Joseph Kennedy and Kathryn Walker were the stars of the show, with strong competition from Sophie Levi. The *Post* wondered "what Vaughan Williams was on" when he wrote the opera.

On the CD, the Empress was sung by the late Anne Collins, who was 60 at the time. Her contralto was described as "fruity" by one reviewer, but I find it rather harsh: I prefer my fruit a bit softer. Charlotte Kitson took this important part with tremendous stage presence, and her voice made a better blend with the ensemble. As a result, I think Act 3 was simply more musical than the recording.

The Poisoned Kiss is not an opera that can rely just on the music – it is complemented by action and dialogue. The acting was lively: bold buffoonery from Hob, Gob and Lob, sinuous sensuousness from the three mediums, and flirtatious frolicking with just about everybody. The dialogue seemed to be included in full, and the audience responded well to the jokes. The notion of the Prince having been brought up on antidote brought the house down, and even that rather arch reference to "the pictures" got its laugh. It's all about

direction and delivery – which were first class.

There was no make-up team; it was designed by the cast and applied by cast and crew, with excellent results. The three mediums had wonderful eye make-up – an eye painted on each closed eyelid enabled them to look at the audience in a most disconcerting way. I wasn't sure whether Tormentilla's (originally white) costume was as grubby as it was for some artistic reason or whether this was to do with the black make-up liberally applied to the faces of Hob, Gob and Lob. It must have got everywhere. The chorus members were brightened up by innovative make-up which contrasted with generally plain costumes.

The orchestra, conducted at a cracking pace by Hamish Newport, was excellent. Inevitably, there was the occasional scratch from the fiddles, but it didn't matter. It was a rich full sound, well up to what you might hear in any opera house.

But there is one final ingredient required to make the spell complete: for me, opera is about passion, and this production had passion in plenty. Vaughan Williams is acclaimed as a symphonist, but this is a very different voice. His mastery of the operatic craft was breathtaking.

For me, this was an emotional evening. It seemed to be the near-perfect realisation for which I had been waiting for years. I felt completely choked when I grasped the conductor's hand and told him that he had done the Old Man proud! Luckily, the opera had recently concluded – otherwise this might have delayed proceedings considerably.

The Project Manager, Georgia Towers, has written to me of her determination to revive the piece if she ends up in the professional opera world. Student productions like this are important in influencing what might be produced by and for the next generation, so I am pleased to report that Durham University is putting it on in November, and there are rumours of a forthcoming production in New York.

Is it such a "might have been" opera as people seem to think it is? Despite the oft-recounted problems with the libretto, it's pretty clear that Vaughan Williams had a tremendous amount of fun writing it. I just wish I knew a little more about the many styles pastiched and parodied within it.

The libretto cannot have been that bad, even in the original form. How disappointed he must have been that there were so few performances! He knew that he had written a masterpiece, and reworked the libretto in his eighties. The final version still owes a good deal to Evelyn Sharp, even if we have Ursula to thank for the rhyming couplets in the spoken dialogue (and remember that the only recording omits much of the dialogue). This production did well by all three of them – and by the opera itself. Vaughan Williams would have loved it!

The audience loved it too. They applauded just about every number and went wild at the end. Even the reluctant sister and brother in law were bowled over, and my wife thought it was the best evening's entertainment she's had in years. (She doesn't get out much.)

A lot of people who love the music of Vaughan Williams put the operas well down their list of favourites, and *The Poisoned Kiss* perhaps below most or all of the other operas. My evening out in Birmingham's Barber Institute confirmed my view that this opera is worthy to take a small place in the mainstream opera repertoire. It has been passed over by people of no lasting consequence for too long. Its time will come.

