

# RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS SOCIETY JOURNAL

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

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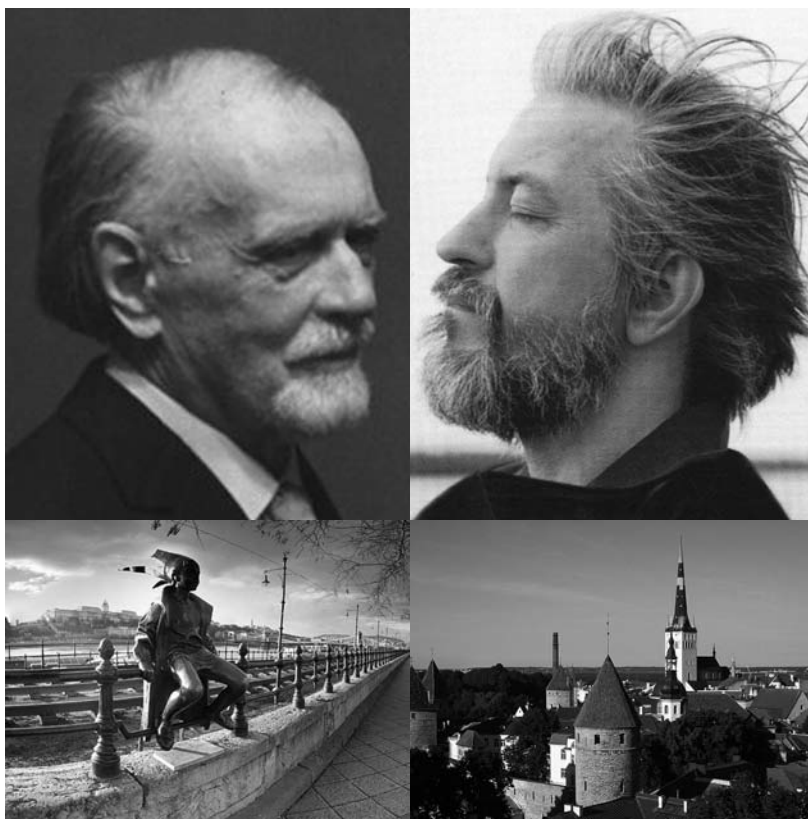
# From the Editor

I wonder how many members of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society are able to remember the day that a particular piece of music struck home, like lightning, opening the way to a whole new musical adventure. I seem to recall quite a few.

I must have been twelve or thirteen, listening to what I rather fear was still called the Third Programme. I remember quite clearly lying on the living room floor with a book, so I don't think I was listening very attentively, when suddenly came the first notes, or rather the first note – the snap of a whip! – of Ravel's Piano Concerto in G major. Then there was school. When would I have discovered the music of Zoltán Kodály had not our school music teacher made us listen to Hány János? As a student I was lucky enough to be taught by Stephen Dodgson. One of his great enthusiasms was for a composer of whose music I had heard not a single note, Leoš Janáček. He recommended the *Sinfonietta* as a good place to start, and I took his advice. And then there was that Festival Hall concert. I was there mainly for the second half – I can't remember what it was now – but I met a friend in the foyer who told me that he'd come for the violin concerto in the first half, by Sibelius. I'd heard the work, apparently without its making much impression, but my friend's passion for it made me listen with more attention. If the opening of the Ravel, and the descending scale that ends the first movement, led me into the endlessly fascinating world of modern music, these other introductions were to guarantee that I would stay there.

There have been other discoveries over the years – the Estonian composer Lepo Sumera: this one threatens to become an obsession – but none quite so far-reaching as that of the music of Vaughan Williams. "Old Tallywag" – see page 7 – was probably my introduction, or perhaps "Greensleeves". In any event it was certainly Barbirolli's LP of English string music, though I preferred the Elgar side at first. But from the first time I heard the Fifth Symphony, in Previn's performance, I never looked back.

Most of us would have a similar tale to tell, but I have chosen these events to highlight how truly international music is. Elsewhere in this edition of the *Journal* you will find a short article by Society member James Lyon, introducing his book, published in French, *Leoš Janáček, Jean Sibelius, Ralph Vaughan Williams. Un Cheminement Commun vers les Sources*. "Les sources" refers to the traditional music of each composer's country, and the book explores how these three composers put their national identity and heritage at the service of their music. But national identity in music goes further than folklore. Ravel was born in the Basque country – a cock's stride further South and he would have been Spanish – but his music is quintessentially French. Or so we think. Debussy's too, though there's precious little traditional French music in his output. But French composers are usually recognisable as such when we switch on the car radio



Left: Zoltán Kodály, Budapest; right: Lepo Sumera, Tallinn.

half way through a piece we don't know. Why? Does Elgar's music really sound English, or have we just convinced ourselves that it does? And what about Vaughan Williams? His music sounds nothing like Elgar's, but does it sound English too?

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On the facing page you will find an interview with Michael Kennedy by Tadeusz Kasa. It was time to honour our President in this way, and we could probably have devoted twice as many pages to him. I hope members will find his reminiscences as fascinating as I did. In the meantime, he has asked me to point out that footnote 1 on page 13 of Sophya Polevaya's article in the last issue might give the impression that he has written that the Scherzo of *A Sea Symphony* was omitted at the Leeds premiere in 1910. Reading the relevant passage in *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* makes clear that he says no such thing. In fact, Sophya was referring to the June 1911 performance in Cambridge, and not the Leeds premiere. Any confusion is, as always, the Editor's fault, and I am sorry it arose.

Ronald Searle, the artist and cartoonist, died on 30 December. One of his drawings appears on the cover of this issue of the *Journal*. I'm indebted to Jeffrey Davis for the information that Searle, a full-time art student, would slip into Cambridge University, wearing a borrowed gown, to hear visiting speakers and draw them from life. Vaughan Williams was one such.

William Hedley



# Michael Kennedy

*“I love it beyond reason...”*

Michael Kennedy CBE,  
President of the *Ralph Vaughan  
Williams Society* seen here  
with his wife, Joyce, was in  
conversation with  
Tadeusz Kasa.

**You were born on the nineteenth of February 1926, in Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester?**

Yes.

**I was born on the twentieth of February.**

Oh, were you?

**Yes, I'm Pisces and I think you are Aquarius.**

We're something between the two, I think!

**When it was confirmed that I could see you, I went to the library and asked for books by Michael Kennedy and they offered me a sackful.**

Were they about fishing? There's a chap called Michael Kennedy who writes a lot of books about fishing.

**No they weren't! And the enormous number of reviews and articles you have written weren't included. The body of work you have produced is huge and scholarly. Are you happy with it, or do you lie awake at night thinking you must rewrite or reassess?**

To be honest you get that every time you re-read your work – you want to reassess it. On the whole I stand by what I've written in the big book that came out in 1964 [*The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*]. I stand by most of what is in that. I think it worked out very well as a sort of companion volume to Ursula's biography. She did all the personal stuff which I'd have had to cut the book in half to accommodate. She did all that, so I don't think mine suffered as a result.

**But your other books, on Benjamin Britten, Walton, Barbirolli, would you want to reassess things?**

Well, you could write more about Britten. I don't want to do Strauss again, I did that quite recently. Elgar I have done two books on, and I think that's enough. I suppose I might do more on Vaughan Williams because his resurrected works make a difference. I'm finishing any day now a very long chapter for this "Companion to Vaughan Williams" which Alain Frogley is editing, with all sorts of bits contributed from various people on various subjects to do with him. I've done a chapter on the fluctuation of his reputation, which leaves me open to all sorts of things.

**You left school at the age of fifteen. Did you ever entertain ideas of staying on?**

No I didn't! I'll tell you how it came about. I won a scholarship from my prep school in Sussex to Berkhamsted, and went there in '39 at the beginning of the war. And then it suddenly dawned on me, the way that things dawn on children I suppose, that there was no way in which I was not going to be in the war. I mean even in 1941 it was obvious it wasn't going to be over in a year or two and I thought that when I came out... I knew people who did from the First World War, with no job, no training in anything, nothing. So I thought I'd leave school and start work. I'd always wanted to be a journalist and I bribed my mother that if I got good results in my "O"-levels, or whatever they were called in those days, she would let me leave school. She kept her word, I did leave, and I started as an office boy at *The Daily Telegraph* that had started up in Manchester about eleven months before. It was obviously in case the Fleet Street office was bombed they would have somewhere to print, and at Withy Grove there was an enormous printing factory, now called the Print Works with cinemas and things, but in those days it was a huge newspaper printing firm. I went as an office boy and after three months I was made a junior sub-editor, writing headlines

and cutting stories. Then in 1943 I went into the navy. Three years there and when I came back I had a job guaranteed.

**At what point did you go into the navy?**

I volunteered in '42 or '43, I think. You could do, and you could pick what service you wanted. I didn't particularly want the army or the air force, I just wanted the navy, and I got it.

**Why the navy?**

Well I thought – not talking about the very big ships, they're different – but on the whole, in the navy's small ships there's less bullshit. When you get on board ship, you sail out of port, you can wear any clothes you like – if you're on a destroyer, 250 crew, you get to know everybody – and it's very informal. The captain had to remind us to put uniform on when we went ashore. He'd say you'd been so long in your casual clothes, just remember to put your sailor's uniform on, so that's how relaxed it was.

I went to Australia, we joined the British Pacific Fleet, based in Sydney. We were escorting the *King George V* to bombard the Japanese mainland which we did and even a long way off the mainland you could see the shells going out. When the war ended we joined up with the American Fleet in the Pacific and were several weeks at sea, a record then. Then we went up as part of the Naval Occupied Force in Tokyo Bay so I had about six or seven months in Tokyo Bay and the Japanese ports around there, keeping an eye on them and seeing what a beautiful country it was. But of course it was in ruins then. I saw Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but people find it hard to believe that Tokyo was worse in as much as although *they* were done by one enormous terrifying explosion, Tokyo had been flattened – and it was a much bigger city than Hiroshima or Nagasaki – it had been flattened by Flying Fortresses and you could just walk for miles over the rubble. It was a mess.

**What was Manchester like during the war?**

Well, although I was born in Manchester and I call myself a Mancunian quite justly, I didn't really live in the place until I left school and I loved Manchester for its faults as well as its virtues. It was dirty, it was run down, but it had a spirit always, and of course the thing that I wanted was to listen to the Hallé Orchestra because by then I was mad on music and I arrived just as Barbirolli arrived. He came to take over the Hallé in June 1943. I was already in the navy then I think, or round about that date so that was a big reason for liking Manchester – its excellent concerts.

**From office junior you rose to be a sub-editor. That's quite a big jump isn't it?**

Yes. You had to know a little about a lot! Sub-editor sounds very grand but at that time in Manchester the *Telegraph* had about 20 subs. Basically their job was to prepare for the printer the stories that go into the paper, to cut them to the allotted length. It can be constructive work, though a reporter whose stories had been cut or altered by a sub didn't like it so much, naturally. I then became the Northern Editor in 1960.

**But as editor you also need to be quite ruthless with people, don't you?**

It's worse now than it was. It's bad at the moment. In the war there weren't so many people getting sacked, but later on... the *Telegraph* has always been a good employer and I've only ever

worked for the Telegraph Group, and it's – how many? – seventy years now. I'm still getting paid for records and things, so I'm still officially a journalist.

**Do you remember any big stories that you were involved in as editor?**

Well you're only involved in them if you're a reporter. The only way a sub-editor can be involved in them is by dressing them up, cutting them and so on. But I made a sort of thing for myself when I was still only sixteen. I used to go in early on the day when Churchill was broadcasting a speech to get it ready for the printer. We printed them in full, so I used to go in early so that the copy could go early to the printer. As for big stories, well, things might happen overnight, then the paper that comes out in the first edition say, at ten o'clock, is then completely changed by an event: President Kennedy's assassination of course, moon landings, all these. They are exciting events for the reporters on the spot but they were also quite exciting for the people in the office too. The great thing is, I think it helped my writing too. What I liked about subbing was that you could select what you thought you wanted to put in and almost write it without it being your copy, you see what I mean?

**You say you were mad about music. Do you play any musical instruments?**

No I don't. I can read scores.

**Where did your passion for music come from?**

My mother and father weren't musical in the sense that they didn't play musical instruments and they didn't go to concerts, but they were aware of good light music. I grew up with Gershwin and all the popular musicals of the period, which I loved and still love, and that's what made me mad on music. Then one day I was looking through a magazine, the *Gramophone* I suppose, and saw an advertisement for records that they sent you in the post and I sent for one. I've forgotten now what I ordered, but they sent me the wrong one. It was Dvořák's *Carnival Overture*, and I thought "Bloody hell, I don't want this!" Anyway I put it on and loved it. So then I started exploring other people, and of course the radio was great – there was plenty of music on the BBC in wartime. It was easy to become mad on music if you clicked on it and I always did click on it, and I still believe to this day that for most people it's better fun finding your own way into music than saying "What work should I... my boy likes music, what work should I introduce him to?" and I'd say "I don't know!" One friend of mine, I know, started on Mozart or something and another one started with *Rite of Spring*. He'd been to a concert and he'd been knocked off his feet by it, and I think the fun of discovering music is that you find these things that you know nothing about and they become big things in your life. The people I liked were Elgar and Vaughan Williams even then, Elgar especially. I collected the symphonies which then were only available on 78s. There wasn't all that much Vaughan Williams on record, but one of the records I certainly had before I went in the navy was *The Lark Ascending* with Grinke. I collected all... I was a magpie, really, I listened to anything that was going, the Tchaikovsky *Piano Concerto*, all the old favourites, and Vaughan Williams. I am trying to think what work it was that really set me off on him. I think it must have been the *Tallis*... I think it was the *Tallis Fantasia* or perhaps *Greensleeves*!

Same as me.

Yes! I am trying to think what records I had before I went in the navy. There was *Tallis, No 4* too was available, the *London*, that old Henry Wood recording, that was it. The *Fifth* was very exciting and that had just come along, everybody fell in love with that, and Barbirolli of course did it and it was listening to that work and getting a bit sentimental about it, that made me write to VW, telling him how much I liked it. I never thought I would get an answer, but I did. I was abroad. We had left England by then, picked the mail up somewhere and there was this letter for me with this extraordinary handwriting and it had on it also... it was addressed to "Commander Kennedy". I was in the Wireless office, decoding codes and things and not a Commander at all, but he managed to promote me to a Commander!

**For someone who doesn't play an instrument, you do write in a musical way...**

Well yes, I know something about it, I can follow a score and I know a bit about it but I can't transfer it. I think you have to go to a school that's good on music when you're nine or ten to take real advantage of that.

**So... as Northern editor of *The Telegraph* you went sideways to become a Music Critic?**

Yes, I did it the time-honoured way. My predecessor as Northern Editor knew I loved music, we talked about it a lot together, so when the regular man who covered Hallé concerts was ill one night he said "Do you want to write about it?" He knew I'd have tickets anyway, as a member of the audience, so I went and that started that off. And I juggled my days off and with my long-suffering wife at the time, we arranged our lives so that I could fit the concerts in. At first it could only be Manchester, but then I started to go further afield. At weekends I could go to Leeds or Liverpool and of course I could go anywhere on a Saturday because there was never a Sunday paper as the *Sunday Telegraph* didn't exist then. I ran them in tandem – for years, until they brought in the new technology in '89 and I thought "I've had enough of this, I don't want all this." I resigned and handed over to my No. 2 and just carried on as his deputy. The then owner of the paper, the late Lord Hartwell, said to me, "What would you like to do, really?" and I said, "Well, I'd like to be full-time Music Critic." He wanted me to go to London and be full time down there, with Martin Cooper and Peter Stadlen, but I'd always refused to go to London because I didn't want to live there particularly, and with my first wife's illness, all the doctors she saw were up here, so I didn't want to go from that point of view either.

**Do you remember the first concert you reviewed?**

I think it was the Grieg Piano Concerto... I'm sorry to be so boring about that but I don't really remember!

**You started to write books about music. Was Vaughan Williams the first book?**

No, it was *The Hallé Tradition*. I took it over from someone who'd done it up to 1939 and his family asked me to complete it. Well you can't complete somebody else's book especially on a subject which I felt had not been done properly, the way he'd done it, so I scrapped his and wrote my own. It came out in 1960. My second book was *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* because that was requested by him in his will, God knows why!



Michael Kennedy with Vaughan Williams at Cheltenham, 1958.

**You didn't know before he died that he was going to ask you to do this?**

No... well did I, really? I think Ursula might have dropped a hint, but I can't really remember.

I have read that your views, especially about Elgar and Vaughan Williams are "sympathetic", but when I was speaking to John Bridcut, he said "You need to take a view." I've always felt that you allow the reader to "take a view". You don't "steer" in the sense that a film-maker does. For instance, the recent films about Vaughan Williams were very strongly directed, but I feel that in your writing, if there is persuasion, it's a very gentle persuasion that leaves space for the reader's own opinion.

Yes, that is deliberate. I never see the point in writing about someone if you don't think much of them! I wouldn't write a book about Webern, because I don't know enough about him and

I don't have any sympathy with his music.

**But you could, if you wanted to be sensational. As someone who has done so much research and scholarly work, does it irritate you that people plunder your work so readily?**

No. Do they?

**I think they do. Presumably you always go to the original sources?**

Well I do try to because that is the only way to get it right really. I've been very lucky in that most of the subjects I have dealt with have had a wonderful archive. If you get into that, you're OK.

**And where do you spend your time when you are reading composers' letters?**

In my study. In the old days probably doing a little bit of work too.

**You weren't stuck in the British Library?**

No, but I suppose I would have been if I had been in London.

**You have stated quite clearly that Vaughan Williams told you that he didn't attach any meaning to his symphonies, and Ursula said he was really angry when people did. You've written that, and she's written that, and yet people keep attaching meanings.**

Yes people do, because sometimes I think composers are kidding themselves. I don't think the *Fourth Symphony* has got anything to do with war, but I do think the *Sixth* is a war symphony really and he got very cross when Frank Howes called it that, but you couldn't listen to that work in 1948 without its suggesting everything that he and we all had experienced in the previous ten years. I accept that he didn't like meanings and mottos but at the same time you've got to be a little suspicious of it as well.

**You first met Vaughan Williams, if I am correct, in Manchester?**

No, I first met him in London when he gave Barbirolli the Royal Philharmonic Society Gold Medal. I knew him quite well by the time he came to Manchester.

**And this was when Barbirolli conducted the Seventh Symphony?**

No, he came earlier than that to conduct the Hallé in his *Sea Symphony*.

**What was Barbirolli's conducting like? I have seen film of him where he was being incredibly strict. Do you remember those rehearsals?**

Well you've seen that famous clip of him doing the Bruckner, haven't you, where he makes them do the same phrase over and over? He was strict, but he could be laid back and amusing with it all too. He was very thorough, and they could only get into the Free Trade Hall for *Antartica* rehearsals the day before the performance. So they built it up in their grotty old rehearsal room which was an old school, and that's where Vaughan Williams himself heard it.

**Do you remember the effect the work had on you then?**

Yes. Thinking that a new sound had come into his music as a result of all these instruments in which he was so interested. You would expect the wind machine if you'd seen *Riders to the Sea*. And I think we half knew it from the film.

**You wrote in 1953 that the Seventh Symphony resembles Richard Strauss's *Eine Alpensinfonie*, "but the composer would have hated me for saying so".**

(laughs)

Yes, that's right. Yes, he would!

**Do you stand by that?**

Well there is an element of it.

**It wasn't a work I knew, but I listened to it the other day and I could see what you were saying. There are wind machines in there, aren't there?**

Yes there is all that, all the elements.

**Vaughan Williams invited you to Hanover Terrace?**

Yes, I stayed there many times, but I went to the "White Gates" before that.

**Was Adeline still alive?**

No, she had gone, but only just. It was 1951.