John Francis

VERDI and RVW in ELY

The last concert of the Cambridge Philharmonic Society's season, on 10 July, began and ended with a whisper – unless, that is, you count the barrage of applause from the large and attentive audience in Ely Cathedral. It had been somewhat speciously advertised as 'Sacred Verdi', which was a bit unfair on Vaughan Williams, two of whose most powerful works were also included in the excellent programme, which provided substantial, thought-provoking and at times even provocative listening. Just the kind of thing, in fact, that brings out the best in the Phil's excellent orchestra and musically intelligent chorus. Both conductor, Tim Redmond, and chorus-master, Leo Tomita, deserve the warmest congratulations on the technical results – and, more importantly, on the way in which the music came over, not just the notes.

The evening opened with the stirring overture to Verdi's *Sicilian Vespers*, a

Grand and Gruesome Operatic Spectacular whose only claims to sacredness lie in one word of the title. Never mind, the orchestra gave us a rip-roaring performance, with a fantastic dynamic range and the cellos in particular revelling in their eloquent Big Tune. As for the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, I would proudly claim that the firm, full sound and phrasing of the Phil's strings in this powerful, sensitive, superbly-paced and precisely-coloured performance was probably the most convincing that I have ever heard, even from a professional orchestra under a virtuoso conductor.

"Match that" was the awesome challenge thrown down by the orchestra to the chorus. They did. The "sacred Verdi" comprised the *Stabat Mater* and the *Te Deum* from the four pieces he composed in his eighties to round off his distinguished career. The spine-chilling opening of the *Stabat Mater*, graphically conveying the concentrated anguish, tenderness and sorrow of the Holy Mother at the foot of the cross, and the jubilation of the *Te Deum* (what a thrill it was when the combined forces blazed up in a mighty shout of "Sanctus" after the measured intensity of the hushed choral opening!) were enthusiastically conveyed throughout.

As for *Dona Nobis Pacem*, I can only say that no previous performance I have heard of it – and I have heard quite a number – carried such intensity and conveyed such a range of moods, all shaped by Mr. Redmond and his forces into a massive, convincing whole. The soloists were the ever dependable Joan Rodgers, conveying with equal intensity both the dramatic urgency and apprehension and the serene calm that Vaughan Williams demands of his soprano, and the baritone, Roderick Williams, whose tone, diction and declamation gave weight and authority to his part. Perhaps the best tribute I can pay to Tim and his collaborators is that they persuaded at least one member of the audience that *Dona Nobis Pacem* is not just a masterly work, but a truly great, well-shaped and deeply moving one, prophetically foreshadowing all kinds of later developments in the composer's idiom, as well as providing plenty of evidence of more familiar aspects of it.

James Day

TALLIS IN GLOUCESTER

In the evening sunlight Gloucester cathedral looked golden against a blue sky. It was an uplifting sight after a day of rain. The date was Tuesday 10 August, and this evening's concert, part of the Three Choirs Festival, was to be one of celebration – the hundredth anniversary of both the *Tallis Fantasia* and Elgar's *Violin Concerto*.

Before the concert, the RVW Society were having "a bit of a do". The Society had hired the Festival marquee for a drinks reception and a brief talk by Michael Kennedy to commemorate the event. The reception was well attended – apparently a hundred and thirty chairs had been set out in the marquee, and I didn't see any empty ones. Laughter rippled around the tent as Mr. Kennedy related anecdotes from the time that he knew Vaughan Williams. Of course the music also got special attention. Mr. Kennedy mentioned how the 1910 version of *Tallis* was longer by several minutes than today's version, and how it had been intended to re-create it in full, but this was impossible due to the poor condition of the original manuscript. All in all, the reception was very enjoyable and it was good to catch up with some familiar faces.

The concert was to be given by the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Sir Roger Norrington. An account of the concert follows shortly, but for the moment, suffice to say that *Tallis* did not sound as I expected. Sir Roger has a passion for re-creating original sounds as the composer would have heard them. For example, he has made prize-winning recordings of Beethoven's symphonies using period instruments. An article by Sir Roger in the Three Choirs Festival programme explains his approach to this evening's concert – it is his quest for "pure tone". To sum up briefly, the article describes how vibrato was not widely used by orchestras at the beginning of the twentieth century, but came more into fashion towards the 1930s. The implication for our concert was that the "1910 sound" was to be different from the one that we are used to.