**And how was that first meeting?**

Well, how many years differences in age were there? Quite a lot, fifty years nearly, but one was never conscious of that. And I don't remember as much about our first meeting as I should do, except that we talked music a lot. I soon discovered that he didn't really like talking about his own music much and he would be fairly flippant about it. He would say "Old Tallywag" if he had to mention the *Tallis Fantasia*, but he was quite touched if anyone really defended his music. I remember saying to him "You ought to tell your publisher to cross out the optional cuts in the *Sea Symphony* finale. Nobody these days would say that it was too long. It's wonderful music and it's cut out." And he said something like "I suppose so." He always thought everything was too long, and he'd be cutting, hence the *London Symphony*, such a muddle.

**What struck you about his physical appearance? It's one of the first things mentioned about him.**

His walking was certainly much better in the early 1950s than later on. He could walk better. Then there was this wonderful head and white hair. It was nearly white by then, and an extraordinary voice which was clipped, quite obviously very much a public school educated voice, as we would say now, but clear and precise. Then I soon learned that he held entertaining views on anything. "Old Beethoven", he called him, and anything like that. He wasn't afraid to say what he liked and what he disliked.

**I was going to ask you about that because he never publicly made any criticisms of other composers. Or did he? And then there was that famous occasion when he reprimanded the orchestra for misbehaving during the Britten piece.**

That was the *Our Hunting Fathers* rehearsal in Norwich, but yes, he would never have criticised. He made a fuss about *things* he didn't like. He didn't like the use of harpsichords instead of pianos, and he would talk about the finale, the great last tune in *Götterdämmerung* – "not fit for a third-rate German beer-garden" – which was a stupid statement, I must say, but these were all dead composers, because he *was* quite a stringent critic if you read his various essays and things.

**Ursula talks about his "white hot" rages.**

I never saw one, or only on the platform, at Leith Hill, where he got very cross with the choir, standing back with his baton cracking on the rostrum. I couldn't hear what he was saying except that it was pretty sharp and he looked very angry and then it would just settle down again. He made a joke and it was all over.

**In everyday life you never experienced that anger?**

No.

**I wonder where it came from, that anger?**

Well I think if you saw him in rehearsal at Leith Hill there... I've seen him get very cross when a particular score wasn't there or something like that. He would go "Miss Cullen!" Marjory

Cullen was the festival secretary and he must have driven her mad, wanting this and wanting that. Oh yes, he was a martinet, doing the job seriously.

**I wanted to switch to Britten. I heard that Britten didn't like Vaughan Williams. You wrote "he probably didn't like him", and he and Lennox Berkeley used to make fun of the works. Did he often make disparaging comments?**

I don't think he liked the music at all really. He wrote that very nice letter to Ursula, but he regarded Vaughan Williams as representative of the Royal College attitude which had stopped him going to study with Alban Berg as he had wanted to, in Vienna. Ralph had nothing to do with it and Hugh Cobbe's *Letters* show that he in fact drew people's attention to Britten's works, how brilliant they were. I think he had varying views but he certainly knew that *Peter Grimes* was a masterpiece and that this was a very clever chap. But there was an orchestrated campaign... I shouldn't say this really, but at Aldeburgh they do far more Vaughan Williams now than in Britten's time. They had their own great composer in Britten, they didn't need anyone else, and Vaughan Williams certainly was not in favour there, at all.

**I've often felt that there was underlying reason why Britten didn't like Vaughan Williams, but he didn't like John Ireland either, especially as a teacher.**

I think it was a Royal College thing really, and I don't mind him not liking the music. Who can like all music?

**But he did a famous performance though didn't he? Wasn't it of *On Wenlock Edge*?**

Yes, he recorded that, but there are stories about that too. That they made jokes about it all the time they were doing it, but they were artist enough to turn in a good performance.

**Vaughan Williams must have been pretty confident that his legacy would be reassessed. He wanted you and Ursula to write his biography. Do you think he knew that he would be considered a great composer?**

Everybody talks about him as being a very modest man, but Ursula said he knew he was good. He couldn't really *not* know, could he? He knew he was good, but as I say, he had this terrible fear for every work. He wanted to scrap it or cut it. It goes right back to the *London Symphony*. The first performance had been a great success, but he went round asking his friends what to cut out. I certainly heard him threaten to throw *No 8* away even when he'd heard it played through and been reassured by everybody that they thought it was a marvellous work, but that was just him. And all these remarks he made about not having technique and so on just played into Britten's hands.

**Do you think he expected to be thought of as old fashioned?**

I don't think he ever thought about it.

**Vaughan Williams was an army person. Did he drink and did he swear?**

I never heard him swear. "Bloody", occasionally.

**But he was flirtatious?**

He *was* flirtatious, yes, always. He was good looking too. He was an old man but he was remarkably good looking.

**He had strong views about composers but he rarely proclaimed them publicly. He wasn't enamoured by Stravinsky and he wasn't keen on Mahler...**

(laughs)  
No!

**... and he wasn't keen on Strauss, and you've written books about all of these!**

(laughs)

Not about Stravinsky. Yes! We'd have had some good arguments. Well he did express some of his views publicly because he put them in essays and things which were printed. I think he took side kicks at Strauss, and then Stravinsky in a letter to me, in which he said "Everybody thinks it's wonderful and I think it's horrible!" *The Rite of Spring!* "Everybody thinks it's wonderfully scored and I think it is very badly scored!"

**And he loved Bartók?**

Yes he did. He liked Bartók. I suspect, although I never spoke to him about it, that he liked Shostakovich as well.

**When I was at school in Manchester, everybody had heard of Barbirolli and they all knew about the Hallé Orchestra. Was it something special about Manchester, that it embraced its culture and its heroes more readily than other places? Is it a northern thing or is it that it tries to assert itself against London. I can't imagine anyone at school knowing who Boulton was, for instance?**

The Hallé has always meant something. I don't know about the pre-Barbirolli days but there was no doubt that he became a very well known figure in the town, even though he wasn't here all that much. He was either in the concert hall or in the rehearsal room or flying off somewhere else but he involved himself with almost every activity the Hallé might have been connected with. He would go to small meetings, with members of the club, you know? There was the fan club: talk to them and you'll hear how much he loved Manchester. And Mark Elder is the same. I have noticed in the last two or three years, he's got very close to Manchester. John used to say that it was a city "you can *work* in". "London," he said, "is far too big," and about a certain work he might say "I could never do it in London because they wouldn't give me time to work it up." And I think they both found, Elder and Barbirolli, that there is great work satisfaction in being able to plan your season and being able to do what you want, look ahead, and not just rely on famous guest artists to fill your hall with such an appreciative audience.

**Why do you think Barbirolli and Vaughan Williams hit it off? As a young man Barbirolli went to hear *On Wenlock Edge* and was obviously very impressed.**

Vaughan Williams admired John's musicianship. He liked the colour and excitement that John brought to his music. It was after the Hallé performance of the *London Symphony* that he said "I think it's my favourite. I don't think I will be able to make that sound any more." I think the sound he heard was the sound that Barbirolli found in it. And Barbirolli heard the sound that Vaughan Williams wanted there.

**You became a friend of Barbirolli?**

Oh yes, I was a very great friend. John was a friend from when he first arrived. I always call him "my musical papa", though I shouldn't have, as a critic, I should have stood aside, but these days people know that we all know the conductors.

**So it wasn't Vaughan Williams who introduced you to Barbirolli?**

No, I knew Barbirolli eight years before I knew Vaughan Williams.

**I think his Mahler recording with Janet Baker is one of my most favourite recordings ever. Beautiful.**

Yes wonderful – with Elgar’s *Sea Pictures* on the other side.

**William Hedley’s question. You were once attacked in print by Hans Keller who wrote something on the lines that a “mere journalist” should never write about music?**

Was that aimed at me?

**Does it ring any bells with you at all?**

No, I’ve never seen it, but I am not surprised. I don’t see why it’s important, though. Several music critics have been “mere journalists” at one time or another.

**As a biographer do you feel privileged to look into people’s lives, or do you sometimes think you are prying?**

Both, privileged and prying! I’ll tell you a story about that. My predecessor as Northern Editor loved music, and he and I used to talk and we’d be there until the early morning hours when nothing much would be going on and we would talk about music. And he knew my passion for Elgar, and one day he said to me – he’d been in quite a good position at the *Morning Post*, he and his wife must have mixed in social circles – and he said to me “If ever you look into Elgar, remember the name Alice Stuart-Wortley.” Now I had never heard that name before in connection with Elgar, and I think by then I must have read all the books that were out. Percy Young came in ’57 and Diana [McVeagh] too, and I looked through the indexes and there was no mention of this woman at all. No book about Elgar at all, until mine, mentions her. In fact I had no intention of writing a book about Elgar, and I hadn’t even started to write proper music criticism really, but when I decided to write the book I went down to the Birthplace for a couple of days and arranged with Alan Webb who was the curator then, a lovely man, that I could have a look at the letters and things like that. He got them all out for me and I said to him “Alan, have you anything of Mrs Stuart-Wortley?” And I’ll never forget the look he gave me. “How do you know that name?” “I was just given it.” And he walked out to his cupboard somewhere, and brought me a pile of letters, all of Elgar’s to her, and I realised as I read them that this was a treasure trove. I mean, they are cries from the heart. They explain all his anxieties and moods. Of course the great argument is, were they lovers? I don’t think they were, actually, but there is no doubt that he *loved* her and admired her musicianship and he felt that he could trust her with his innermost feelings about everything. I just sat there. The Birthplace was supposed to close at half past five and Alan said – in those days! – “Just lock up when you leave.” And I sat there in this little room, reading these letters and I had the most distinct feeling I’d been disapproved. As much as to say, what are you poking into this for? It’s probably my imagination. It couldn’t have been otherwise, but I tell people ever since that I had the feeling that a presence was haunting me, telling me to mind my own business. But I’m glad I didn’t.

**There are some who think Vaughan Williams saw Gerald Finzi as his musical heir. Did you ever meet him?**

I knew Rubbra better. I think Finzi wrote one masterpiece.

**Dies Natalis?**

Yes.

**Absolutely wonderful work. And I like his songs, especially the ones he didn’t like such as *To Lizbie Browne*.**

Yes so do I, but I think Britten set Hardy better in *Winter Words*. And Vaughan Williams, didn’t he write “I would never dare set Hardy”? But he did, in *Hodie [The Oxen]* and it’s beautiful.

**Vaughan Williams dedicated his Fourth Symphony to Arnold Bax.**

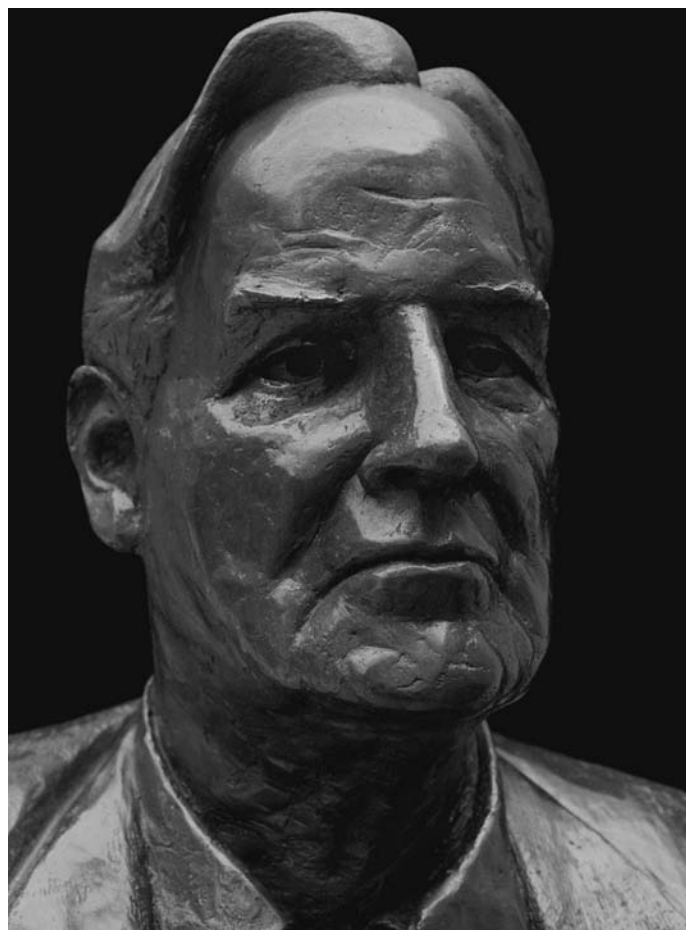
He thought very highly of Bax, especially his piano playing. He said Bax could look at the most complex score and play it as though it was an orchestra. And then there’s the *Piano Concerto* where he quotes a theme from Bax’s *Third Symphony*, because it was all associated with Harriet Cohen, who was Bax’s mistress for a long time. That shows that they were pretty close at that time. Funny little man, Bax. Red face! He drank a lot and he got fatter and rounder as he got older. I remember Barbirolli saying – Barbirolli loved medical books and he would study them, reading about old-fashioned diseases – and one day he said, “Mike, I’ve found out what’s the matter with Arnold. He’s got the purples.” He’d found this ancient illness and decided Bax had it.

**Alcohol related?**

Yes. Bax goes on too long.

**But Harriet still liked him?**

Very much so. She attacked me at the publication party for my Vaughan Williams book. The letter about the *Piano Concerto*. I said “There was nothing wrong about it”, but she said “Well, they more or less suggested that my hands weren’t big enough to play it.” Well, they weren’t! But I said, “You let me see those letters, Harriet, you must have known I would use them.” “Oh!” she said. She was a formidable lady but strikingly good looking.



Portrait of Michael Kennedy by Cecile Elstein.

Is there something about, for lack of a better word, the romantic side of Vaughan Williams that embarrasses people? Colin Davis, for instance, who will only play No 4 and No 6? There seem to be conductors who look only to his darker works.

Does Colin conduct the *Tallis Fantasia*? He mainly does *No 4* and *No 6*. I've never heard him do the *London* or the *Pastoral* or *No 5* either.

Some people don't seem to want to embrace works like the *Lark*, or the *5th* or the *3rd*. Simon Heffer always seems to talk about the *Piano Concerto*, the *4th* and *6th*, the fiercer, more aggressive works.

Only in the first movement – the *Piano Concerto*. The second movement is like Ravel and the third is like Vaughan Williams joking about himself. I think there is humour in the *4th Symphony*, the *Scherzo* especially.

Where does the comic element come from in works such as *Sir John in Love* and *The Poisoned Kiss*? Was it to do with Gilbert and Sullivan?

I don't think so, although he admired Sullivan. I think the principal love in his life, besides music, was literature, and he had to spend that time as Music Director at Stratford, which had given him a great insight into Shakespeare. I think the comic side of Shakespeare always made him want to write this comic opera, which he did, and which I thought was very good. Did you enjoy it? [in the English National Opera production]

**I think the music is lovely. Gorgeous.**

I could never make up my mind about *The Poisoned Kiss* though. I think it's super music and delightful but I do think it is wrecked by the libretto, and I don't see what you can do about it now.

**I just think that if he had stuck to darker works like *Riders*, or gone the way of Britten... I think it is fair to say that Vaughan Williams isn't successful in opera.**

No, but I think he might be.

**You think he might in the future?**

I think he could be.

**Yet Britten found success immediately.**

Yes, he hit the right note at the right time, didn't he? Whereas *Pilgrim* didn't, although the more I hear *Pilgrim* the more I think it a masterpiece. It is what Vaughan Williams said, it is like no other opera.

**Christopher Finzi thought that Vaughan Williams had no interests outside music.**

I don't think that's true. We talked about world affairs and politics, but I must say most of our conversations were on musical themes or people connected with it. It's not right to say that he had no other interests. Certainly he had no sporting interests: he didn't follow a football team or anything like that. But I never got the impression that his was not a wide-ranging mind.

**Do you think Vaughan Williams today has "reached the hearts of the people"? I am quoting something you said about Elgar.**

It was Parry who said that "Elgar has reached the hearts of the people."



Left to right: The composer William Wordsworth, Michael Kennedy, Eslyn Kennedy, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Ursula Vaughan Williams at Cheltenham, 1956.

**What do you think he would have thought about topping the Classic FM Charts?**

It's amazing, this *Lark Ascending* thing, which I think is a beautiful work. Why has it suddenly taken off? Because people can see in it an idealistic view of life, and because it doesn't go on too long.

**It's not so popular in America.**

When did you last hear a lark ascend? It's years since I have, but I think it's a beautiful work.

**Vaughan Williams wrote to you and asked you to explain Schoenberg's twelve-note system. Did you explain it? And did he understand it?**

He does make some comment about it. If you've got Hugh Cobbe's book...

**I have been reading it, but it took him twenty years to produce, so it's taking me a bit of time to read it!**

Well most of the letters he wrote to me are in that book, and there is one where he says "All I can say is that if this is the great twelve-note method, it's a fraud", or something like that. Anyway, he was very disparaging about it.

**Have you ever felt that, like Ursula, Susana Walton or Shirley Beecham, you are the "keeper of the flame"?**

No. Well, I suppose I have in a way. I've always championed Vaughan Williams's music and done things towards it like chairing the Trust and so on, and so I am a keeper of the flame, yes.

**Finally I was going to ask you if you were on a desert island which two works of Vaughan Williams would you take? Just two.**

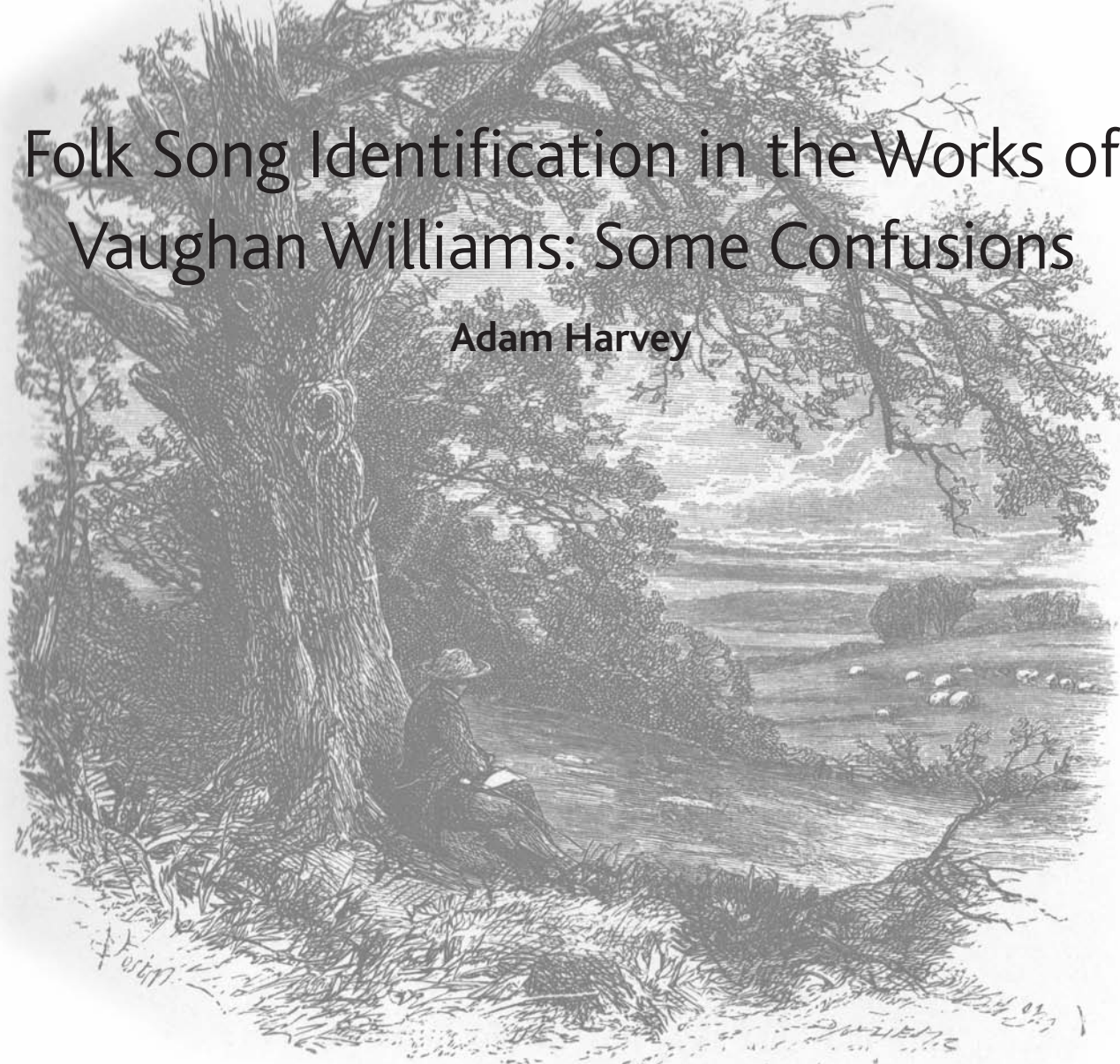
Well I'd take, because I love it beyond reason, I'd take a bit of the *Sea Symphony* probably the beginning of the finale. Then I might go for something out of *Hodie* or the *Tudor Portraits* if they are well enough done.