And so to the concert. The cathedral interior was bathed in golden sunlight, and as Sir Roger strode beaming on to the stage, he looked down the nave to see the audience warmly applauding and the west window's stained glass lit up by the setting sun like a thousand jewels.

The first item on the programme was Holst's *St. Paul's Suite*, written in 1913 for the students of the school where Holst was musical director. It is a lively piece which makes good use of folk tunes. The orchestra captured the spirit of the suite well and it was a good opening for the concert. *Tallis* was next, and the anticipation mounted.

The second orchestra moved away to a position completely hidden from the main audience in the north aisle and then everything was ready. Sir Roger, conducting expressively with his hands, without a baton, brought the piece into life. The opening chords sounded good enough but somehow did not have the warmth that I had expected. The music progressed, sounding good but not great. When the faint sound of the second orchestra rose from their hiding place, Sir Roger beamed. His style was relaxed, and he brought a great personal warmth to the performance. However, the first real disappointment of the evening for me was coming up. The viola and violin solos, so exquisite if lingered over, were quickly rushed through. There was also a rapid, almost frenzied, build up to the climax, which I thought did not work well in the echoing acoustic of the cathedral. At the end, Sir Roger held the last note brilliantly and it seemed suspended in the air as it slowly died away, leaving the intense stillness and silence which follows every performance of *Tallis*.

There was generous applause. For me, the performance had been a wonderful celebration of *Tallis* but had not truly revealed the depth and mystery of this magical work. It was interesting how Michael Kennedy in his talk had said that *Tallis* and *The Lark Ascending* were not initially very popular but became more so towards the 1940s. Coincidentally this is also the period when using vibrato became the norm for orchestras. Is there a connection? Vaughan Williams' career spanned the introduction of vibrato, so what did he think of it? Did he ever encourage or discourage its use, particularly with regard to *Tallis*?

After the interval we were treated to Elgar's *Violin Concerto* and a performance by violin soloist Philippe Graffin which was sensational to hear and see. We can only guess at the emotions that Elgar must have been going through when he wrote the work, but Mr. Graffin expressed passion, anguish and tenderness in a very physical performance.

It was a fine concert although I don't think I appreciated Sir Roger's pure tone with *Tallis*, which perhaps is my loss. It is only fair to quote Sir Roger's opinion on the matter, from his programme article: "The awesome opening of the *Tallis Fantasia* ... is thrilling with this sound: innocent, noble, honest, and amazingly warm. In the Elgar the solo violin stands out with its more accentuated tone over the more innocent orchestra."

The last word musically in this review goes to William Byrd and his *Prevent Us, O Lord*. The evening before the concert I had gone to evensong in the cathedral, sung by Worcester Cathedral Choir. The voices that sang Byrd's anthem danced around the space, the sacred music evoking a past age in a way that *Tallis* the following evening failed to do. Pure tone in an orchestra is, I think, an acquired taste – perhaps one day I will acquire it!

Robert Shave

MORE...

The *Tallis Fantasia* has always held a special place in my heart; along with the *Fantasia on Greensleeves* it was the first Vaughan Williams music that I became aware of.

At the age of 14 in 1958, I had become the proud owner of a reel-to-reel tape recorder. I had no interest at that time in classical music; I recall that I bought the tape because I liked the tune of *Greensleeves*. This of course was the year of Vaughan Williams' death, of which I was aware due to coverage in the press and television. More than that about him I did not know.

When I first played the tape I was captivated not by *Fantasia on Greensleeves* but by the *Tallis Fantasia*. It had the most profound effect on me. Here was a lad heavily into rock & roll suddenly confronted by music that seemed to bypass the mind and touch the very heart. I played it over and over again, and every time that I played it, I seemed to hear something new. The years have not diminished those feelings; I still feel a sense of anticipation whenever I am about to listen to it. It is not just hearing something new each time, but also a very strange, deep yearning inside of me for something lost. The feeling is difficult to describe, perhaps a longing for a time that has passed and will never be again. With the passage of time I started to discover

other works. In particular, I fell in love with *Five Variants of "Dives and Lazarus"*, whereas *Flos Campi* is a piece that fascinates me but which I have never really come to terms with. With the advent of Classic FM I heard *The Lark Ascending* for the first and certainly not the last time!

Having lost my wife after twenty-five years of marriage, I remarried, this time to a lady who was a musician. She introduced me to a broader spectrum of music, and also to my delight she had a love of the music of Vaughan Williams. Together we have discovered a whole new world of Vaughan Williams' music that has brought us much pleasure and delight. Joining the Society has also broadened my horizons. I get to thinking that I have a recording of everything, only to discover more. There is pleasure and delight in finding new recordings, and I am blessed to have an excellent shop in Norwich, Prelude Records, whose staff are very knowledgeable and go to great lengths to find the more obscure recordings.

My wife, as a music student in Gloucester, studying under George Budge, often had free tickets to concerts. On one occasion she had a ticket to Gloucester Cathedral to hear a performance of the *Tallis Fantasia* and Holst's *Hymn of Jesus*. She relates to me that the sound seemed to float in the air, layer upon layer of sound. She had never heard anything like it and was totally bowled over by the experience. I was jealous of this: although I had heard many performances of the *Tallis Fantasia*, I had never heard it played in Gloucester Cathedral! I knew the acoustics were special and that Vaughan Williams had used these to enhance the music. My vow was that before I went to Glory I would hear the *Tallis Fantasia* there! Imagine my delight to discover that the work was to be performed at the 2010 Three Choirs Festival. My wife and I immediately made plans to go. Getting the tickets proved a headache as the Festival was having problems with their on-line booking, but the matter was resolved by a lady in the ticket office who was greatly amused that someone by the name of Elgar should want to hear the *Tallis Fantasia* in Gloucester Cathedral before he died!

I cannot say that the day dawned bright on Tuesday 10 August 2010; in fact for the whole morning, it tipped down with rain. We had tickets for the afternoon concert, "Venetian Splendour", but ninety minutes of Monteverdi and Gabrieli without a

break is too much for anyone! I was becoming more and more anxious as the time passed, but suffice to say that we arrived at the Society's reception only a little delayed. Was it worth it? Well, my wife and I are very sociable people, but to engage anyone else in a conversation proved impossible. We were politely ignored! Then to be told from the front that the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society was a friendly society did not exactly ring true! My wife and I considered fleeing but were glad we stayed, because it was worth hearing Michael Kennedy relating some personal anecdotes of Vaughan Williams.

To the concert itself, the order had been changed and the first piece performed was the *St. Paul's Suite*. It is not a piece that I have ever heard live, but the performance brought a depth and vitality that I had not heard from recordings. I thought that this augured well for the *Tallis Fantasia*, but how wrong I could be! Quite what Sir Roger Norrington was about totally avoided me! I was so disappointed; I have never in all my life heard such a flat and disappointing performance. I sat there in anticipation that this must get better but it never did. I expected this soaring sound in the acoustics of Gloucester Cathedral, but I waited in vain! It was as though Sir Roger had never heard this music before! I quote *The Times* of the first performance: "The work is wonderful because it seems to lift one into some unknown region of musical thought and feeling ... one is never sure whether one is listening to something very old or very new. The voices of the old church musicians are around one, yet their music is enriched with what modern art has done, since Debussy, too, is somewhere in the picture. It cannot be assigned to a time or a school, but it is full of visions." If only!! An American gentleman in the row in front of me became quite animated at the end of the performance. He declared that in all his life he had never heard an interpretation quite like it, and seemed very incensed! As for myself, I was left feeling very deflated, so much anticipation, so much disappointment!