Thank you. 🌸

NOTE: The interview took place on 20 December 2011 in Manchester.

# Folk Song Identification in the Works of Vaughan Williams: Some Confusions

Adam Harvey



From his first-hand discovery of English folk song in 1903, Vaughan Williams consistently introduced folk elements into his compositions. Firstly, and most importantly, folk song had a significant impact on his style, its essence being absorbed by the composer into his own musical language. Furthermore, folk song was employed more directly with arrangements or quotations appearing regularly throughout the composer's career. Vaughan Williams made it clear from his own statements that he had no qualms about using folk song in his work. For him the love of these tunes was "a freeing and not a restraining influence, setting free new ideas, new vistas and new possibilities."<sup>1</sup> The esteem in which folk song was held by Vaughan Williams is also reflected in the fact that tunes can be found in virtually every genre. In addition to arrangements for voice and piano or mixed voices, folk songs occur in two ways: either as brief excerpts to enhance the flavour of a given work, such as "The Bold Princess Royal" in *A Sea Symphony* (1909) and "Lovely Joan" in *Sir John in Love* (1928), or as full quotations where the work itself has been inspired by the folk songs in question, as in the *Norfolk Rhapsodies* (1905-6), the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* (1912), the *English Folk Song Suite* (1923), the *Six Studies in English Folksong* (1926), *Five Variants of "Dives and Lazarus"* (1939) and *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* (1949), among others.

Many of these works are well known and the folk melodies they contain familiar. However, researching the folk songs used by Vaughan Williams in these and other compositions has

uncovered some inaccuracies present in existing literature, and it is evident that the correct designation of certain folk songs has proved problematical. Some of the composer's scores provide the names of the folk songs included, but several do not, and there are some instances where the title given is inaccurate. In addition, Frank Howes and Michael Kennedy have both written detailed studies on Vaughan Williams' works, and while these books are the only ones that endeavour to provide detailed information about which folk songs the composer employed – shedding much light on this subject – they are not infallible. The multifaceted nature of folk song, with various names for the same tune and numerous variants with the same name, makes precise identification of specific tunes difficult. Given below are a number of examples where errors or oversights have been detected, highlighting some of the various obstacles one can face when attempting to identify a folk song.

One obvious place where pinpointing a folk song can prove difficult is where the incorrect name has been given in the score. This is the case with "A Brisk Young Farmer", collected by Vaughan Williams in 1904 from Thomas Bowes in Westerdale, Yorkshire (MSS III 22). This folk song was used by the composer three times. Firstly, he adapted the tune in 1906 for the hymn, "'Tis winter now; the fallen snow" in *The English Hymnal* (No. 295, tune: Danby). Subsequently, he employed the tune in his folk ballet *Old King Cole* (1923) and his music for the film *The Dim Little Island* (1949), but previous research has been unsuccessful in recognising this folk song in its later

incarnations. In *Old King Cole* it is used, with one or two embellishments, as the tune played by the second fiddler. However, exact identification has been hampered because the title has been given as “Bold Young Farmer” in the score (p.47, one bar after Fig. 37). When discussing this work, Howes takes his cue from the score and gives “bold” (Howes, 247), although he recognises that it is not the same “Bold Young Farmer” as the one collected from Mr Denny in Essex in 1904 (MSS II 130 and JFSS II 155).<sup>ii</sup> Kennedy cites correctly “Brisk Young Farmer” in his list of hymns derived from folk songs (Kennedy *Works* 71), but when discussing *Old King Cole* refers to “Bold Young Farmer” (Kennedy *Works* 179 and Kennedy *Catalogue* 94) making no connection between the two.<sup>iii</sup>

For *The Dim Little Island*, a propaganda film made for the Central Office of Information, an orchestral arrangement of the tune is used for the opening titles. Dickinson asserts, “Auxiliary fragments (?‘Pretty Betsy of Ballahtown Brae’ and ‘Pretty Susan the pride of Kildare’) introduce the dialogue...” (Dickinson 425); and as a footnote he thanks “Mrs Noyes, the librarian of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, for identifying the second tune and conjecturing the first.” (Dickinson 425n). Perhaps misguided by this, Kennedy states that this “short prelude” is “based on two folk songs, one of which is ‘Pretty Betsy’ and the other ‘The Pride of Kildare’, both from Vaughan Williams’s manuscript collection.” (Kennedy *Catalogue* 188).<sup>iv</sup> Mark Doran, in his *Tempo* review recognises correctly the tune for the “prelude” as that of the second fiddler in *Old King Cole*, but relying on the available sources, identifies it, understandably, as “The Bold Young Farmer”.<sup>v</sup> Of course, “bold” and “brisk” are synonymous in this context, but these two folk songs are not interchangeable and have distinct Roud numbers (Brisk = 400; Bold = 60). However, the alteration of just one word has led to the true origin of this particular variant being obscured. “A Brisk Young Farmer” has not been published previously, and this may be due, in some part, to the confusion over the name noted above.

#### “A Brisk Young Farmer” (transposed down a perfect fourth)

A brisk young far - mer court-ed me, He stole a - way my lib - er - ty, He  
stole my heart with my free good will, I must con - fess I love him still.

Another example of a misnamed folk song occurs in *Sir John in Love*. In 1908, Cecil Sharp collected “The Game of Cards” from Samuel Burman in Durston, Somerset (CSCEFS No. 276C). This song was later arranged by Sharp for inclusion in the collection *Folk Songs for Schools*,<sup>vi</sup> but when submitting it he gave the wrong title and text, as Maud Karpeles explains: “Cecil Sharp erroneously attributed version C to ‘The Sailor from Sea’ and the tune is published as such in Sharp *Schools*. No. 1315.” (CSCEFS Vol.2, 620) Vaughan Williams, who also contributed to Novello’s *Folk Songs for Schools* series, would have been familiar with the tune from this publication and so inadvertently used the mistaken title when including it in Act I of *Sir John* (see p.15 of the vocal score, where the tune is given as “The Sailor from the Sea”).<sup>vii</sup> Subsequently this error has been duplicated in Howes (276), Dickinson (262), Kennedy (*Catalogue* 121) and in some more recent articles.<sup>viii</sup> In one of these, by Eric Saylor for

the Journal of the Royal Musical Association, the author has written a detailed study on the use of folk song in *Sir John in Love*, but is powerless to comment in depth about this particular folk song because he has been deceived by the incorrect title and is therefore unable to find any information about it, merely stating “...his source for [this] tune is unclear, but he did not collect a version of it.”<sup>ix</sup> Mr Saylor makes no reference to Sharp.

It is also easy to overlook a particular variant when the folk song is published under one of its alternative names. An instance of this occurs with the tune used by Vaughan Williams for the fourth movement of the *Six Studies in English Folksong*. The folk song in question was collected by the composer in 1908 from Mr Hilton in South Walsham, Norfolk, and Vaughan Williams wrote “She Borrowed some of Her Mother’s Gold” on the manuscript (MSS 4 to I 46/5),<sup>x</sup> but the folk song is more widely known as “The Outlandish Knight”. The variant collected by Vaughan Williams was published in the *Folk Song Society Journal* in 1910, along with nine other variants under the general title “The Outlandish Knight or May Colvin”, although Mr Hilton’s tune was attributed the name “She Borrowed some of Her Father’s Gold” (JFSS IV 123).<sup>xi</sup> However, when the song was published later in *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs* in 1959 it appears as “The Outlandish Knight” (Penguin 80). No words appear on the manuscript or with the tune published in the folk song journal, so the Penguin source is the first to attach a text to this variant. It is interesting to note that the remarks about the various names for the folk song put forward in Penguin do not mention the “mother’s gold” or “father’s gold” titles used previously (Penguin 120).<sup>xii</sup> Furthermore, in respect of the *Six Studies*, the name change has led to the folk song’s inclusion in Penguin being overlooked by some commentators. The song is listed as “She Borrowed some of Her Father’s Gold” in Julian Onderdonk’s checklist, but without “The Outlandish Knight” given as an alternative name and with no reference to Penguin (*RVW Society Journal* No. 50, 21). Also, had the link been made then, John Barr would have had more to say about this folk song in his article on the *Six Studies* instead of resorting to the statement “The words and any other information, at present, are not at hand” (*RVW Society Journal* No. 13, 14).

On the subject of the *Six Studies*, both Howes and Kennedy state that these are not “exact transcriptions of... identifiable folk-songs” (Howes 228; Kennedy *Catalogue* 113). However, it should be pointed out that each movement does, in fact, correspond to a particular variant. Apart from an element of variation when the tune is repeated, the melodies are presented almost exactly as in the original folk song, and in this respect the *Six Studies* is not dissimilar to other folk song compositions such as the *English Folk Song Suite* or *The Running Set*. While Howes does identify “Lovely on the Water” as the tune for the first movement, he describes the others in somewhat prosaic terms, with the fourth study referred to as a “carol” (Howes 228-9). Despite his concurrence with Howes that the tunes are not identifiable, Kennedy does assign each movement with the name of a folk song and these are correct apart from “The Lady and the Dragoon” given to the fifth study.<sup>xiii</sup> The folk song used here is actually “The Pride of Kildare” collected by Vaughan Williams in 1904 from Mr Copas in Cookham Dean, Berkshire (Palmer No. 1). Kennedy’s titles are now pervasive throughout the recording catalogue.<sup>xiv</sup>

In addition to issues regarding the names of folk songs, problems can also arise with identification if the tune in question

is related in some way to another folk song. This is the case with “Whistle Daughter Whistle”, collected in 1906 by Cecil Sharp from Walter Locock in Martock, Somerset (FSS Vol. 3, 20-1 and CSCEFS No. 195A). Vaughan Williams employs this tune in the *English Folk Song Suite* for the trio section (first tune) in the third movement, “Folk Songs from Somerset”. However, when discussing this work, Howes cites this tune as “The Trees So High” (Howes 233). This is repeated in Kennedy (*Catalogue* 97) and also appears in the sleeve notes to several recordings.<sup>xv</sup> This oversight can be excused to some extent, however, as Sharp does state that “the Somerset air has points in common with ‘The Trees They Do Grow High, No. 15’” (FSS Vol.3, 74), referring to the folk song sung by Harry Richards given in volume one (FSS Vol.1, 30-1). A comparison of the opening bars (Ex. 1) shows that the two tunes share the same rhythm and shape.

## Ex. 1

## “Whistle Daughter Whistle”



## “The Trees They Do Grow High”



Distinguishing two similar tunes becomes more difficult if they are variants of the same folk song, as seen with “The Lawyer”. Vaughan Williams arranged two versions of this tune, one in *Two English Folk Songs* (1935) and another in *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* as “The Green Meadow”. The first of these was collected from Mrs Verrall at Horsham, Sussex in 1908 and was published in George Butterworth’s *Folk Songs from Sussex* as “A Lawyer He Went Out”.<sup>xvi</sup> The tune itself was actually noted down by Francis Jekyll, a friend of Butterworth’s from his days at Eton and Oxford, as stated by the composer in the preface to the original edition.<sup>xvii</sup> The version used in the later work is in fact from the composer’s own manuscript collection, taken down from Ted Baines in Lower Beeding, Sussex in 1904 (MSS II 354).<sup>xviii</sup> However, the two variants are so alike (see Ex. 2) that it has been supposed that the Butterworth version was used in *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons*.<sup>xix</sup>

## Ex. 2

## “A Lawyer He Went Out” (Verrall)



## “The Lawyer” (Baines)



Howes states “The song here bears the title ‘The Green Meadow’ but equally is called ‘The Lawyer’. It comes from the collection made by George Butterworth in Sussex.” (Howes

200) But, with the Butterworth variant already used by the composer and with the two versions being almost identical, this is an understandable mistake. Subsequently this error has been duplicated in Kennedy (*Catalogue* 152), in Michael Barlow’s book on Butterworth<sup>xx</sup> and in the sleeve notes to the premiere recording of *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* on Albion Records (ALBCD 010). The two variants are separated correctly in Julian Onderdonk’s checklist (*RVW Society Journal* No. 50, 18-9).

Recognising a folk song which has a similar melody to another is made more problematical if they both appear in the same work. A good example of this can be found in the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*. In the preface to this work, Vaughan Williams makes the following acknowledgement: “This Fantasia is founded on the following traditional English Carols: ‘The Truth sent from above’ (Herefordshire) words and tune; ‘Come all you worthy gentlemen’ (Somerset) words and tune; ‘On Christmas Night’ (Sussex) words and tune; ‘There is a fountain; (Herefordshire) tune only...’ It is the identification of the last of the folk songs named here that has confounded scholars. As far as research shows, there has been no analysis of the *Fantasia* that explicitly identifies this tune. Howes’ detailed examination only mentions the title of the folk song, but does not point out specifically which variant it is or where it appears (Howes 126-131), and Kennedy does not mention the folk song at all (Kennedy *Works* 134-5) apart from when quoting the above acknowledgement in his catalogue (Kennedy *Catalogue* 61). Vaughan Williams collected three different versions of “There Is a Fountain”, and it would seem that the most obvious candidate to be included in the *Fantasia* would be the one that was collected in 1909 from Mrs Esther Smith in Weobley, Herefordshire (MSS I 309/1 and JFSS IV 21, second tune). This tune has been arranged no fewer than three times by the composer, appearing (as “Joseph and Mary”) in the *Twelve Traditional Carols from Herefordshire* (1920), in the *Oxford Book of Carols* (1928) (No. 115) and in *The First Nowell* (1958) (No. 8). But the tune actually used by Vaughan Williams is the less well-known variant sung by Mr Hancock from Monnington in Herefordshire in 1908 (MSS I 309/2 and JFSS IV 21, first tune). The reason why this tune has evaded identification is because it is so akin to the tune of “The Truth Sent from Above” that it has most likely been overlooked as a variation on the latter’s melody. See Ex. 3 below.

## Ex. 3

## “The Truth Sent from Above”



## “There Is a Fountain”



In the *Fantasia* the tune appears six bars after Fig. F (p.5 of the vocal score), as a postlude to the opening section. Evidently the composer has employed this tune *because* of its resemblance to “The Truth Sent from Above” and has utilised this relationship by juxtaposing both folk songs, but in doing so has made the two almost indistinguishable.

The detection of a folk song in the same work becomes more difficult again if the composition in question is based upon

different versions of the same tune, as seen with the *Five Variants of "Dives and Lazarus"*. Apart from the well-known version of "Lazarus" found in *English County Songs* (ECS 102-3) which Vaughan Williams uses as the main theme (see Howes 234 and Kennedy 278), further identification has been discouraged by the composer's note in the score which states "These variants are not exact replicas of traditional tunes, but rather reminiscences of various versions in my own collection and those of others." However, it is possible to detect other tunes that correspond to specific folk songs. Howes points out the relationship between "Lazarus" and "The Red Barn" (or "The Murder of Maria Martin") and identifies a version collected by Vaughan Williams in Norfolk which is used for Variant V (Howes 234 and also Kennedy *Works* 278). This tune was collected in 1905 from Mr Whitby in Tilney All Saints, Norfolk (JFSS II 118) and was also employed by the composer in the first movement of the *English Folk Song Suite* (third tune).<sup>xxi</sup> Incidentally, when discussing this work, Howes describes the section in which this folk song appears as "a jig tune, *volkstümlich* and original not a folk-tune..." (Howes 232), missing the inclusion of "The Red Barn" in the bass, as given by Dickinson (460) and Kennedy (*Catalogue* 97); interestingly, both these latter writers refer to the tune as "Dives and Lazarus". In addition to the Whitby version of "The Red Barn" in Variant V, which is heard almost in its entirety, Vaughan Williams also utilises two other tunes where the melodies are not quoted in full, but still correlate to identifiable folk songs. Variant III is based on the version of "Cold Blows the Wind" found in *English County Songs* (ECS 34-5), a rare example of the "Lazarus" melody in compound time which Vaughan Williams converts into triple time (Ex. 4).

Ex. 4

"Cold Blows the Wind" (transposed up a sixth)



Five Variants, Variant III



Variant IV corresponds to another version of "The Red Barn" collected by the composer in 1904 from Mr and Mrs Verrall at Monk's Gate in Sussex (JFSS II 118, as "Maria Martin").<sup>xxii</sup> The folk song is in a typical AABA form and Vaughan Williams bases this variant on the four bars that comprise the A section of the tune. The brevity of the quotation and the modification of the mixolydian tonality both help mask its origin (Ex. 5).

Ex. 5

"The Red Barn" (Verrall)



Five Variants, Variant IV



The final example is something of an oddity, where, it seems, the composer himself was unsure about exactly which variant he

was using. In *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons*, Vaughan Williams includes the folk song, "The Sprig of Thyme" (Ex. 6), but states in the score "The arranger cannot trace the source of the above version of this well-known melody, he hopes that no copyright has been infringed" (p.31 of the vocal score).

Ex. 6

"The Sprig of Thyme"



Howes asserts that "The particular variant of the tune used by Vaughan Williams is unidentifiable and it may be suspected that... Vaughan Williams has himself behaved like the traditional singer, transforming the tune slightly in transmitting it." (Howes 200) However, the composer had used the exact same tune before in *On Christmas Night* in 1926 (Figure 69, Andante sostenuto). When discussing this latter work Howes identifies the folk song by its parallel name, "The Seeds of Love", and although he quotes the tune, he does not make a connection between the two (Howes 251). The melody is, in actual fact, a conflation of the version collected by Lucy Broadwood in Northamptonshire (ECS 58-9) and that collected by Vaughan Williams from James Punt in East Horndon, Essex in 1904 (MSS II 92). The first four and a half bars match the Broadwood version, while the last three and a half bars correspond to those from Mr Punt. Both tunes are given in Ex. 7 with the relevant sections in square brackets.

Ex. 7

"The Seeds of Love" (Broadwood)



"The Sprig of Thyme" (Mr Punt)



Unless this tune does belong to an anonymous variant with which, it seems, only Vaughan Williams was familiar, we can only assume that the composer has fashioned a hybrid version of the folk song from two known sources. Whatever its origin, Vaughan Williams thought the tune worthy enough to use in two separate works twenty-three years apart.

It is clear then that the process of identifying folk songs can be problematical. The intention here has been not to criticise, but to show that the correct designation of a folk song can be hindered for a variety of reasons, and that errors can then be perpetuated

by dissemination into subsequent literature. The examples cited above illustrate the difficulties that can arise when there is an anomaly regarding the name of the folk song, or when the tune in question is very similar to another song or variant. Regarding the folk songs mentioned, it is hoped that this article will help unravel some of the issues concerning which tunes were used by Vaughan Williams and also bring those that have been overlooked to the notice of a wider audience.

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**Dickinson** = Dickinson, A. E. F., *Vaughan Williams*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1963.

**ECS** = Broadwood, Lucy E. and Fuller Maitland, J.A., *English County Songs*. London: Leadenhall Press; J. B. Cramer; Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1893.

**FSS** = Sharp, Cecil J., and Marson, Charles L., *Folk Songs from Somerset*. London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent; London: Simpkin; Schott; Taunton: Barnicott and Pearce, 1904–09.

**Howes** = Howes, Frank, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*. London: Oxford University Press, 1954.

**JFSS** = *Journal of the Folk Song Society*, 1899–1931.

**Kennedy Catalogue** = Kennedy, Michael, *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

**Kennedy Works** = Kennedy, Michael, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*. London: Clarendon Press, 1992.

**MSS** = Ralph Vaughan Williams folk song manuscript collection.

**Penguin** = Vaughan Williams, Ralph and Lloyd, A. L. (ed.), *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959.

<sup>i</sup> Manning, David (ed.), *Vaughan Williams on Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 252 (originally from *English Dance and Song*, 6/3, 27–8).

<sup>ii</sup> This folk song was later arranged for voice and piano as No. 3 of *Folk Songs from the Eastern Counties* (1908).

<sup>iii</sup> Kennedy also refers to the tune as “Bold Young Farmer” in his notes to EMI’s 1983 recording of this work by the Northern Sinfonia conducted by Richard Hickox.

<sup>iv</sup> Kennedy’s statement, originally from 1964, was duplicated in his notes for *The Film Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, Vol. 2 on Chandos in 2004 and then again when all three volumes were re-released as a box set in 2009.

<sup>v</sup> Doran, Mark, *London, Barbican: Vaughan Williams Rarities in Tempo* magazine Vol. 58 No. 228, April 2004, 71.

<sup>vi</sup> McNaught, W. G. (ed.), *Novello's School Songs: Folk Songs for Schools*. London: Novello & Co. Ltd., 1908–36, Book 268, No. 1315.

<sup>vii</sup> The tune was also used by Vaughan Williams in the music for the film *The People's Land* (1943).

<sup>viii</sup> See *Alice Shortcake, Jenny Pluckpears, and the Stratford-Upon-Avon Connections of Vaughan Williams's 'Sir John in Love'*, Savage, Roger. *Music and Letters* (2008) 89(1), 40 and 49; and *Dramatic Applications of Folksong in Vaughan Williams's Operas 'Hugh the Drover' and 'Sir John in Love'*, Saylor, Eric. *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, Vol. 134, Issue 1, May 2009, 60–5.

<sup>ix</sup> Saylor, *ibid.*, 61.

<sup>x</sup> Rosamund Strode gives “mother’s gold” in her checklist (*R. V. W. Folksong Manuscript Collection: General Descriptions and Check Lists*, 24), as does Michael Kennedy in his list of Vaughan Williams’ folk songs (*Catalogue* 270) and when discussing the *Six Studies in English Folksong* (*Catalogue* 113).

<sup>xi</sup> This has led to some later sources giving “father’s gold” instead of “mother’s gold”; see Bronson’s *Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*, Vol.1, version 39; note 12 below; and the main body of text.

<sup>xii</sup> The updated version of Penguin, *Classic English Folk Songs*, suggests that the composer wrote “father’s gold” on the manuscript not “mother’s gold”, but it is probable that the folk song journal has been used as the source (Vaughan Williams, Ralph, Lloyd, A. L. and Douglas, Malcolm (ed.), *Classic English Folk Songs*. London: English Folk Dance and Song Society, 2003, revised 2009, 105).

<sup>xiii</sup> Kennedy gives the following titles: 1. “Lovely on the Water” (“The Springtime of the Year”) [JFSS IV 84 and Palmer No. 66]; 2. “Spurn Point” [JFSS II 178 and Palmer No. 55]; 3. “Van Dieman’s Land” [JFSS II 166 and Palmer No. 57 as “Younger Henry the Poacher”]; 4. “She Borrowed some of Her Mother’s Gold”; 5. “The Lady and the Dragoon” and 6. “As I Walked over London Bridge” [JFSS II 208]. (Kennedy *Catalogue* 113).

<sup>xiv</sup> Examples include Jean Stewart on EMI in 1963 (notes by Michael Kennedy), Eileen Croxford on EMI in 1973 (notes by Michael Kennedy), Janet Hilton on Chandos in 1982 (notes by Andrew Keener), Emma Johnson on ASV in 1993 (notes by Michael Pilkington), Paul Watkins on Hyperion in 2001 (notes by Andrew Burn) and Ian Scott on Dutton Epoch in 2005 (notes by Philip Lane), among others.

<sup>xv</sup> Examples include the London Wind Orchestra on ASV in 1978 (notes by W. A. Chislett) and the Royal Northern College of Music Wind Orchestra on Chandos in 1999 (notes by Timothy Reynish).

<sup>xvi</sup> Butterworth, George, *Folk Songs from Sussex and Other Songs*, Augener, 1913. The manuscripts give the title as “A Lawyer Fine and Gay” (GB/6b/11) and “A Lawyer He Rode Out” (GB/7b/25A).

<sup>xvii</sup> Jekyll’s name does not appear in more recent editions of the work, for example, Stainer and Bell, 1974, where the preface has been replaced by an introduction by Peter J. Pirie.

<sup>xviii</sup> The folk song is also included in Palmer, Roy (ed.), *Bushes and Briars: Folk Songs Collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams*. Burnham-on-Sea: Llanerch, 1999 (2nd edition; originally published under the title *Folk Songs Collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams* in 1983), No. 96.

<sup>xix</sup> That the Butterworth version is not used in *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* is borne out by the fact that the published score does not credit Butterworth or Augener in the preface, but does for the other tunes not collected by Vaughan Williams (i.e. Boosey & Hawkes Ltd., Cramer & Co. Ltd. and Novello & Co. Ltd.). In the published score of the *Two English Folk Songs* the correct credit is given: “‘The Lawyer’ [used] by kind permission of Sir A. K. Butterworth.”

<sup>xx</sup> Barlow, Michael, *Whom the Gods Love: The Life and Music of George Butterworth*. London: Toccata Press, 1997, 80.

<sup>xxi</sup> This tune also appears in the now lost *Norfolk Rhapsody No. 3* (1905–6).

<sup>xxii</sup> The tune also appears in the *Oxford Book of Carols* as “Job” (“Come all you worthy Christian men”) (No. 60, fourth tune). 🐼

# Thomas Canning's "Morgan Fantasy": a tribute to Ralph Vaughan Williams

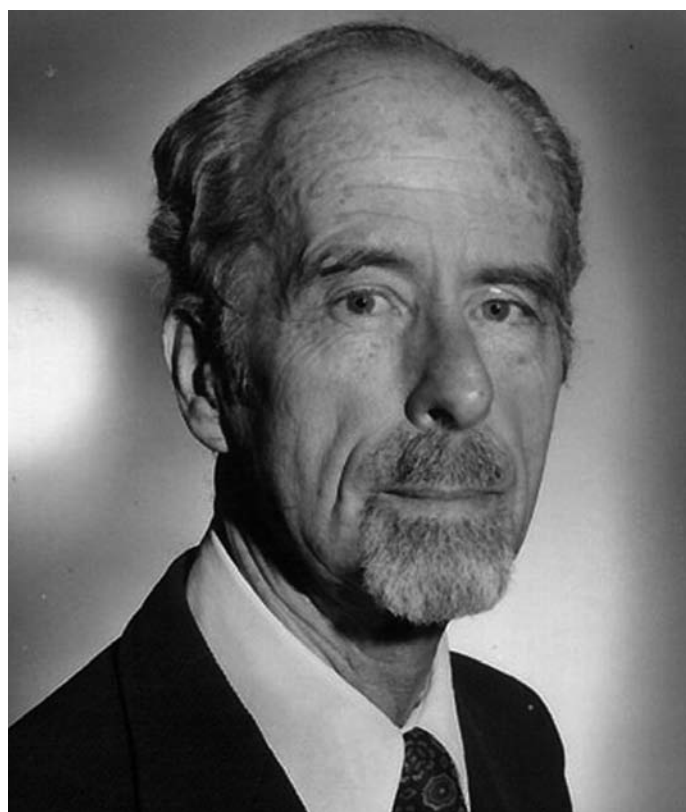
Allan W. Atlas

What follows is the third and final installment in a series of articles about various aspects of the reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* in the United States. Part 1 dealt with the reception accorded the work by the musical press in New York during the years immediately after its American premiere there on 9 March 1922 (Atlas 2010a). Part 2, by far the longest, looked at the "translation" of *Tallis* (and the composer's equally popular *Fantasia on Greensleeves*) onto canvas by the American (Lithuanian-born) synaesthetic painter Ira Jean Belmont (1885-1964) (Atlas 2011). In this third part, the focus is on a composition by an American composer that pays musical tribute to *Tallis*: Thomas Canning's *Fantasy on a Hymn Tune by Justin Morgan*.

Little known either to audiences in general or to scholars in particular (Americanists included: there is no entry for Canning in the current edition of "AmeriGrove", nor will there be one in the forthcoming revised edition), Thomas Scribner Canning was born at Brookville, Pennsylvania, on 12 December 1911. After studying composition at Oberlin College (B.M., 1936) and the Eastman School of Music (M.M., 1940), Canning held a number of short-term teaching positions prior to serving in the armed forces during World War 2; after the war, he taught at Eastman, from 1946 to 1963, and then at West Virginia University, from 1963 until he retired in 1977. Canning died at Morgantown, West Virginia, on 4 October 1989.

Though prolific, Canning is best remembered today for one piece only, his deeply moving *Fantasy on a Hymn Tune by Justin Morgan*, composed in 1944-1945 (published jointly by the Eastman School of Music and Carl Fisher in 1955). And that Canning modeled the work closely after Vaughan Williams' *Tallis Fantasia* is anything but a secret. As Ross Parmenter put it in his *New York Times* review of Howard Hanson's 1953 recording of the work (see the discography for this and other recordings): "Mr. Canning calls his piece Fantasy on a Hymn by Justin Morgan [note the omission of the word "Tune"]. It is well-worked and most agreeable in sound, but it is almost too close to Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on Theme by Thomas Tallis* for comfort" (Parmenter, section X, p. 9). Indeed, drawing attention to the Canning-Vaughan Williams connection has since become commonplace in references to *Morgan*:

After Vaughan Williams wrote his *Tallis Fantasia* a dozen composers produced imitations. Most of them sound pretty good, and Thomas Canning's, from 1944, is one of the best (Vroon, 94).



Thomas Canning

Of particular note is the Hymn Fantasy by Thomas Canning. This is nearly an American-style *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*... (Haldeman, 209).

...the Fantasy is reminiscent of Vaughan Williams's great *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* in its expert writing for strings and mood of rapt contemplation (Adams, 4-5).

More recently, and in our very own *Journal*, we read that the Canning *Fantasy* is an "out-and-out pastiche of the *Tallis Fantasia*" (Rooksby, 21), while the following (to back up chronologically) is downright mean-spirited: "Canning's work is a *shameless plagiarism* [my emphasis] of Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Tallis Fantasia*..." (Hurwitz). In all, then, what critical spin there's been about the relationship between the two works has, to the extent that it's leaned in one direction or another, leaned "center-negative".

My goal in this brief communication is twofold: 1, to compare the two works in much greater detail than they have been until now; 2, to offer a very different assessment of Canning's motives for basing his work so closely on Vaughan Williams'.

To be sure, the similarities between Canning's *Morgan* and Vaughan Williams' *Tallis* are both striking and extensive, and they exist on two clearly-defined levels. First, there are the obvious matters of orchestration and pre-existent material. Both works are for strings only, though Canning reverses Vaughan Williams' disposition of two orchestras (of varying size) and solo quartet, and scores *Morgan* for two quartets and a single orchestra. As for the pre-existent material: just as Vaughan Williams dipped into his Elizabethan heritage and based his work on the tenor of a four-part psalm setting by Thomas Tallis that had originally appeared in Archbishop Matthew Parker's *The Whole Psalter translated into English Metre* (London, 1567), so Canning reached back to his own roots in eighteenth-century American hymnody – he composed a great deal of Protestant sacred music (there is a partial list of works on the website of the American Composers Alliance) – and drew upon the tenor of a four-voice hymn setting titled *Amanda* by the eighteenth-century American composer Justin Morgan (b. 1747 in West Springfield, Massachusetts; d. 1798 in Randolph, Vermont), best known in his own day and perhaps even more so in ours for developing the equine breed known as the Morgan horse.

#### Amanda

Death, like an overflowing stream,  
Sweeps us a way; our life's a dream; An empty tale; a  
morn ing flow'r, Cut down and with er'd in an hour.

Ex. 1. Justin Morgan, *Amanda*, tenor; after Asahel Benham, *Federal Harmony* (New Haven, 1790), 4; the text is drawn from Isaac Watts' version of Psalm 90, "Death, like an overflowing stream". Benham's *Federal Harmony* was extremely popular and went through six editions by 1795 (Crawford, 447); the four-part setting in its entirety appears in Kroeger, 120-21.

Unlike Vaughan Williams, however, Canning did not dig through "ancient" tune books to find *Amanda*; rather, according to Mrs. Ruby Canning (communication of 28 June 2008), he found it in a modern publication that had appeared just one year before he composed the work: the popular and then-groundbreaking *Landmarks of Early American Music, 1760-1800*. The similarities, though, extend well beyond orchestration and pre-existent material. In fact, Canning's *Morgan* echoes the more famous *Tallis* in a very audible gesture-for-gesture manner from beginning to end, so that there is a sense of structural parallelism between the two pieces that involves (1) placement of themes, (2) shifts in orchestration, texture, and tempo, (3) gradations in dynamics, and (4) other signposts that define the structure of the two works.

The following accounts for what I hear as the dozen most notable instances of this parallelism. I have organized the

material in quasi-outline fashion, citing locations in *Tallis* by rehearsal letter and bar within, those for *Morgan* by rehearsal number and bar within; locations prior to the beginning of the series of rehearsal letters and numbers cite bar numbers only; and when the total length of the passage is not immediately apparent (as in, say, A.5 – C.1 or 2.17 – 3.1), I also specify the total number of bars involved.

*Gesture 1.* Vaughan Williams, bar 1 – 2 = Canning, bar 7-10: Both works begin with broad, sustained, modal-progression chords that establish a somber, quasi-mystical atmosphere.

*Gesture 2.* Vaughan Williams, bars 4 – 6 and bars 9 – A.1 (the latter 3 bars long) = Canning, bars 15 – 19: Low-register pizzicato passages allude to the pre-existent melodies on which the works are based; but whereas Vaughan Williams quotes the head motive of the *Tallis* theme directly, Canning seems most closely to anticipate bars 12 – 13 of *Amanda* (at the words "morning flow'r" – see Ex. 1), and presents it in *Morgan*'s original key of A minor instead of the E minor to which he transposes the tune throughout the remainder of the work.

*Gesture 3.* Vaughan Williams, A.5 – C.1 (17 bars) = Canning, bars 19 – 2.1 (17 bars): Both *Tallis* and *Morgan* offer the first complete presentations of their pre-existent themes: *Tallis* in second violins, violas and cellos, *Morgan* in second violins and violas only.

*Gesture 4.* Vaughan Williams, C.1 – C.2 = Canning 2.1: first and second violins sweep up an octave in preparation for the second statement of the themes.

*Gesture 5.* Vaughan Williams, C.2 – E.1 (16 bars) = Canning, 2.1 – 2.17: Each composer presents the second complete statement of his theme, but now an octave higher than the first presentation (at times two octaves higher in Canning), with both pieces accompanying the melody with bustling 16th-notes, either entirely (Vaughan Williams) or mainly (Canning) in the second violins.

*Gesture 6.* Vaughan Williams, E.5 – E.6 = Canning, 2.17 – 3.1 (2 bars): Hammer-like strokes announce the onset of transition-like passages; in *Tallis*, Orchestra I plays alone for the first time as Orchestra II drops out (the solo quartet has yet to enter); in *Morgan*, the two quartets play together for the first time, so that each work marks this important structural boundary with a change in orchestration.

*Gesture 7.* Vaughan Williams, I.1 – R.7 (94 bars) = Canning, 4.1 – 11.7 (61 bars): Both works set out on their long – about 40% of *Tallis* (94 bars out of 236) and roughly 33% of *Morgan* (61 bars out of 186) – development-like sections. In his *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, Wilfrid Mellers describes this section of *Tallis* as transforming "ecclesiastical devotion into pastoral lyricism...people's prayer into open fields" (Mellers, 55. 57); and though I am not sure that we can say quite the same about *Morgan*, there is a definite "lightening" of the mood at this point. The two works share another feature at this important structural point: as I have noted elsewhere, the articulation at I.1 of *Tallis* just misses coinciding with the "short" Golden Section (short segment preceding long segment – see Codetta II, below) of that work's total duration, and this regardless of recording (Atlas 2010b, 117). Significantly, this is also true of the articulation at 4.1 in *Morgan*, as the total duration of Raymond

Leppard's performance is 10:10 (610 seconds), with the articulation at 4.1 arriving at 3:39 (234 seconds), or just five seconds (0.8% of the total duration) before the true short Golden Section. And though I would maintain that neither composer consciously planned – and perhaps did not even know about – the Golden Section, I think that Canning was at least intuitively trying to approximate in *Morgan* what he felt was a satisfactory sense of proportion in *Tallis*.

*Gesture 8.* Vaughan Williams, R.8 = Canning, 12.1: The two works reach their emotional highpoint at R.8 and 12.1, respectively, and do so on a loud (*ff* in *Tallis*, *fff* in *Morgan*) E major chord; each work also marks its climax with the same tempo indications: “molto allarg.” and “largamente” in Vaughan Williams, “molto allargando” and “Largamente” in Canning; and call for the same level of intensity and manner of articulation: Vaughan Williams has “marcato” and “ten.”, while Canning calls for “sonoramente assai”.

*Gesture 9.* Vaughan Williams, S.4 – T.5 (12 bars) = Canning, 13.1 – 13.4: Both *Tallis* and *Morgan* wind down from their climactic points gradually, much like the slowing down of a music box, and finally fade away with a *ritardando* and a sustained chord that overlaps with the contrasting section that follows; in addition, the final stage of both “fade-aways” feature contrary motion in the outer voices.

Up to this point, the parallelism of *Gestures 1 – 9* has, in each instance, consisted of two elements: the similar nature of the gestures themselves and their appearance in the same “chronological” order. Beginning with *Gesture 10*, however, this chronological agreement breaks down, as *Gestures 10-11-12* in Vaughan Williams appear in the order 11-12-10 in Canning (and I have indicated what equals what in the headings of the remaining gestures.)

*Gesture 10* in Vaughan Williams, T10. – U.2 (3 bars) = *Gesture 11* in Canning, 17.6 – 18.1 (5 bars): The low-register pizzicato passages with which each piece had introduced the first presentation of its main theme (see *Gesture 2*) return with the same function, as they now precede the final statement of the main theme.

*Gesture 11* in Vaughan Williams, U.2 – W.10 (13 bars) = *Gesture 12* in Canning, 18.1 – 18.17: Both *Tallis* and *Morgan* offer the third and final statement of their respective themes.

*Gesture 12* in Vaughan Williams, Z.2 – Z.5 = *Gesture 10* in Canning, 13.4 – 15.6 (14 bars): Canning turns Vaughan Williams' brief solo for his Quartet's first violin into a more extended pair of cadenza-like solos for the first violin of Quartet I (8 bars) and the cello of Quartet II (6 bars), with both composers supporting the solos with sustained chords on the flat seventh degree of the scale (F minor in *Tallis*, D major in *Morgan*); Canning's solo for the first violin of Quartet I might well remind some listeners of the cadenza-like passages in Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*

Clearly, Canning's *Morgan* leans very heavily on Vaughan Williams' *Tallis* in terms of its broad structural outline and its most important gestures. It is as if Canning used *Tallis* as a pre-existent template of sorts, one into which he poured the content – melodies, harmonies, proportions, and “atmosphere” of *Morgan*.