It was interesting to read John Quinn's review at musicweb-international.com. "The solo quartet played as well as the prohibition of vibrato would allow but it was in their solo lines that I particularly missed the warming effect of vibrato." Amen. (The American gentleman was particularly vexed over this.) To continue: "The basic pulse was just too brisk and the

music never really allowed to breathe or expand naturally. His treatment of the main climax was quite horrid." I could continue but suffice to say that I was a very upset and disappointed man.

Where does this leave me? Will there be another performance of the *Tallis Fantasia* at Gloucester in my lifetime? I do not know, and I am glad that I was able to attend this performance, even if it did disappoint. Was I disappointed with the Society? I can get over it! I remain, however, glad of the music of Vaughan Williams and the pleasure it has brought into my life. As I write this I am listening to a recording of *Benedicite*, sung by Heather Harper and the Bach Choir, and I am transported to another realm!

Clive Elgar

DARK PASTORAL at the PROMS

Vaughan Williams was writing a cello concerto during the 1940s and 50s for Pablo Casals, but the work was still unfinished at his death and the composer's widow, Ursula, forbade any performance.

With assistance from the Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust and the British Library, the composer David Matthews has now completed the second, slow, movement, adding a little over six minutes to the four which had been drawn up by Vaughan Williams in short score and for which he had included indications for instrumentation. Matthews has named the movement *Dark Pastoral*. The work received its first performance at the Royal Albert Hall in London on 5 September as part of this year's BBC Proms. Stephen Isserlis was the soloist, and the BBC Concert Orchestra was conducted by Paul Daniel.

Following Vaughan Williams' own material, Matthews transforms it, with a contrasting middle section providing an ambitious development for the soloist to shine. Folk-like themes in the woodwind provide lighter contrast and echoes of the *Pastoral Symphony* before we are returned to the mood of the opening for the final transcending bars, into the realm of the unknown region. It will be for the listener to decide whether the middle section works within the context of the piece.

There is no doubt that the opening theme, which the cello delivers almost

immediately, has a melancholy beauty. Steven Isserlis describes it as "magical, yearning, atmospheric, moving, haunting and very beautiful," all of which it is.

As the work continues, one is made steadily aware of a solemn walking bass line, perhaps more obvious in the live performance than on radio broadcast, giving an ominous feel and reminiscent of the final bars of the *Sixth Symphony*, or even Alwyn's music for the film *Odd Man Out*.

The later atmosphere reprises the darker passages of *Job* and Vaughan Williams' consuming argument between related minor chords. The cor anglais, full of fear and foreboding, ushers the return of the unrelenting lower strings and the orchestra falls away to leave the soloist to rise high above Tallis-like strings, another Vaughan Williams characteristic, of course.

On the experience of completing the work, David Matthews has said, "It was like wearing Vaughan Williams' overcoat; not a good fit but I could move about and walk out in it." According to Matthews, it would have been more difficult to complete the outer two movements, but how interesting it would be to hear the thoughts of the British Library and the Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust on this possibility, if the integrity of the work could be kept intact.

There is no doubt that the Proms performance was played with compassion and conviction by the BBC Concert Orchestra and soloist, Steven Isserlis, to whose late wife the piece is dedicated.

Karen Fletcher

RVW FROM SCRATCH

Vaughan Williams' *Concerto Grosso* was written in 1950 for the Rural Music Schools Association, and caters for string players ranging from skilled to virtual beginners. Its first performance was at the Royal Albert Hall on 18 November 1950, by about four hundred instrumentalists, conducted by Sir Adrian Boult. According to Ursula Vaughan Williams' biography, the composer sat with the second violins.

Because of its very nature I do not expect that it is very often performed – it cannot be an easy task to gather together so many instrumentalists. So I was overjoyed to learn that a performance was to be held

at Birmingham's Symphony Hall on 11 September this year, as part of the "Strings in the City" project. Furthermore it was to be free. (How often can one get into Symphony Hall for nowt?)