And this, as noted above, has been common knowledge since Parmenter reviewed Howard Hanson's recording of the work in 1953 (even if the comparisons of the two works have not approached the detail presented here). Yet to charge Canning with “shameless plagiarism” (as Hurwitz does), or to write that *Morgan* “...is almost too close to [Tallis] for comfort” (as Parmenter does) is, I think, to miss the point entirely. First, why and for whom is it “too close for comfort” (not for me, even excusing the cliché)? And second, Canning was certainly not trying to sneak one past us (which is what plagiarists usually try to do). Rather, I would argue that Canning intended *precisely the opposite*: that he was paying tribute both to Vaughan Williams in general and to *Tallis* in particular, and that he was doing so in a very public and audible way, one that listeners who were familiar with *Tallis* could readily hear and appreciate without – as some of our “critics” – taking offense. In *Tallis*, then, Canning had found a piece with which he could identify both musically and spiritually. Indeed, as John Cuthbert, who studied with and knew Canning well, has so nicely put it: “*Morgan* is “a ‘Yankee-Protestant’ response to RVW's Elizabethan-Church of England piece” (communication of 22 July 2010). And Canning, quite thankfully, was not at all reluctant to let *Morgan* tell it to the world.

*Codetta I:* During the course of my communications with Mrs Canning, I asked her if she knew just what it was that had attracted her husband to *Morgan*'s tune. With her fine sense of humor, she quipped: “My maiden name was *Morgan*, so maybe that's why he became interested in the *Morgan* hymn.” And why not? On the other hand we can rule out another “*Morgan*” as the source of inspiration; Canning composed the *Fantasy* almost twenty years before settling down in Morgantown, West Virginia (end of “*Morgan*” quips!)

*Codetta II:* Since the “Golden Section” is not part of everyone's everyday vocabulary, perhaps a word of explanation is in order. The Golden Section – also called “extreme and mean ratio” (already in Antiquity) and “divine ratio/proportion” (from the fifteenth century on) – divides a given length into two parts in such a way that the ratio of the entire length to the larger segment is equal to the ratio of the larger segment to the smaller segment (no other ratio produces that result). One may quickly determine the Golden Section of a given length by multiplying the length as a whole by 0.618. Whether consciously or intuitively – and the latter is certainly the case with Vaughan Williams – many composers, artists, and architects have based the structure of their work on the proportion; the proportion is all around us in nature, where in the shape of a logarithmic spiral it appears in such things as the pine cone, the chambered nautilus, and the flight path of hawks as they swoop down on their prey.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Brief as this essay is, it could not have been written without the kind help of the following people: Mrs Ruby Canning, upon whose communications I based the thumbnail biography of Thomas Canning; Barton Hudson, who put me in touch with Mrs Canning; Beth Royall and Jonathan Cuthbert, for sharing with me their knowledge of the Canning holdings at West Virginia University; and David Peter Coppen, for the same with respect to the Eastman School of Music. (Note that at neither of those two sites do the Canning holdings contain anything relevant to the present essay.)

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**DISCOGRAPHY:**

I know of four recordings of *Morgan*, one of which has been issued on three separate occasions as part of three different CDs. (1) Jesús López-Cobos, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, which Telarc has packaged three times: (a) *Into the Light: Symphonic Expressions of the Spirit*, 80462 (1970), (b) *American Adagios*, 80503 (1998), and (c) *Breathe: The Relaxing Strings* 80635 (2008); (2) Raymond Leppard, *American Dreams*, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, Decca 458 157-2 (1999); (3) Leopold Stokowski, *Wagner, Chopin, Canning*, Houston Symphony Orchestra, Everest 9004 (1995), originally recorded in 1959, and now released on DVD, Everest 2029 (2008); (4) Howard Hanson, Eastman-Rochester Symphony, Mercury 40001 (1953; an LP, not reissued as a CD; see Clough & Cuming 1970, 46). Finally, one can listen to three performances of the work on YouTube. 🎵

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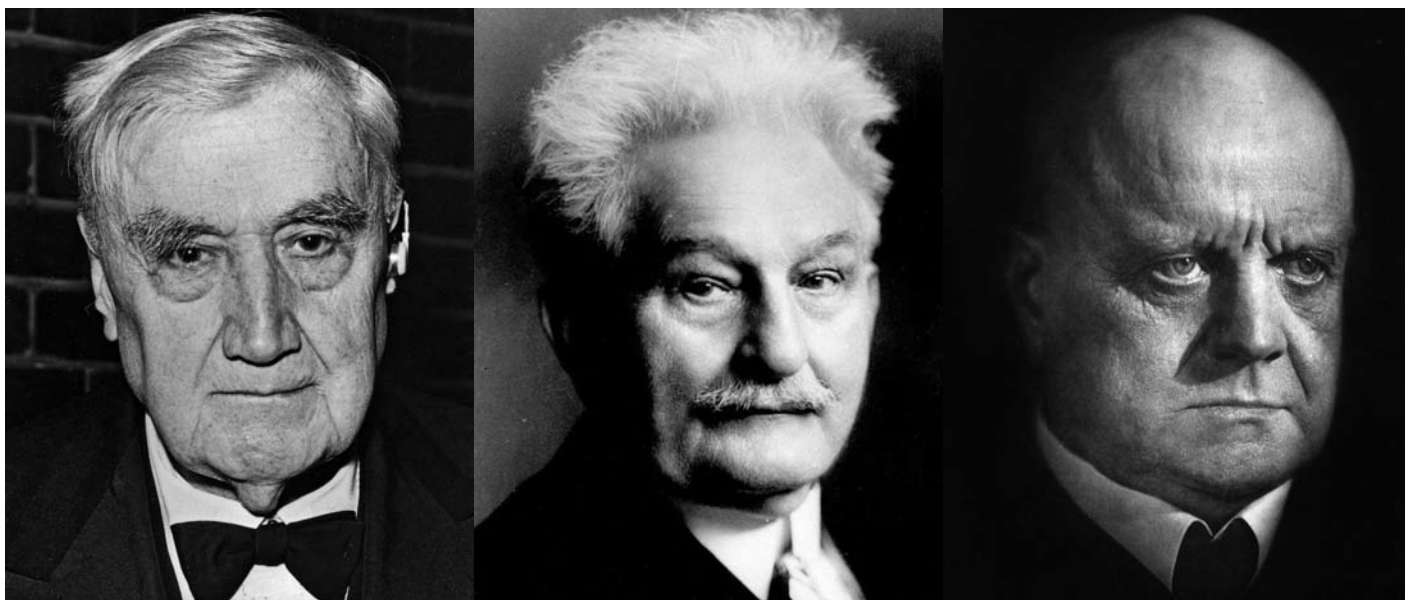
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# Ralph Vaughan Williams, Leoš Janáček and Jean Sibelius

James Lyon



I am a Swiss hymnologist, a member of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society, a lover of English music generally and that of Vaughan Williams in particular.

I study particularly the sources of tunes. For me, a French speaker, the English word “tune” takes on quite a particular meaning. Imogen Holst (1907-1984), in her valuable book, manages to give an extremely precise definition.<sup>i</sup> It was in the same spirit that I wrote a book dedicated to the melodies which Johann Sebastian Bach borrowed for his chorales.<sup>ii</sup>

In 2006, during two Prom concerts in London, I heard the music of Vaughan Williams, Janáček and Sibelius. My hymnologist’s heart and ears vibrated! I realised how their intimate understanding of melody could reunite them. It was then that I decided to apply myself to a project which was to result in a book devoted to them.<sup>iii</sup>

The task was not easy. I began by writing an article. I wanted to be able to understand their respective lives, their choices and their thoughts. I had the idea that part of the book should be entitled “an intermingled biographical journey”. This became the first chapter of the book, and the work was fascinating to undertake. I introduced several of the composers’ own writings. I think that those of Vaughan Williams are translated into French for the first time.

The other nine chapters fall into three parts, each part devoted to one of the three master composers. The first chapter of each part deals with melodic sources, and the other two discuss two works by each musician.

As regards Vaughan Williams, however, I proceeded in a slightly different way. Chapter 7 is concerned with the notion of folklore such as it was understood and described by William John Thoms (1803-1885) in 1846. From there, I concentrated on the predecessors of Vaughan Williams on the subject; in other words, on folk song according to Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924), Lucy Etheldred Broadwood (1858-1929) and Cecil James Sharp (1859-1924). I analysed several tunes collected by these remarkable folklorists and hymnologists. Here is one of them. It was collected in Dorset in July 1906 by the brothers Henry and Robert Hammond. It is a very beautiful tune in the Aeolian mode (*The Boys of Kilkenny*<sup>iv</sup> or *I will give my love an apple*):



As a hymnologist, I am obviously interested in the tune itself, but also in its modal character, an essential element of folk song. Notice, for example, the very beautiful ascending Dorian seventh, d-c, that closes each half of the tune.

I conclude this long seventh chapter with Vaughan Williams' own beautiful contribution, his first collected folk song, on Friday 4 December 1903, from the moving voice of Charles Potiphar (1829-1909), *Bushes and Briars*. Finally, and quite naturally for a hymnologist, the chapter ends by examining the link between these folk melodies and hymns, leading to much of the main body of the *English Hymnal* in 1906.

Chapters 8 and 9 are essentially concerned with *The Pilgrim's Progress*, first, John Bunyan's work, then the "Morality" by Vaughan Williams. I also wished to deal with the sensitive and complex question concerning Puritanism and music. For that purpose, I made particular reference to the remarkable study by Percy Alfred Scholes (1877-1958) which puts things in perspective<sup>v</sup>. Bunyan's text is psychologically deep and the music of Vaughan Williams translates it in exemplary fashion. However, the first performance of the work, on 26 April 1951 at Covent Garden, provoked much debate, crystallised in the very interesting correspondence between the composer and the musicologist Edward Joseph Dent (1876-1957), translated into French at the end of my chapter 9.

The links between Vaughan Williams, the main subject of my book, and the other two composers gradually emerge from the study. All value melody as such, independent of harmony, as an ancient source. They agree on the importance of folklore in the noblest and the most scientific sense of the term as conceived by Thoms. This is why I quote the beautiful aphorism of Vaughan William at the beginning of my book: "A good folklorist requires to be scientifically accurate, artistically imaginative and humanly sympathetic..." He refers, moreover, to the moral dimension which he no doubt inherited from his respected teacher Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry (1848-1918).

Janáček and Vaughan Williams associate music with truth. The two did not really know each other personally, except from Janáček's visit to London in the spring of 1926. Vaughan Williams appreciated the music of his Moravian colleague, but he had closer ties with Sibelius.

At the end of the day, I am convinced that these three master composers shared a common ideal, strongly rooted in the notion of culture such as Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) and the Austrian psychologist Paul Diel (1893-1972) conceived it in their different ways. They complement each other harmoniously.

Janáček associated the inner man, his psyche, with his melodic choices. His writings, of real scientific value, bear particular witness to this.

Sibelius, less involved in folk music research, translated into sound in masterly fashion the Finnish epic of *Kalevala*. He insisted on the importance, for a composer, of respecting the melodies of one's cultural origins.

Finally, Vaughan Williams, uniquely, gathers together those indispensable qualities particularly appreciated by a hymnologist: simplicity, sincerity and serenity.

<sup>i</sup> Imogen Clare HOLST, *Tune*, London, Faber and Faber, 1962, p. 11.

<sup>ii</sup> James LYON, *Johann Sebastian Bach: Chorals*, Paris, Beauchesne, 2005.

<sup>iii</sup> James LYON, *Leoš Janáček, Jean Sibelius et Ralph Vaughan Williams. Un Cheminement Commun vers les Sources*, Paris, Beauchesne, 2011.

<sup>iv</sup> Frank PURSLOW (Ed.), *Marrow Bones, English Folk Songs from the Hammond and Gardiner Manuscripts*, London, The English Folk Dance & Song Society, 2007, p. 12.

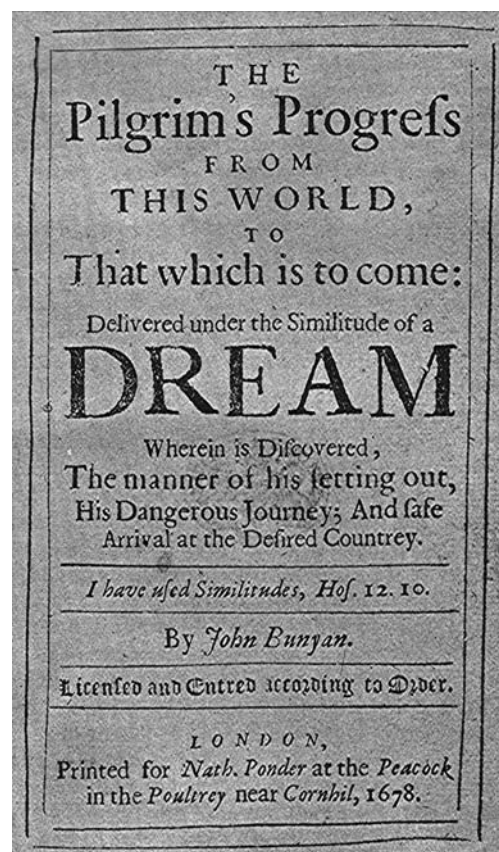
<sup>v</sup> Percy Alfred SCHOLES, *The Puritans and Music in England and New England. A Contribution to the Cultural History of Two Nations*, London, Oxford University Press, 1934, 1969. 🐦

## Ralph Vaughan Williams and literature in English

After this it was noised abroad that Mr Valiant-for-truth was taken with a Summons [by the same Post as the other], and had this for a Token that the Summons was true, That his Pitcher was broken at the Fountain. When he understood it, he called for his Friends, and told them of it. Then said he, I am going to my Fathers, and though with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the Trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. My Sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my Pilgrimage, and my Courage and Skill to him that can get it. My Marks and Scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought his Battles who now will be my Rewarder. When the day that he must go hence was come, many accompanied him to the Riverside, into which as he went he said, Death, where is thy Sting? And as he went down deeper he said, Grave, where is thy Victory? So he passed over, and all the Trumpets sounded for him on the other side.

John Bunyan  
from *The Pilgrim's Progress*

[Vaughan Williams chose not to set the words in brackets]

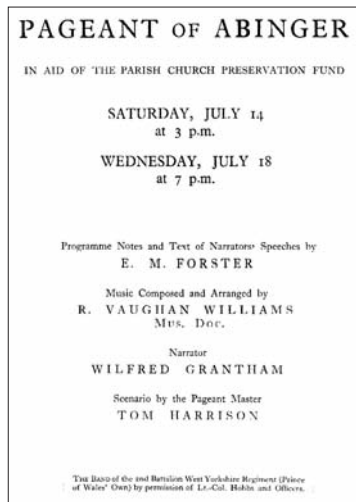


# Ralph Vaughan Williams and the two Surrey Pageants: *The Abinger Pageant* (1934) and *England's Pleasant Land* (1938)

Renee Stewart

When he was living in Dorking in the 1930s Vaughan Williams was one of three key local figures who produced two pageants. The other two were the author E. M. Foster and the talented young producer Tom Harrison. *The Abinger Pageant* was performed in the garden of the Old Rectory at Abinger Common and *England's Pleasant Land* in the grounds of Milton Court, an Elizabethan house at Westcott. Both pageants involved some 500 people of all ages, and animals played their part too. In 1934 there was an ad hoc committee (supported by many sub-committees) who organised the pageant. In 1938 the Dorking and Leith Hill Preservation Society formed a special organising committee. The programmes for both events list the numerous individuals and organisations who gave their support in many different ways.

*The Abinger Pageant* opened with a Woodman, in the role of narrator, driving sheep out of the arena so that the pageant could proceed. He is an important figure and the only performer who has a speaking part. He tells the story of Abinger in six episodes with a prologue and epilogue. Vaughan Williams was responsible for all the music though he was laid up with a poisoned foot and



unable to take the later rehearsals or conduct on the day. His place was taken by David Moule Evans, a composer and colleague at the Royal College of Music. (He was also one of the composers who wrote music for the *England's Pleasant Land*, the others being John Ticehurst, Mary Couper, Julian Gardiner and William Cole, Vaughan Williams' successor as conductor of the Leith Hill Musical Festival.) Vaughan Williams had written descriptive music for the various episodes (for example the Roman invasion of Britain). He used mostly traditional music such as Latin plainsong, hymns, folk songs and dances. One of the episodes tells of pilgrims visiting Abinger on their way to Canterbury. For the last scene Vaughan

Williams composed the anthem *O How Amiable* – published in 1940 and dedicated to Fanny Farrer, Secretary of Leith Hill Musical Festival – that ends with “O God our help in ages past”. The music is provided by a military band and choir. After the epilogue the narrator drives the sheep back into the adjoining field where sheep still graze today. A fair was held in the garden and the programme had advertisements in it including one saying “Get your milk from the cows that are taking part in the Pageant.”





Above: Vaughan Williams conducting the choir and band.  
E.M. Forster said the purpose of the pageant was to "show continuity of country life".

*The Abinger Pageant* had an underlying theme about preserving the countryside and this message was even clearer in *England's Pleasant Land*, which was actually presented by the local Preservation Society. The programme has three sections in it by E. M. Foster, Vaughan Williams and the Chairman of the Preservation Society. It was performed in the grounds of Milton Court, where there is a small ornamental lake. There were two major differences from the earlier pageant: there were six composers of the music and there was a play within the pageant with speaking parts. Vaughan Williams wrote music for the second act of *England's Pleasant Land*. The pageant opens with a prologue outlining early British history up to the Norman invasion in 1066 and the subsequent drawing up of the Domesday Book. Act 1 describes the breaking up of the old order when villagers had certain rights of ownership, withdrawn in the eighteenth century by parliamentary acts of enclosure. This caused rioting and violence and when the yeomanry were summoned a villager was shot. Act 2 is set in more settled Victorian times and the old squire gives a party when he muses about his ancestors who had owned his land. They appear as ghosts on the far side of the lake and for the "Exit of the Ghosts of the Past" Vaughan Williams wrote his first section of music. The second section he wrote is a "Funeral March for the Old Order"; this is sung by the choir to a translation

by Vaughan Williams of an Ode by Horace, "Swiftly they pass the flying years". The interesting thing about this music is that in it Vaughan Williams tries out ideas which were later used in his Fifth Symphony, first performed in 1943. Further, in July 1938 he had written of his fears that he was "drying up" as a composer. But he did write the pageant pieces and he did conduct the three performances and, presumably, the necessary rehearsals.

Vaughan Williams' manuscript of the *Abinger Pageant* is reasonably clear and there are copies of the soprano choir part which help. *England's Pleasant Land* is another matter. The manuscript is not clear or complete and I have not been able to see that of the other composers. I do not imagine that either pageant is likely to get another performance but it would be good to have some sort of clear score to play from for pleasure and interest. There is a lot of interesting information about both pageants and some intriguing practical detail. The first pageant had the rectory as a base which was used for the actors to change in and to provide a water supply; at Milton Court there were tents, and one of the acknowledgements listed is to the water company for providing a free supply to the catering tent. Among the individuals listed in the *Abinger* programme are a Master of the Horse and a Master of the Beasts, as well as the milk advertisement previously mentioned. The many papers about both pageants give a very good idea of the masterly organisation needed to make them the success they undoubtedly were. The part that Vaughan Williams played illustrated his opinion that a composer should not live in an ivory tower but should be involved with his fellows. And, too, the pageant music does provide us and future devotees with an enjoyable anthem and it helped in the writing of a great symphony.

## SOURCES

- Vaughan Williams manuscripts in the British Library.
- Programme booklets from Dorking Museum & Surrey Performing Arts Library.
- Soprano chorus parts from Janet Sharpe whose mother sang in the *Abinger Pageant*.
- Papers from Anne Farrer (*Abinger* Secretary, courtesy of her aunt, Shirley Corke).
- Photographs from Terry O'Kelly who, as a boy, acted in both pageants.