For this performance the skilled players were eighteen members of the Orchestra of the Swan, which is based at Stratford upon Avon but plays frequently at the refurbished Birmingham Town Hall, and surrounding venues. The orchestra has recorded for Somm, and has an excellent reputation. The remaining performers were thirty-three local string players of varying degrees of competence, and seemingly ranging in age from about ten to about sixty. Most were violinists, but there were four cellists.

The concert began with three movements from Holst's *St. Paul's Suite*, performed splendidly by the strings of the Swan.

Then we had the *Concerto Grosso*. What an experience to hear it live! And how well they all played, though credit must be given to the composer for his scoring, which gives all the players interesting things to do within their specific capabilities. And credit, too, to the conductor David Curtis, who admitted that the sole rehearsal began at 10.30 that very morning. The actual performance started at 12.20! One would never have guessed that this was a largely scratch group.

It must have been a real experience for most of them to play at Symphony Hall. Although their numbers were well below those at the first performance, at least on this occasion they were well outnumbered by the enthusiastic audience. I reckon there were about four hundred people there.

The piece itself shows Vaughan Williams in his most benevolent mood and is in five movements, all of them tuneful. The third movement, "Sarabande", is particularly beautiful, and the orchestra did it – and the rest of the work – due justice. I preferred their rendition of the scherzo to the 1972 version by Boult and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. To my ears there are pre-echoes of the *Eighth Symphony* in the "Sarabande", and elsewhere in the work even echoes of the *Fifth*. What a pity it is not performed more often.

All in all it was well worth the sixty mile round trip for less than an hour's music.

Michael Gainsford

CD Reviews



Vaughan Williams: *Symphony No. 6 in E minor* (transcribed Michael Mullinar/edited Alan Rowlands; *The Wasps – Overture* (transcribed Constant Lambert)

with John Ireland: *The Forgotten Rite; Mai-Dun* (both transcribed Ireland)

Alan Rowlands, Adrian Sims (pianos)

ALBION RECORDS ALBCD011

This disc has an importance far greater than might at first appear. Almost twenty years ago, I attended an event that on paper seemed to be little more than absurd: it was described as a “Mahlerthon”, given at London’s South Bank, in which the pianists Andrew Ball and Julian Jacobson played Mahler’s nine symphonies in sequence on two pianos in one day, with a short pause between each symphony and the next. My concentration faltered after No. 6, although we had seen no less a figure than Philip Glass conduct Ball and Jacobson in the opening bars of No. 5.

Despite the highly unusual nature of the event, the experience of hearing those Mahler symphonies without the composer’s brilliant (and familiar) orchestration was enlightening, not least in demonstrating Mahler’s structural and contrapuntal mastery. So much so that I realized that self-respecting conductors would learn a great deal if they began their study of a particular symphony by similarly playing it through at the piano with a colleague.

On that occasion, it was a very worthwhile experience to hear Bruno Walter’s two-piano version of the First and Second Symphonies and Alexander von Zemlinsky’s of the Sixth, although I had to forgo Alfredo Casella’s version of No. 7, which, in the light of recent CDs of his music, would have been more than particularly interesting.

The musical significance of those transcriptions is reflected in those on this disc, dominated as it is by the greatest work in the programme: Vaughan Williams’ Sixth Symphony. From acquiring Boult’s original 78 set in 1952 I have always found this a difficult work with which to come to terms, but – as with those by Mahler and Sibelius – the most important characteristic of Vaughan Williams’ symphonies is that they are all very different, one from the other, but each is equally typical of the composer: they could be by no one else.