## From the Publicity Officer

The pianist Mark Bebbington has recorded the *Fantasia* for Piano and Orchestra of 1896. According to the pianist “the piece clearly points the way to later works and the genius to come.” The recording is now available on the Somm label, with the Ulster Orchestra conducted by George Vass. The disc has been enthusiastically received, and a full review will appear in the June *Journal*.

Another recent release, on Hyperion this time, couples *Flos Campi* and the less well-known *Suite* for viola and small orchestra, as well as Sir John McEwen’s Viola Concerto. Lawrence Power is the soloist, with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales conducted by Martyn Brabbins. (See review in this issue.)

Also acclaimed is the Hallé Orchestra’s performance of *A London Symphony* conducted by Sir Mark Elder. The coupling is the Oboe Concerto with Stéphane Rancourt as soloist. (See review in this issue.)

The latest Albion Records CD, “On Christmas Day”, was awarded five stars in the December issue of *BBC Music Magazine*. This qualifies it to go through to the BBC Music Magazine Awards 2012 to be considered for the awards by eight critics.

Some Society members joined Terry Barfoot’s “Arts in Residence” course recently to visit to the Somme, including Vimy Ridge, where they viewed the tunnels and battlefield monument, saw the field hospital building where Vaughan Williams was based, and were able to identify landmarks which inspired the *Pastoral Symphony*.

*The Lark Ascending* was broadcast recently on BBC4, as part of a short history of this ever-popular work. Interviews with Michael Kennedy and Tasmin Little also featured and the performance was given by young violinist Julia Hwang accompanied by Charles Matthews. The programme was introduced by Dame Diana Rigg.

The Society now has Facebook and Twitter pages, so do join other members and enthusiasts from around the world and help to contribute. There is always an interesting topic of conversation, and this helps to increase awareness of the Society.  
[www.facebook.com/pages/Ralph-Vaughan-Williams-Society/202673946456879](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Ralph-Vaughan-Williams-Society/202673946456879)  
<http://twitter.com/#!/RVWSociety>

*Job, a Masque for Dancing* and Symphony No. 8 feature on a new ICA DVD. The London Philharmonic Orchestra is conducted by Sir Adrian Boult. The performance took place at the Royal Festival Hall on 12 October 1972.

J S Bach’s “Giant” Fugue, BWV680 (a chorale prelude for organ) in the transcription for string orchestra by Vaughan Williams and Arnold Foster is newly available from Goodmusic:  
[www.goodmusicpublishing.co.uk](http://www.goodmusicpublishing.co.uk)

*Ralph Vaughan Williams Society Journal* issues 1 – 17 are now available as free downloads from the Society’s website, providing a user-friendly way to locate previous articles.

Em Marshall-Luck’s new book, *Music in the Landscape: How the British countryside Inspired our Greatest Composers*, is currently available for £20 instead of the usual £27.50 from  
[www.englishmusicfestival.org.uk](http://www.englishmusicfestival.org.uk).

### English Music Festival: 1 – 5 June

There are two significant Vaughan Williams performances taking place this year: the world premiere of the *Fantasia* for Piano and Orchestra, with Mark Bebbington and the BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by Martin Yates on 1 June, and *Job, a Masque for Dancing* in the piano transcription by Vally Lasker on 4 June. This concert also includes *The Lake in the Mountains* and *Hymn Tune Prelude on “Song 13”*, both with Iain Burnside as soloist. Solo songs and works for brass band by Vaughan Williams also feature elsewhere in the programmes. It is hoped to organise a members’ gathering around one of these concerts.

### Three Choirs Festival: Hereford: 21 – 28 July

The Society plans to have a presence at this year’s festival in Hereford and a members’ event is planned for Monday 23 July. *A Sea Symphony* is to be performed by the Philharmonia Orchestra on that evening, and Roderick Williams will sing *Songs of Travel* on Thursday 26 July. Both concerts are likely to sell out quickly once booking opens in April. The preliminary programme can be found at  
[www.3choirs.org](http://www.3choirs.org).

### Arts in Residence

6 March, 7.00 – 9.00pm  
Havant Arts Centre, East Street, Havant, PO9 1BS, Hampshire, Musical Masterworks series: Oboe Concerto and Symphony No. 8  
24 – 26 April, Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire: Exploring English Music, featuring Vaughan Williams alongside other English composers.  
[www.artsinresidence.co.uk](http://www.artsinresidence.co.uk).

### FORTHCOMING CONCERTS

More information is available on the Society’s website; always check details before making a special journey.

11 MARCH: 15:30

**St Barnabas Church, Middlesbrough**  
*A London Symphony*  
plus Delius and Bruch  
Andy Long, violin  
Cleveland Philharmonic Orchestra  
David Greed, conductor

14 MARCH: 19:30

**Birmingham Symphony Hall**  
*A London Symphony*  
plus Mozart and Richard Strauss  
Imogen Cooper, piano  
The Hallé Orchestra  
Sir Mark Elder, conductor

17 MARCH: 19:30

**Brighton Dome**  
*The Lark Ascending*  
plus Weber, Mendelssohn, Sibelius  
Fanny Clamagirand, violin  
London Philharmonic Orchestra  
Fabien Gabel, conductor  
(also 25 March, Eastbourne)

17 MARCH: 19:30

**All Saints Parish Church, Marlow**  
*Serenade to Music*  
Vivaldi, Magnificat  
plus Mozart and Elgar  
Chiltern Camerata/Camerata Consort

18 MARCH: 19:30

**Caird Hall, Dundee**  
*A Sea Symphony*  
plus Arne and Stanford  
Judith Howarth, soprano  
Derek Welton, baritone  
Dundee Choral Union  
Orchestra of the Scottish Opera  
Derek Clark, conductor

23, 25, 26 MARCH

**Tonhalle – Das Planetarium der Musik**

*A Sea Symphony*

Susan Gritton, soprano

Mark Stone, baritone

Düsseldorf Symphony Orchestra

Sir Roger Norrington, conductor

[www.tonhalle.de](http://www.tonhalle.de)

24 MARCH: 19:30

**Holy Trinity Church, Sloane Square, London**

*Symphony No. 6*

plus Debussy, Rachmaninov, Barber

Bloomsbury Chamber Orchestra

Michael Turner, conductor

30 MARCH: 19:30

**St James's Church, Piccadilly, London**

*Symphony No. 5*

with Beethoven and Sibelius

Anna-Liisa Bezrodny, violin

Corinthian Chamber Orchestra

Adrian Brown, conductor

MARCH – APRIL

**Dorking**

**Leith Hill Musical Festival 2012**

Works by Vaughan Williams featured

include: *Sound Sleep* and *To the Ploughboy*

Brian Kay, Festival Conductor

[www.lhmf.co.uk](http://www.lhmf.co.uk)

10 APRIL: 19:30

**Chipping Sodbury Town Hall**

*Five English Folksongs*

with Schumann, Saint-Saëns, Poulenc etc

Will Oinn, oboe

Yshani Perinpanayagam, piano

21 APRIL: 19:30

**St Andrew's Church, Oxford**

*A London Symphony*

plus Weber and Arutunian

Vere Smyth, trumpet

St Giles Orchestra

Geoffrey Bushell, conductor

22 APRIL

**Church of St Mary the Virgin, Whitley Bay, North Tyneside**

*Heroic Elegy*

plus Mercadante etc

New Tyneside Orchestra

Stephen Pettitt, conductor

[www.stmarysmunkseaton.co.uk](http://www.stmarysmunkseaton.co.uk)

22 APRIL: 16:00

**St Aidan's Parish Church, Leeds**

*Five Mystical Songs*

plus Stanford

St Peter's Singers

Simon Lindley, director

29 APRIL: 19:00

**Birmingham Symphony Hall**

Singalong with the CBSO

*O Clap Your Hands*

*Five Mystical Songs*

plus Parry, Handel, Elgar

City of Birmingham SO and Chorus

Simon Halsey, conductor

16 MAY: 18:30

**Chicago Symphony Center, Chicago**

*Tuba Concerto*

plus Mozart, Beethoven

Gene Pokorny, tuba

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Jaap van Zweden, conductor

(also 17 and 18 May)

18 MAY: 19:30

**Cadogan Hall, London**

*Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*

plus Delius, Ireland, Elgar

Julian Lloyd Webber, cello

London Chamber Orchestra

Christopher Warren Green, conductor

19 MAY: 19:00

**Birmingham Symphony Hall**

*Symphony No. 5*

plus Elgar, Britten

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

Andrew Manze, conductor

26 MAY: 19:30

**Bridgewater Hall, Manchester**

*The Lark Ascending*

*Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*

plus Elgar, Haydn

Giovanni Guzzo, violin

Manchester Camerata

Gábor Takács-Nagy, conductor

Pre-concert discussion: 6.30pm

31 MAY: 19:30

**Royal Albert Hall, London**

The Queen's Diamond Jubilee Gala

*The Lark Ascending*

plus Haydn, Piazzolla, Ravel, Mozart

Alison Balsom, trumpet

Nicola Benedetti, violin

Lesley Garrett, soprano

Emma Johnson, clarinet

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Sian Edwards, conductor

(also 6 June, Colston Halls, Bristol)

1 JUNE: 19:30

**St Mary's Parish Church, Woodbridge, Suffolk**

*The Lark Ascending*

(original version for violin and piano)

plus Bach, Ravel, Brahms

[www.woodbridgechamberconcerts.org](http://www.woodbridgechamberconcerts.org)

**ENGLISH MUSIC FESTIVAL**

[www.englishmusicfestival.org.uk](http://www.englishmusicfestival.org.uk)

1 JUNE: 19:30

**Dorchester Abbey, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire**

*Fantasia for piano and orchestra*

(world premiere)

plus Parry, Curtis, Ireland, Moeran

Mark Bebbington, piano

Julian Lloyd Webber, cello

BBC Concert Orchestra

Martin Yates, conductor

2 JUNE: 19:30

*Silence and Music*

plus Bax, Tippett, Gibbons, Morley,

Howells, Britten etc

Joyful Company of Singers

Peter Broadbent, director

3 JUNE: 11:00

**Silk Hall, Radley College, Abingdon, Oxfordshire**

Songs by Vaughan Williams, Finzi,

Ireland, Howells, Gurney, Britten etc.

Philip Lancaster, baritone

Andrew Plant, piano

4 JUNE: 11:00

**Dorchester Abbey, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire**

*Job, a Masque for Dancing* (arr.

Vally Lasker)

*The Lake in the Mountains*

*Hymn Tune Prelude on "Song 13"*

plus Gurney

Iain Burnside, piano

4 JUNE: 19:00

**Dorchester Abbey, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire**

*"Henry V" Overture*

plus Ireland, Howells, Arnold,

Bantock

Jaguar Land Rover Brass Band

Dave Lea, director

We welcome news of forthcoming Vaughan Williams concerts in electronic form only; it is not possible to accept listings from printed brochures.

If you would like to receive publicity updates from me please send your email address to [archerypromos@btinternet.com](mailto:archerypromos@btinternet.com)

Karen Fletcher

# Letters

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## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

It was a privilege to have been able to attend the launch of Somm's new recording of Vaughan Williams' *Fantasy* (or *Fantasia*) for piano and orchestra, coupled with two concertos by William Mathias. The pianist, Mark Bebbington, clearly demonstrated the work's indebtedness to both Schumann and Brahms; and yet, in those comparative extracts, I thought I heard a voice that was at least a bit English if not necessarily that of the composer that we have come to know and love. Listen to the jaunty fugal bit at about 14:32 and try to persuade me that anybody else could have come up with it.

But I wonder whether the work was influenced in scale and structure by fashion? Advertisements in a recent edition of *Gramophone* indicate that Hyperion and Dutton Epoch have just issued identical couplings of Charles-Marie Widor's First and Second Piano Concertos with his *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra. This seems a bit tough on both labels, since so much work goes into releases of this pioneering nature. I bought the Hyperion, mainly because it was downloadable in FLAC format for £7.99, which I thought was good value.

Widor (1844-1937) might one day be remembered for more than just one movement and perhaps even for more than one instrument, and the sleeve note for his *Fantaisie* suggests that he may have started a local trend. His twenty-two minute work (about a minute longer than that by Vaughan Williams) was first performed in 1889, and was followed by works with a similar title by Debussy (1890), Saint-Saëns (1891), Benjamin Godard (1894), Max d'Ollone (1897), Marcel Dupré (1908) and Fauré (1919). The early *Fantasy* by Vaughan Williams falls into this sequence, and he may have been aware of a current French fashion. It is fair to say that it is not difficult to find similar works by composers more widely scattered, including Busoni, Liszt, Scriabin, and Fernand de La Tombelle – so the idea was neither new nor exclusively French.

The Widor *Fantaisie* was performed by the Philharmonic Society in London in March 1890, and received a warm review in *The Times*. Could the young Vaughan Williams have heard it? It's a nice thought, but perhaps a bit far-fetched; he was probably still at school. It is a big, tuneful work, fully justifying its place in Hyperion's "Romantic Piano Concertos" series, but it would be fanciful to attempt to find connections with our home-grown hero. If you want to try it, it will be £7.99 well spent! Meanwhile, I'm struggling a bit with the Mathias.

Somm have chosen to call this early work by Vaughan Williams a "Fantasy", but I have already seen one review murmuring gently that Michael Kennedy correctly catalogued it as a "Fantasia". Vaughan Williams often gave his works Italian names, but he liked "Englishness" as well. Would he have minded? Discuss!

**John Francis**

*Tonbridge, Kent, UK*

## PAUL BEN-HAIM

With reference to Mr Michael Greenwald's letter commenting on my article about Paul Ben-Haim, I am afraid that he is in error. Ursula Vaughan Williams, on the last page of her biography, refers to an Israeli composer called Haim Alexander and not Alexander Ben-Haim as Mr Greenwald suggests. Haim is a common Hebrew first name and I doubt that this man of whose composing talent I am unaware bears any relationship to Paul Ben-Haim. The New Grove entry on Alexander, furthermore, makes no connection between the two Israeli composers.

I am sure that there was no connection between Vaughan Williams and Ben-Haim as Mr Greenwald seems to imply. I have gone through a number of Vaughan Williams books in my possession and there is nothing whatsoever relating to Ben-Haim, nor for that matter to anyone called Haim Alexander in them. Vaughan Williams is not mentioned anywhere in the official Israeli (in English) biography of Ben-Haim by Jehoash Hirshberg. Hirshberg does mention Haim Alexander but there is no suggestion of any relationship with Ben-Haim.

Incidentally, "Ben-Haim" in Hebrew means "the son of Haim". His father's German first name was "Heinrich" and it is likely that his first name in Hebrew was "Haim".

**Cecil Bloom**

*Leeds, UK*

## THOMAS CANNING

I was very interested to see Rikky Rooksby's mention of Thomas Canning's *Fantasy on a Hymn by Justin Morgan* in the October issue of the *Journal*. I have always loved this music ever since I first ran across it performed by Howard Hanson and the Eastman-Rochester Symphony Orchestra on the wonderful Mercury "American Music Festival" series which was originally issued on LP recordings.

It seemed to me that someone who had written such a beautiful piece must certainly have had other works recorded as well, but I have never been able to find any. There is also a dearth of information available on Canning and in 2008 even his item on Wikipedia was removed. The reason given was that it "doesn't indicate importance/significance". However, if anyone is interested in at least finding out more about what he wrote over the years there is a good site at the American Composers Alliance – <http://composers.com/thomas-canning> – which has a list of his works as well as a photo and a short biographical sketch.

Some years ago I asked Canning's widow if there were any other recordings of his works around and she said no, just the ones of the *Fantasy*. She said that though he wrote a great deal for schools, colleges and church groups, which he found both challenging and gratifying, he never tried to promote his own

music. A tape was usually made at the time of performance but these were not commercial tapes. The *Fantasy on a Hymn*, written in 1944, was premiered on 23 October 1946 at the Eastman School of Music Fall Symposium, with Dr Howard Hanson conducting the Eastman-Rochester Symphony Orchestra. After several subsequent performances it was recorded by Mercury in 1952 for the American Music Series on LP MG 40001.

I went back to listen again to the lovely recording Mr Rooksby mentioned – *American Dreams* (Decca) – and in doing so found a couple of errors in the insert notes. Thomas Canning died in 1989, and not in 1959. They also attribute the piece to his time in Nebraska during the Second World War, when he was teaching aircraft mechanics there, but Canning himself has said that it was written in April 1944 while he was residing briefly in his home town of Brookville, Pennsylvania. Nevertheless, it is a beautiful performance of an outstanding piece of music.

**Richard Lewis**

*Hopewell Junction, New York, USA*

### VAUGHAN WILLIAMS AND HYMNS

While I enjoyed Hugh Benham's article on Vaughan Williams' original hymn tunes in the October issue of the *Journal*, I was surprised to see that, after commending the composer's sensitivity to word stress, and citing "Sine nomine" as an example of how alternative rhythms were provided for different verses, he printed the melody of verse 1 with the stress "WHO thee by faith" rather than "who THEE by faith" which was specified by the composer in the 1904 edition of *English Hymnal*. I know most congregations ignore that, along with the similar instance in verse 8 ("through GATES of pearl"), but it is not what the composer intended. Incidentally, the Cardiff Festival Choir recording mentioned in the article (a disc certainly well worth having) makes the same error.

I would also like to endorse Michael Greenwald's rational comments on the Britten-bashing that has gone on in recent issues. "A rather lesser figure"? I think not: Britten must surely rank as one of this country's finest composers, a true genius, and we do our Society and Vaughan Williams himself no service by pretending otherwise, nor by claiming to understand and censure Britten's character and conduct in an unfair comparison. I personally would not wish to be without the music of either of them.

**Charles Paterson**

*Asfordby, Leicestershire, UK*

### MORE...

I enjoyed reading Hugh Benham's article in the last issue of the *Journal*. I wonder if readers are aware that the harmony in the original version of "Sine Nomine" is slightly different from the version now usually used. The early editions of the *English Hymnal* used the original version. Later editions contain the revised version. The original version is used in the *New English Hymnal*. The revised harmony is slightly stronger, but there is something quite appealing about the original. I have sometimes used the original in the last verse.

Much as I love "Down Ampney" and "Monk's Gate", I have sometimes wondered why so many of the phrases in both tunes

begin on two-beat notes. Perhaps it is a throw back to such tunes as the "Old Hundredth". Would it be sacrilege to say that the tunes in *Ancient and Modern Revised* fit the words slightly better?

**Philip Moore**

*Malton, North Yorkshire, UK*

### THE MAGIC CASEMENTS

In issue 52 of the *Journal* (October 2011) you raise once more the question editorially: "If [Vaughan Williams] had no religious belief, why did he set to music so many sacred texts?" I make bold to reply "Because music is religion!"

Music itself, when worthy of the name, is of God, as many composers have claimed. Thomas Hardy remarked that poetry modulated into religion; that is true for the arts in general, and for music in particular. Thus, in Santeri Levas' book *Sibelius, a personal portrait*, the composer is quoted as saying that "Music is on a higher plane than everything else in this world. It is brought to life by the Logos, the divine in art." I recently heard the Hallé Orchestra's Bradford performance of the Finnish master's astounding Second Symphony, which led me to say to my companion that "it is part of the 'case for God', since its scale is far away beyond mere human skill." Only a score or so out of quadrillions of people have composed at its level! Vaughan Williams is among them. When he was eighty-five he wrote to Swaffham Primary School that "Music will enable you to see past facts to the very essence of things. The arts are the means by which we can look through the magic casements and see what lies beyond." Thomas Aquinas offered in the thirteenth century five "proofs of the existence of God". Not all of them are universally accepted, but we can stem any leakage by adding another two: the "moral argument" and that from music and the arts!

Atheists rightly and busily deny the existence of a god or gods that are nonexistent! On questions of ultimate reality, I am impressed by Tillich and say God does nothing so boring as merely to exist, but rather is "That whence things stand out" (Latin "ex-sistere"). I prefer the phrase "The Reality of the Sacred Mystery" to "The Existence of God", and I recall claiming to an atheist friend that Hebrews 12,22: "But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God" is achievable in our earthly life in transcending experiences, including those of ineffable music.

Vaughan Williams' last compositional act appears to have been setting his favourite carol "The First Nowell" for a Christmas piece of that name, as far as the lines "To seek for a King was their intent/And to follow the star wherever it went." His musical star drew him through a life which embodied Hardy's painful truth that "...if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst" (*In Tenebris II*), and led him to use traditional Christian language for musical expression. Thus to all intents and purposes he ended his life among us as a Christian hero (if perhaps not quite a "saint") on the presumption that "if it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it is a duck."

**Frank McManus**

*Todmorden, West Yorkshire, UK*

### VAUGHAN WILLIAMS AT THE THREE CHOIRS

I read with interest about the performances of two Vaughan Williams choral works during summer festivals. In connection with *Five Tudor Portraits* being performed at Chester Cathedral, I wonder whether this could be the first ever performance in an English cathedral? I've always imagined that the nature of much of the text by John Skelton has made it unsuitable, certainly until recent years. I can't recall its being done at the Three Choirs Festival at all, and it seems to me a pity that the wonderful fourth movement, "Jane Scroop", has not been performed separately sometimes.

Although I do attend at least one Three Choirs concert every year I can't say that I've been too impressed by their coverage of Vaughan Williams choral works. The *Five Mystical Songs* performance during this year's festival at Worcester was not an "official" event and therefore never appeared on their website or in the printed brochure. It seems to me extraordinary that they did not have a cathedral performance with full orchestra and a notable soloist to mark the centenary of its premiere in that very same building. The *Sea Symphony* is programmed for 2012, but neither *Sancta Civitas* nor *Dona Nobis Pacem* has been heard at the Three Choirs for twenty-five years, and another piece first performed at that festival, the *Fantasia on the Old 104th*, has been totally ignored, I think. Given that Elgar apparently saw *Sancta Civitas* as completing the trilogy he had begun with *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*, and the number of times those works have been included in the festivals, surely *Sancta Civitas* should also be heard again at one of them?

**Robert Allan**  
Edgbaston, UK

### IN PRAISE OF THE EIGHTH

As a loyal devotee of this great man's music I do feel we need to fly the flag more for this wonderful and underrated work from an octogenarian composer. It has everything: marvellous form, notably in the first movement; great humour, and moments of great beauty, particularly the modulation from B flat major to D major towards the end of the first movement, which is, for me, one of the most moving and beautiful passages in the composer's output, reminiscent of the great key change from C minor into E major for the second subject in the first movement of the Fifth. What also is so impressive, completely putting to bed the tiresome and totally erroneous opinion of some so-called "experts" who suggest an amateurish orchestral technique, is the sheer luminosity and clarity of the writing at this point. It is an object lesson for any young composer attempting to orchestrate a tutti passage with a reduced-size orchestra, and the introduction of the trombones is a masterstroke. In the second movement his marvellous contrapuntal technique comes to the fore, and a great sense of humour; in the third movement he shows his great facility to write so beautifully for strings, and the last movement, much maligned, is such happy, joyous music, more befitting of a twenty-something, not an eighty-four year old.

I love the story in Michael Kennedy's book about Tom Whitestone, a nine-year old who heard the Eighth alongside a Haydn symphony at a concert conducted by Sir John Barbirolli. He sent the conductor a letter saying how much he'd enjoyed the Haydn but not the Vaughan Williams. Barbirolli sent the letter

on to the composer, who wrote directly to the boy: "Dear Tom, Sir John Barbirolli has sent me your letter to him - I am glad you like Haydn. He was a very great man who wrote beautiful tunes. I must one day try to write a tune which you will like!" How typical of this most wonderful man. I do urge all Vaughan Williams fans who are perhaps not overly familiar with this most marvellous work to enjoy, what will be, a very pleasant experience indeed.

**Adrian Woolliscroft**  
Kings Heath, Birmingham, UK

### VAUGHAN WILLIAMS AND "MUSICA RESERVATA"

In June 1972 five friends and I decided to start informal fortnightly meetings at each others' houses, where we would take turns to present an evening of recorded music. Presenting the very first event, I made a vow to myself that at each of my evenings I would play a different work by Vaughan Williams. Around the same time another of our group was making a similar vow in respect of Elgar.

Thirty-nine years and over 900 evenings later we are still going, although the personnel has changed. Somewhere along the way we acquired the name "Musica Reservata". I have kept my vow, although there have been some repeats, but the Vaughan Williams works have not yet been exhausted. Every piece we have ever presented appears in a huge tome which is regularly updated.

Members may be interested to learn which of Vaughan Williams' works have proved most popular amongst us over the years. Examination of our records shows that the following pieces have been played more than twice. The figures in brackets show my contribution to each total. My proselytising has had some effect, it seems, although the others seem oddly unmoved by the Fifth Symphony. Perhaps they have no souls.

Symphony No. 5	5(5)
<i>The Lark Ascending</i>	5(1)
<i>A London Symphony</i> (three versions)	4(2)
Symphony No. 4	4(3)
Symphony No. 6	4(3)
<i>Tallis Fantasia</i> (including percussion version!)	4(3)
<i>Six Studies</i> (various versions)	4(1)
<i>Linden Lea</i>	4(4)
<i>A Sea Symphony</i>	3(1)
<i>A Pastoral Symphony</i>	3(1)
Symphony No. 8	3(1)
Symphony No. 9	3
<i>Five Variants of "Dives and Lazarus"</i>	3(2)
<i>Dona Nobis Pacem</i>	3(2)
<i>Valiant for Truth</i>	3(3)

Largely because of my efforts, Vaughan Williams comes third in our "League Table" (based on "needle time") after Beethoven and Mozart. Elgar is currently fourth.

Over the last twenty years collections at each evening have raised well over £4000 for the Musicians' Benevolent Fund.

**Michael J Gainsford**  
Burbage, Leicestershire, UK

# Concert Reviews

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## OXFORD in WORCESTER

In a summer when no Vaughan Williams was performed at the Proms (keeping company with a puzzling absence of Haydn as well), the Vaughan Williams flag was thankfully flown by many of our regional music festivals, including the fine English Music Festival at Dorchester and the Worcester Three Choirs Festival.

The Worcester event managed a very good balance of interesting repertoire, the familiar rubbing shoulders with the not so familiar, and attracting large audiences in both categories. Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, Mozart's and Brahms' Requiems fell into the former category, Elgar's *Caractacus* and Vaughan Williams' *An Oxford Elegy* into the latter. A superb performance of Mahler's *Third Symphony* conducted by Susanna Mälkki, fell, I suppose, somewhere between the two.

I'll admit now that the *Oxford Elegy* holds a special place for me in the Vaughan Williams canon, and the first few notes always stimulate activity in the neck hairs region: the heady mix of Arnold's verse and Vaughan Williams' music creates a rare magic, even when the vital delivery of the narrator is less than perfect. It is always difficult to put the sound of the classic recording with John Westbrook from the mind – this recording directed by David Willcocks must represent the gold standard – but there should be plenty of room for other interpretations, and the audience in the cathedral for the performance on the penultimate day of the festival were far from being disappointed.

The resident Philharmonia Orchestra had been on top form in my two previous encounters with them and remained so for this concert under the baton of Geraint Bowen, revealing the wonderful subtlety of Vaughan Williams' masterly scoring in its sunshine and shadow. This subtlety of delivery also went for the Three Choirs Festival Chorus, as part of the orchestral texture in their wordless contributions as well as putting over Arnold's fine verse with feeling and clarity of diction. The narrator, Worcester Cathedral's Dean, Peter Atkinson, gave a convincing account of Arnold's evocative verse – the "edge" that would have been brought by a professional actor seemed to have been balanced out by the personal integrity of his delivery – making this performance a rewarding experience for everyone.

Earlier in the day, two Vaughan Williams pieces were included in an intriguing folk-inspired concert in Huntingdon Hall, "English Music and Song." Local composer and performer, Ian King, led an imaginative group of musicians in a couple of his own folk song arrangements as well as the premiere of his *A Worcestershire Song Cycle*, an original take on the "folk" idiom, sometimes humorous and often very moving. The Vaughan Williams elements in this concert, "The Vagabond" from *Songs of Travel*, and the haunting *Romance* for viola and piano, sensitively performed by Wilhelm Theunissen and Shulah Oliver respectively, fitted very well into this imaginatively constructed programme.

Graham Muncy

## THE NINTH IN LIVERPOOL

I have been acquainted with the Ninth Symphony for well over forty years, but have to admit that it is not amongst my favourites among the nine. However, when my daughter, who lives in Cheshire, informed me that the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under John Wilson were to perform it on 13 October I leapt at the rare chance of hearing it live, along with the three other pieces of English music in the programme. For some reason the programme was entitled "Serenade", although only one piece really fitted that description.

After a truly horrible journey to the concert – severe congestion on the M6, getting lost in Crewe, being sent by satnav on a circuitous route to the concert hall – we arrived just in time to snatch a couple of baguettes in the Rubato restaurant before it was time to enter the art deco splendour of the Philharmonic Hall's auditorium. This really is a jewel amongst concert halls! It was about eighty per cent full, and I noted quite a few younger persons in the hall, an encouraging sign.

The programme commenced with Holst's *Perfect Fool*. I had never heard this live, and it was a revelation – a most exciting (and loud) rendition. The bass drummer had a ball. The viola solo near the end was superbly played and this was acknowledged at the end by the conductor.

The second item was the really rather beautiful Cello Concerto by William Walton. The soloist, who excelled himself, was the Norwegian Jonathon Aasgaard, the principal cellist of the RLPO, who is earning himself a reputation as a soloist of note. This was a most moving performance, the soloist capturing the bitter-sweet character of much of the music, and coping expertly with the difficulties and cross rhythms of the scherzo. The work met with tumultuous applause and four curtain calls for the soloist.

After the interval we had the only true serenade in the programme, that of Edward Elgar, which was beautifully and delicately played.

This was the calm before the storm. A procession of additional instrumentalists entered for the Vaughan Williams, including three clutching saxophones, and an entourage of additional percussionists. I missed the flugel horn player but he was called to his feet by the conductor at the end of the work.

Despite the excellent and sympathetic (and again very loud!) performance, this still remains for me an enigmatic work. The fault no doubt lies with me but it seems to lack the cohesion of the other symphonies. I regret to say that the two probably eleven year-olds sitting in front of me showed distinct symptoms of boredom during this work, but it must be a difficult work for a child to get hold of. Despite lots of orchestral colour it is by no means flashy. Nevertheless I enjoyed hearing a rare performance of the work, and by the reception it received so did the rest of the audience. The conductor received three curtain calls.

The programme notes for both the Vaughan Williams and the Walton were written by Michael Kennedy.

For anyone visiting the Philharmonic Hall, I can thoroughly recommend the Rubato baguettes!

Michael J Gainsford

### PASSION IN THE STOCKS AT HIGHGATE

In November, Hampstead Garden Opera (HGO) presented *Hugh the Drover* or "Love in the Stocks" in a version re-scored for chamber orchestra – with the support of the Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust – by Oliver-John Ruthven, who also conducted. The reduced score is to be retained by Faber and is available for hire by other groups. Since the venue was a theatre over the Gatehouse pub at Highgate, I had expected to see about three acoustic instruments and a keyboard, so I was pleasantly surprised to see a real chamber orchestra comprising fourteen first-class players. The one slightly alien feature was a piano, which enabled the battery of percussion in the full score to be reduced to something fitting the space – and the effect was marvellous. At no point was I conscious of anything missing from the full score.

Having got the reduction out of the way, what about the opera? With eight principals, a chorus of twenty-one and assorted morris dancers, this was not in any way reduced. Five of the principals were double cast and, if your programme is to hand, I got to see those in the left hand column.



A singer and dancer herself, Angela Hardcastle was directing her first opera, and did a fantastic job. There are some big ensembles in *Hugh* and everything worked smoothly. There were no gimmicks: the scenery was a simple evocation of a Cotswold town. I had not realised that you could do stonework and cobbles so convincingly just with paint.

I like small opera companies like this, and the reason is both simple and obvious: the singers playing young, attractive, passionate lovers are generally young, passionate, often attractive, and also cheaper. Something happens to a voice as it matures sufficiently to fill Covent Garden; of course the result, at its best, is wonderful, but something is lost, and that is the ability to convince as a love-struck teenager.

I am always drawn to the lead soprano, Mary, and I am delighted to say that Elaine Tate did not disappoint. Her expressive face lent itself to anguish, and sometimes to anxiety, and Mary has plenty of that to deal with. The pain as she realised that she was to be married on a Tuesday morning was palpable, and if my eyes watered now and again I put it down to my cold. The same face radiated joy and passion as she fell in love, and at last allowed the drover to claim his bride. The singing was beautiful; I was impressed by the range as well the power of her voice.

David de Winter as Hugh was very good indeed, with a powerful tenor voice. David, like Elaine, is young, both having just graduated from the Royal Academy of Music. He has many productions, and a small recorded repertoire, to his credit and will go far. The boxing match is a central part of the opera;





Above: Elaine Tate as Mary and David de Winter as Hugh.

Facing and following pages: costume designs for *Hugh the Drover* by Charlotte Tymms.

though vicious, it can just teeter on the brink of comedy. So, perhaps to draw attention away from the boxers ducking and feinting, the chorus crowded round the ring on all four sides. Sitting in the front row with my feet on the cobbles, I prepared my lap for what seemed the inevitable descent of a soprano into it, but it was not to be! Even so, that proximity enabled me to experience opera as never before.

All the principals were good; there was never any sense of second best. Camilla Bull made a sensitive Aunt Jane. She is probably a bit too young to be Mary's aunt, and sounded all the better for it. Barnaby Beer played the Showman and the Sergeant, impressing with both singing and showmanship. The horns under the bowler hat were a good idea, and a further useful point about the French was made by the Napoleonic doll, a sort of "guy", uncomfortably impaled on a pike.

The excellent Ed Ballard as John looked a bit sad as he was booed at the end; I had warned HGO's Chairman, Alastair Macgeorge, to tell him to expect it every night, but it must come hard after a convincing performance as one of the nastiest villains in all opera; the audience identifies with the character. The opera's story really does convince: Vaughan Williams was a master of the stage as well as the symphony hall. This is the

most nearly conventional of his five operas, and I tell you (again) that it will eventually earn the acclamation due to it.

Was there a disappointment? Only that I did not get a chance to see the other principals. Would I have fallen in love with Philippa Murray as Mary? Yes, of course I would! And did Zachary Devin acquit himself well as Hugh? I understand that he did. Was it worth staging this opera in a theatre that seated only 104? Unquestionably! I've said it before: opera is about passion, this one particularly so; that was conveyed in full measure. My wife, daughter number two and boyfriend agreed with me that such an experience might one day be equalled, but never bettered. We owe an enormous debt to HGO and those who made this production possible.

The cold confined me to quarters next day, and I listened to both of the available recordings in an attempt to see which I prefer. In 1979 Sir Charles Groves cast Robert Tear (then 40) and Sheila Armstrong (37) as Hugh and Mary, Michael Rippon (40) as John, with Helen Watts (52) as Aunt Jane. This is currently available only as part of the 30-CD EMI Collector's Edition,

which is a real bargain at £35 or so if your existing collection overlaps it by anything less than 90%. Matthew Best, in 1994 (on Hyperion), cast Bonaventura Bottone (44), Rebecca Evans (31), Alan Opie (49) and Sarah Walker (51) in those parts. Stephen Connock endorsed the Matthew Best recording in the very first edition of the *Journal*, but now speaks very warmly of the Groves. "Buy both!" was his suggestion then, and that's still good advice seventeen years on. Both of the mezzos as Aunt Jane are on the fruity side, but not unmusically so. I'm going to stick to my guns and suggest that the younger Rebecca Evans is most nearly convincing as the bride, and recommend the more recent set on those grounds alone. Accuse me of sentimentality if you must, but not inconsistency.

It has been a privilege to see three enjoyable productions of this opera in the past four years (with York Opera in 2007 and New Sussex Opera in 2010). I hope there will be more like this one to come – ideally in theatres that allow the experience to be shared with somewhat bigger audiences, and perhaps resulting in a "live" DVD since this is, technically, the twenty-first century. Well done Hampstead Garden Opera; please don't let this be your first and only Vaughan Williams opera.

John Francis

**Mark Hammett** attended the same performance and writes: I went for two reasons – the first being that The Gatehouse was once one of my “locals” and it was great to revisit the area, and secondly because I had not yet witnessed a Vaughan Williams opera. After a disappointing early experience with opera I was persuaded to try again, and I absolutely loved the evening. In that intimate environment, you felt totally part of the action and, even from my seat which was sideways on to the stage, you could not help but be enthralled, and the balance between vocals and chamber orchestra was just right. The stage setting was simple yet effective, representing the town square, which became crowded when the full cast was present. The evening seemed to pass very quickly, and I was doing quite well until Mary’s father, the Constable who had disowned her when she kicked John the Butcher into touch for Hugh, once again called her “daughter” as she and Hugh were leaving for ever, at which point it appeared that someone had misplaced a lump and left it in my throat! It was a very special evening and I would dearly like to see the other Vaughan Williams operas, but the jury is still out on operas by other composers, especially in a foreign language!

**Graham Muncy** saw the same cast: I’m very pleased that I got to Highgate for the wonderful production, the day after John and Mark. Like Mark, I was sideways on with a good balance between singers and orchestra. Everything seemed very well thought out with the chemistry between performers and

of this opera as it could appeal to good amateur companies as a welcome change from *Merrie England* or Gilbert and Sullivan. Vaughan Williams’ time as a major opera composer has yet to come, but I’m sure that it will with superb and memorable productions like this. The Gatehouse, by the way, is a fine venue with the best theatre bar I’ve ever come across!

**David Chandler** saw the “other” cast and wrote an enthusiastic review for *Opera Today*. It’s worth tracking this down online for an interesting discussion of why the opera has not been taken up by professional opera companies (essentially the libretto and the lack of “psychological interest”). He writes “It would perhaps be a slight exaggeration to suggest that all the problems surrounding *Hugh the Drover* have been solved at a stroke by Hampstead Garden Opera, but it is close to the truth. Their production feels absolutely right. Altogether, while I can imagine technically more polished versions of *Hugh the Drover*, I find it hard to imagine a better one and, now that it has been adjusted to the needs of smaller companies and venues I hope it will become more widely recognised for what it is: not a great opera, but great operatic entertainment, with melodies that lodge themselves in your head for days.”

#### ACCADEMICO IN BIRMINGHAM

My wife & I attended a rare and very beautiful performance of the Violin Concerto (*Concerto Accademico*) on 23 November 2011 in Birmingham’s wonderfully restored Town Hall. The Orchestra of the Swan under their energetic conductor David Curtis gave an all-English programme of Elgar and Ireland and were joined by the young violinist Tamsin Waley-Cohen who not only gave the perceptive interpretation of the concerto but also of *The Lark Ascending*. The latter was slightly spoilt by the rather powerful horn player but the sixteen sweet strings of the Swan Orchestra and the appropriate winds plus triangle more than just accompanied – the atmosphere of the English countryside on the cusp of changing forever was perfectly caught.

My main reason for attending this concert was the chance to hear the concerto, long a favourite from my teens when I imported an LP recording by Joseph Fuchs, and then later Nora Grumlikova on Supraphon, an even better recording. I can even just remember one live performance, again in Birmingham with the Orchestra da Camera in the City Art Gallery. I think the soloist was Kenneth Page, with Adrian Boult conducting.

It is an underrated work and long overdue for a definitive recording. The Buswell/Previn recording is poorly balanced and the soloist is clearly not at ease with the improvisatory nature of the glorious slow movement. Bradley Creswick on Chandos is very edgy in tone, although Hickox brings out the orchestral part with understanding, battling against a cavernous acoustic, the recording not really up to Brian Culverhouse’s usual standard.