Vaughan Williams’ Sixth is probably the most difficult of the nine to interpret – it does not “play itself”, as it were, and the structural

problems it poses to the interpreter are considerable. The first movement can so often appear, at heart, inorganic but Michael Mullinar’s version for two pianos (edited by Alan Rowlands), splendidly played on this disc by Rowlands and Adrian Sims, because of its very nature, concentrates the mind on the single unifying characteristic of the entire work: the juxtaposition of tonalities and regions a semitone apart, beginning as the flat supertonic of E minor. The result, in this wholly keyboard version, is to make the building blocks of the symphony – as well as the composer’s contrapuntal skills in the third movement (the revised version is, correctly, the basis here) – more readily intelligible, so that when one hears the work in its normal orchestral guise, its indestructible organisms are enhanced, the final chords being shown as but the inevitable outcome of that initial inspired juxtaposition.

In this regard, the playing here by both artists is beyond praise: their tempos and grasp of the work are exemplary. The disc ends with Constant Lambert’s utterly brilliant version for piano duet of *The Wasps* Overture – a superb piece of transcription in itself and brilliantly played. While one might have expected Vaughan Williams’ other music to have been included on this disc, it is interesting to have Ireland’s own versions for piano duet of two of his shorter orchestral pieces, although the music in either instance does not really stand alone in these transcriptions, which seem to cry out for orchestral colouring. Such a coupling demonstrates beyond doubt that Vaughan Williams was by far the greater composer, although Rowlands (a long-time noted exponent of Ireland’s fine solo piano music) and Sims perform both pieces with admirable sympathy and concentration. However, it is the symphony for which this important recording should be bought – it is a noteworthy achievement.

Robert Matthew-Walker

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Book Reviews

Let Beauty Awake: Elgar, Vaughan Williams, and Literature
 Edited by Julian Rushton.

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Based on the proceedings of an International Symposium jointly organised by the Elgar and Ralph Vaughan Williams Societies and held at the British Library, London, on 22 and 23 November 2008.

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Richard Hickox

This symposium was the fourth collaboration between the Elgar Society and the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society. The title, “Let Beauty Awake, Elgar, Vaughan Williams, and Literature” speaks for itself in reflecting the literary influences on two great composers who contributed such a wealth of choral and vocal music to our English musical heritage.

This publication is a great tribute to the Elgar and Vaughan Williams Societies. Such symposiums are always exhilarating and rarefied occasions, but having been to many of these on various topics I know that we don’t immediately inwardly digest the full wisdom of what we hear. As the programme plunges from one speaker and topic to the next the mind is always racing ahead, while the memory quickly fades. That the talks have been edited and issued here gives one the opportunity to take on board and to appreciate each of these scholarly papers in a more leisurely manner.

The first essay, by Michael Pope, puts English choral music appropriately into perspective in the late nineteenth century by dwelling on Parry, who was clearly an inspiration to all English composers at this time. Parry touched the heights of greatness in some of his choral works and both composers acknowledged the supreme achievement that was *Blest Pair of Sirens*. Parry, who is often unfairly underestimated as a composer, was one of the great educators of his age and one of Vaughan Williams’ composition teachers; Parry advised him to write choral music “as befits and Englishman and a democrat”. Pope makes the valid point that whereas Parry would have inspired both Elgar and Vaughan Williams, he would himself have been influenced by Elgar in the early twentieth century. Pupils learn from their teachers, but teachers also learn from their pupils!

Poetry and prose have always been a most potent influence on composers right from earliest times with opera and oratorio, while in the nineteenth century the influence of the romantic German poets inspired great music of unsurpassed beauty. These influences were gradually picked up by the English composers later in the century and were very much led by Parry. Roger Savage reminds us in his essay that Parry urged his students to study poetry in equal measure with their musical studies.

For both Elgar and Vaughan Williams choral and vocal music was an important part of their output. The two composers diverge slightly in seeking out texts. Vaughan Williams was a very widely read man, which is reflected in his choice of texts. Elgar was perhaps not so familiar with such a wide range of literature, and as Stephen Johnson observes, some of his texts are not of the highest quality. Nevertheless he was able to elevate the text with great music, as described by Andrew Neill in his essay “There is music in the midst of desolation”. In reflecting on their “war music” he rightly regards Elgar and Vaughan Williams as opposites.

Hugh Cobbe traces Vaughan Williams’ response to literature from a more personal stance through the letters. With the proposed *New English Bible* on the horizon, Vaughan Williams, although an agnostic, wrote a strong letter to Gilbert Murray expressing his fear that language would be degraded.

Three papers deal with specific poets. Alain Frogley makes the case for the influence of Whitman on Vaughan Williams, and reminds us that the composer always carried a Whitman anthology throughout his WW1 service. Byron Adams draws largely upon Vaughan Williams’ love and regard for Shakespeare and the Tudor period, while Philip Lancaster explores the Housman connection through *On Wenlock Edge* and *Along the Field*.

The fascinating paper by David Owen Norris moves away from vocal texts and deals with the influence of Shakespeare’s Falstaff. Here is a case of Elgar being inspired to produce one of his finest orchestral scores from a literary source. The paper goes on to expand upon the piano transcription of *Falstaff* by Sigfrid Karg-Elert. The Symposium was succinctly wound up in an impartial epilogue by Michael Kennedy who has, after all, written authoritative volumes on each composer.

Richard Hickox was of course a great advocate of English music both on the concert platform and in the recording studio. On the Saturday evening, after a day of rehearsals at the English National Opera for *Riders to the Sea*, he agreed to join the Symposium for an interview with Stephen Connock. We were so lucky to have been able to witness this occasion for he died the following day. The book is dedicated to his memory, and the CD of the interview, which accompanies the volume, is the icing on the cake.

Robin Wells

The Symposium panel at the British Library



From the Chairman

The summer has been rather quiet on the Vaughan Williams front. There were a few snippets at the BBC Promenade Concerts, including David Matthews' *Dark Pastoral*, based on a fragment of Vaughan Williams' never completed cello concerto, and although *Dark Pastoral* itself cannot be said to be substantial Vaughan Williams fare, it nonetheless could lead to a tantalizing "what if"? There were a few other concerts, and then much waiting with bated breath to hear back from the National Trust about Leith Hill. Still no news, I regret to report. More, hopefully, in the next Journal!



Michael and Joyce Kennedy at the Three Choirs Festival

The Society's main event of the summer was our reception at the Gloucester Three Choirs Festival, where we were delighted to be joined by Michael and Joyce Kennedy, and a goodly crowd enjoyed drinks on the lawn before gathering in the marquee to hear Michael's ever-fascinating reminiscences of the great composer. The ensuing concert divided Society opinion more sharply than any concert I have attended before, with some members commenting that the centenary performance of the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, as performed that evening by the Philharmonia and Sir Roger Norrington, opened their ears and made them appreciate the work in a different way; whilst others, scandalised, bandied around words as strong as "sacrilege". It was certainly a controversial concert, from which no-one emerged without a vehement point of view!

On a personal note, firstly, I would like to thank all those of you who attended the English Music Festival this year. It was wonderful, and meant a great deal to me to see so many of you at the concerts, and I do hope that you will be able to continue supporting us in future years as the Festival grows and flourishes. Secondly, I must apologise to those members who tried to contact me on Society matters during June and July, when I had "gone to ground", and to thank you for your patience while I finished off my book before getting back to you many weeks later!

This autumn holds some exciting events in store, not least the Albion recordings of Vaughan Williams' *The Garden of Proserpine* with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Joyful Company of Singers conducted by Paul Daniel. This is the most ambitious Albion recording to date, and one whose release I'm sure you are anticipating with as much excitement as I am. Further Albion releases are currently being considered and discussed, all of which would continue to contribute significantly to the recorded legacy of Vaughan Williams, as we aim to bring you a range of recordings and works unavailable elsewhere. The A.G.M. also promises to be a marvellous event, and our celebrated artists – James Gilchrist, Stephen Varcoe and Penelope Thwaites – have devised a programme that I'm sure will enthral any lover of Vaughan Williams' glorious songs. I very much look forward to seeing you there.

Em Marshall

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