So please can someone invite Tamsin Waley-Cohen to record her heartfelt interpretation, preferably with David Curtis and his Swan Orchestra? She wrote on my miniature score – bought by my wife for 4/6d as a Valentine gift in 1967! – “I hope you enjoy this wonderful work”, and David Curtis wrote, wistfully, I think, “Here’s to our recording”. If you don’t know the work, track it down, you won’t regret the effort.

*Stephen Hayford Morris*

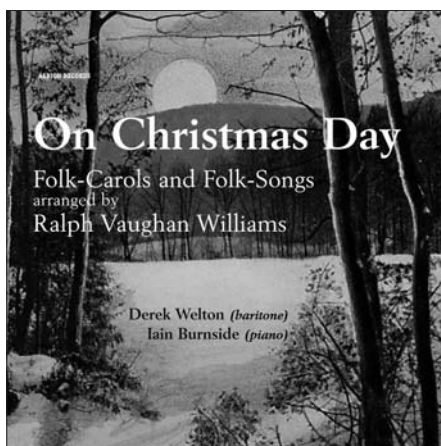


audience at a high level. With one or two reservations (the bells in Act 2) the reduced orchestration was brilliant and the band played with real flair and commitment. Was there some music cut from the *London Symphony* somewhere at the beginning of Act 2? This reduced version should enable further productions

# CD Reviews

## Vaughan Williams Folk carols and Folk songs

An essential ingredient in my Christmas listening has always been **Vaughan Williams's** *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*. Much more rarely performed, or recorded, are his folk carols, which include *On Christmas Night* and *The truth sent from above* which both feature in the *Fantasia*. He had begun collecting songs and carols in 1903 and many of them were included in *The Oxford Book of Carols* of 1928, of which he was a co-musical editor.



Albion Records was launched by the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society in 2007 and I've particularly enjoyed its song recitals "Kissing her hair" and "The sky shall be our roof". Unlike those collections, the present one employs just the one singer – Australian baritone Derek Welton, accompanied by pianist Iain Burnside. There are two books of carols; *Eight Traditional English Carols* and *Twelve Traditional Carols from Herefordshire*, surrounding the *Six English Folk-Songs*. A few well-known carols jostle with rarities, with Stephen Connock's booklet notes containing information on them all. It's charming to hear *Dives and Lazarus* in its original form. Welton is an excellent singer, his vibrant baritone perfect for the swaggering nature of some of the songs, while he can scale it down tenderly for others. His diction is perfect. Burnside is very much "house pianist" for Albion and the ideal accompanist (Albion Records **ALBCD013**, 54 minutes).

Mark Pullinger

*This review first appeared in the December 2011 edition of International Record Review and is reproduced here with their kind permission.*

## English Vocal Music

**Hadley** Fen and Flood<sup>a</sup>.

**Vaughan Williams** The Garden of Proserpine<sup>b</sup>. In the Fen Country<sup>c</sup>.

**Traditional** The Captain's Apprentice (arr. Vaughan Williams)<sup>d</sup>.

<sup>a</sup>Mary Bevan (soprano); <sup>b</sup>Jane Irwin (mezzo);

<sup>ad</sup>Leigh Melrose (baritone);

<sup>abd</sup>Joyful Company of Singers; <sup>abc</sup>Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra/ Paul Daniel.

**Albion Records** **ALBCD012** (full price, 1 hour).

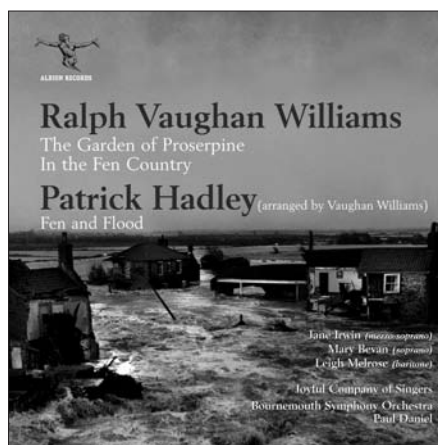
English texts included.

Website [www.albionrecords.org](http://www.albionrecords.org)

Producer Michael Ponder.

Engineers Dexter Newman, Dillon Gallagher.

Dates September 27th and 28th, 2010.



Here's something to fascinate any lover of British music, starting with the first recording of Vaughan Williams's earliest large-scale work. *The Garden of Proserpine* was started in about 1897 and completed in 1899 (at about the same time as the recently disinterred Mass that he submitted for his Doctor of Music at Cambridge). It is a setting for solo mezzo-soprano, chorus and orchestra of Swinburne's poem published in his 1866 collection of *Ballads and Poems*. This had scandalized Victorian taste when it first appeared and, as the notes for this release observe, the collection "remained a watchword for modernity and rebellious free-thinking" to artists of Vaughan Williams's generation. The rather world-weary mood of the poem ("I am tired of tears and laughter... Here life hath death for neighbour") clearly attracted the young composer. His setting is not only fluent and well crafted but it also contains some pointers to his mature style, particularly in the modal colouring of the melismatic vocal solos, and in the characteristic turning of phrase endings and cadences

onto radiant major chords. Though Vaughan Williams was still at a very early stage in his artistic development, this is a genuinely intriguing piece that has been given a very persuasive first recording. Jane Irwin is radiant in the solos and the Joyful Company of Singers is an excellent, well-balanced choir, warmly supported by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. Paul Daniel conducts a most sympathetic performance.

This is followed by an atmospheric and sensitive account of *In the Fen Country*. Just how quickly Vaughan Williams started to find his completely original voice is apparent from this work: its first version was completed only five years after *The Garden of Proserpine* and already shows the influence of folk music that the composer had begun collecting in 1903. Daniel's performance is a fine one, with some eloquently shaped instrumental solos from the Bournemouth SO principals.

Patrick Hadley is best known on record for *The Hills* (Philip Ledger for EMI) and the "symphonic ballad" *The Trees so High* (Vernon Handley for Lyrita). *Fen and Flood* is later than either of these pieces. Written in 1955, it commemorates a night in January 1953 when well over two thousand people lost their lives when a catastrophic combination of spring tides and high winds caused massive flooding in The Netherlands and East Anglia. As Ursula Vaughan Williams put it in her biography *RVW: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (OUP; 1964), the cantata *Fen and Flood* showed "how man's wit and resource stood against the powers of water on the low lying, fertile but dangerous East Anglian coast". The work was dedicated to Vaughan Williams, partly because it used *The Captain's Apprentice*, a folk tune that VW had collected at King's Lynn in 1905. Originally composed for two soloists, male chorus and instruments, *Fen and Flood* so impressed VW that he asked Hadley if he might arrange it for mixed chorus. It was a charming gesture of friendship from a composer in his mid-eighties, and at the height of his fame. There was a successful performance of his new arrangement at the King's Lynn Festival in 1956, and Ursula Vaughan Williams recalled another in Croydon two years later at which VW, Hadley and his co-librettist Charles Cudworth were all

present (the second half of the programme was *A Sea Symphony*). It was evidently a stirring occasion: "The choir's performance was a justification of Ralph's faith that the introduction of women's voices had been well worthwhile, so all of them were pleased...and we drove back to London in an atmosphere of mutual esteem and affection." This piece was well worth reviving and its premiere recording is as thoroughly committed a performance as anyone could wish for. Mary Bevan and Leigh Melrose are fine soloists and, as in *The Garden of Proserpine*, the choir and orchestra are first-rate. As a bonus, Melrose sings the version of *The Captain's Apprentice* transcribed by Vaughan Williams.

Daniel has often demonstrated great warmth and understanding in his performances of British music and he's the ideal conductor of all the works here. The sound is good, and the booklet includes interesting notes as well as complete sung texts. Albion Records, the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society's own label, deserves congratulations for such an enterprising and valuable release.

*Nigel Simeone*

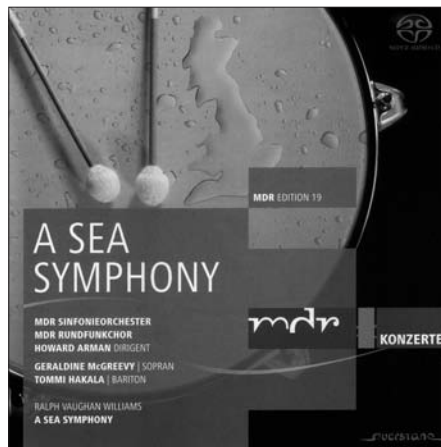
*This review first appeared in the January 2012 edition of International Record Review and is reproduced here with their kind permission.*

#### **Vaughan Williams: *A Sea Symphony***

Geraldine McGreevy (soprano); Tommi Hakala (baritone); MDR Symphony Orchestra and Radio Choir/Howard Arman  
**MDR KONZERTE VKJK 0731**

Since many of the performers on this disc were new to me, it makes sense to begin with them. MDR stands for Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk, or Central German Broadcasting. The amalgamation in 1991 of two radio orchestras based in Leipzig gave birth to the MDR Symphony Orchestra, whose Chief Conductor is Jun Märkl, soon to be succeeded by Kristjan Järvi. The conductor on this disc is actually the Chorus Master of the associated Radio Choir, a post he has held since 1998. He was born in London, but most of his career seems to have been spent in Germany. Geraldine McGreevy is an English soprano who trained at the Royal Academy of Music. Members who have the NMC disc of Hugh Wood's magnificent and challenging *Scenes from Comus* on their shelves

will already be familiar with her voice. Finally, Finnish baritone Tommi Hakala studied both in Finland and in Germany, and in 2003 was the winner of the BBC's Cardiff Singer of the World competition.



This is a live recording from the Leipzig Gewandhaus. The audience is well behaved and for most of the performance the listener wouldn't know they were there. The final bars of the work, fading into nothingness, are followed by several seconds of silence, so why the producers decided to include applause, and over half a minute of it at that, is anybody's guess. Individual views differ as to whether or not to include applause in a live recording, but I do think it was a pity to retain it in this case. This is not, however, a reason for members to pass over this performance, which is an outstanding one.

You suspect a safe pair of hands from the opening bars, which are splendidly sonorous and majestic, but which above all show a real feeling for the ebb and flow – please forgive the maritime imagery – of

Vaughan Williams' musical pulse. The suspicion is confirmed when the mood changes for the words "Today a rude brief recitative", whose music has just the right swaggering, even swashbuckling quality. In short, this first movement is hugely impressive, with magnificent sweep, as if conceived and performed in a single breath. The second movement communicates great calm, though the incomparable Sir Adrian Boult achieves even more. The scherzo is brilliantly precise and exciting, but as so often in this work, it is the long opening passage of the finale that demonstrates most clearly the quality of the choral singing. The choir is magnificent throughout, in fact, and it is clear that the work has been scrupulously prepared, presumably by the conductor of this performance. Singling out the near-ecstatic singing of the passage "The true son of God shall come singing his songs", again from the finale, shouldn't detract from the remarkable achievement of the whole. Orchestras don't always take kindly to being conducted by the choral director, but there are no signs of any problems here, the group playing with remarkable skill, commitment and conviction. Geraldine McGreevy is very fine, her stratospheric notes admirably secure, and the voice steely and clear in her very first solo. Tommi Hakala sings with superb spirit and insight, and that is enough for this listener to forgive him his rather pronounced vibrato; others might feel differently. They might be more disturbed that I, too, by his sometimes rather wayward English vowels. The soloists' long duet in the fourth movement is very affecting, and their way with "Bathe me O God in thee", just before the famous passage "O thou transcendent", is as beautiful as I can remember hearing it.

## I N T E R N A T I O N A L RECORD REVIEW

FOR THE SERIOUS CLASSICAL COLLECTOR

We will be pleased to supply a free sample copy of our monthly magazine to members of The Ralph Vaughan Williams Society

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The *Sea Symphony* is a difficult work to hold together, and Arman is very successful indeed. His pacing of the work is unerring, and balancing these huge forces has been most skilfully done. Only in the final minutes do I part company with him. Firstly, the silence before the the coda (“O my brave soul! O farther sail!”) is much longer than the “piccola pausa” indicated by the composer. Then the final section is very slow indeed, arguably too slow, though again, others might not share this subjective view. At no other point do I find the conductor’s vision of the work to be anything other than totally convincing.

The recording, presumably intended for broadcast, is of demonstration quality. Details emerge, especially in the orchestral writing, that I have never heard before. If you find the same, be assured, they are all there in the score. The English/German booklet is excellent, featuring, amongst other things, a short and thoughtful essay on the work signed by the conductor.

There are many very fine performances of this work on disc, and members will all have their own favoured version. I hope they will be ready to add this one to their collection, however, as I have been bowled over by its quality. It will certainly be one of the choices when, in the future, I feel the need to hear the *Sea Symphony*.

William Hedley

*This is an amended version of a review that first appeared at musicweb-international.com*

### Vaughan Williams: *Flos Campi*; *Suite for viola and orchestra*

with McEwen: *Viola Concerto*

Lawrence Power (viola); BBC National Orchestra & Chorus of Wales/Martyn Brabbins

**HYPERION CDA67839**

An especially warm welcome to this splendid feast of music for viola and orchestra (+ chorus). I suppose that the CD could have been called “A Tribute to Lionel Tertis” as two of the pieces, McEwen’s Concerto and the Vaughan Williams *Suite* were in fact written for him, while *Flos Campi* was premiered by and dedicated to Tertis.

*Flos Campi* is the best known, or rather, least unknown, piece on the CD and like

many Vaughan Williams works from around this date – mid 1920s – is totally original, unique in style and form and deserves to be much better known. It may be that its performance requirements (sympathetic and virtuoso viola and fairly demanding parts for wordless chorus) are asking a lot, together with its rather obtuse/precious, biblical/erotic literary subtext. Vaughan Williams’ skill in orchestral writing and the effect of the wordless chorus (delicate brushstrokes of orchestral and vocal colour delivered by a master at least the equal of Ravel) transport the listener in this sensitive recording to a world heady and sensual. Of all the composer’s works, *Flos Campi* is perhaps the hardest to get a grip on and in fact, Vaughan Williams’ friend, mentor and confidant, Gustav Holst, could never come to terms with it.



Lawrence Power’s eloquent advocacy for this piece should win it many new friends. From the delicate yearning phrases of “Sicut lillium” (No. 1) to the passion and energy of “En Lectulum” (No. 4), Power has the piece well under his fingers, and support from chorus and orchestra is subtle and effective.

I had always considered the *Suite* for viola and orchestra, dating from 1934, to be rather a “curate’s egg” of a work, lacking the unity and cohesion of a proper concerto with its eight short movements and somewhat wanting in overall focus. This recording has made me realise just what I’ve been missing! The clue is in the “Prelude” (group 1), obviously inspired by Vaughan Williams’ beloved J. S. Bach. So the key to the whole work is there from the start – a string of mainly short dance movements in the manner of a Bach keyboard suite – Vaughan Williams’ own original take on the instrumental concerto.

Again, Power and Brabbins make a strong and convincing case for this work which emerges full of fresh melodic invention and with an orchestration demonstrating yet again that Vaughan Williams’ technique was second to none, despite what he tells us elsewhere!

The first 3 movements (group 1 – “Prelude”, “Carol” and “Christmas Dance”) are almost a miniature viola concerto in their own right, while group 2 – “Ballad” and “Moto Perpetuo”, range between a lyrical beauty that remind me of some of the more serene passages in *Job*, and a busy piece of viola virtuosity. In the final group (“Musette”, “Polka Melancolique” and “Gallop”) the viola leads us on a journey from a tranquil state of meditation to an almost breakneck frenzy. This reading should go a long way towards greater appreciation by listeners and perhaps other potential performers.

Not many of us will be familiar with the music of John Blackwood McEwen (1868-1948), one time Principal of the Royal Academy of Music. This revival of his *Viola Concerto*, commissioned by Tertis in 1900, must be applauded – a British romantic concerto for viola is quite a rare bird (although not unfamiliar territory for Lawrence Power as he impressed me with a performance of a concerto by York Bowen at a recent English Music Festival concert.)

In contrast to the two Vaughan Williams works, the McEwen is more of a conventional, late-romantic concerto with its solo part a vehicle for the viola to flex its muscles, Power once more making a very strong case for lifting this work from its century of neglect. With its attractive melodic ideas it deserves the occasional performance in a field where repertoire choice is not excessive.

So, very warm congratulations to Hyperion, Lawrence Power, Martyn Brabbins, the BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales for this excellent issue. In a recent broadcast of the Vaughan Williams *Suite*, (with Power again as soloist), Brabbins expressed his opinion that the works of Vaughan Williams were becoming more meaningful and important to him. I am looking forward to this inspired conductor being able to further indulge his growing enthusiasm.

Graham Muncy

**Music for a Time of War**  
**Vaughan Williams: *Symphony No. 4 in F minor***

with Charles Ives: *The Unanswered Question*; John Adams: *The Wound-Dresser*; Benjamin Britten: *Sinfonia da Requiem*

Sanford Sylvan, baritone  
Oregon Symphony Orchestra/Carlos Kalmar

PENTATONE CLASSICS 5186 393



Here is an eclectic choice of music from the Uruguayan Carlos Kalmar, chief conductor of the Oregon Symphony, one of America's oldest orchestras. The programme was chosen for the orchestra's debut at Carnegie Hall, New York where it was greeted with a great reception from a packed audience and the press. The recording was made from live performances in Portland, Oregon in May 2011, prior to the Carnegie triumph. As in the concerts, the first three pieces are played without a break – no applause – but the symphony stands alone.

*The Unanswered Question* (1906) has no real connection to wartime. Its theme is existential, a challenge to the universe, the uncertainty that can lead to conflict. Sustained strings at the beginning are played *pianissimo*, a plaintive offstage trumpet questions the status quo, then spiky woodwinds interrupt the hushed atmosphere to suggest disorder. Calm is restored as the work closes with a return of sustained strings, creating a vast stillness, and the music merges with the next piece almost unnoticed.

*The Wound-Dresser* (1989) takes words from Walt Whitman's *Drum Taps* (1865) in which he reflects upon his experiences as a nurse in the American Civil War. In this harrowing work, John Adams, associated with the "minimalist" movement, shows that he is a very serious composer indeed. According to the

excellent sleeve notes, Adams was moved to compose this masterpiece by the lingering death of his father, and also by friends who had battled with AIDS. For baritone and orchestra, the piece constructs an arch of sound starting quietly with muted strings, followed by the singer beginning his journey through the wards of the wounded. Trumpet and woodwinds penetrate the strings as the words describe the full horrors of war. The climax occurs with these disturbing words from the baritone: "I dress the perforated shoulder, the foot with bullet-wound, cleanse the one with a gnawing and putrid gangrene, so sickening, so offensive..." Thereafter the music and words are full of resignation, with memorable flute and violin solos, until we return to where the music started at the words "Some are so young, some suffer so much..." This is a compelling performance, with superb playing from the orchestra. Sanford Sylvan gave the premiere of this work: his voice is quite forward in this recording, but powerful and crystal clear, and you will hear every word of Whitman's testimony.

After the strings' quiet fade out we are straight into the next work. *Sinfonia da Requiem* (1940) opens with a bombshell from the timpani, which in this recording could have you running for cover! This is in my view Britten's orchestral masterpiece, cast in three movements, each with a title from the Latin Requiem Mass. Kalmar and his players deliver a dark, taut and very committed account. *The Dies Irae* is a *tour de force* with brass, woodwind and timpani in terrific form. This is very warlike music, suggesting perhaps a frenzied dogfight in the skies. The closing *Requiem aeternam* takes us into calmer waters, with flutes and haunting strings delivering hope and resolution, all played with great precision and clarity by this superb orchestra.

Carlos Kalmar has an empathy for British music: in the recent past he has conducted Vaughan Williams' *London* and Sixth symphonies and two performances of the Fifth are planned for next year. The Fourth Symphony was composed in the early 1930s and was first performed in 1935; again, not wartime music, but certainly warlike. Despite the composer's protestations to the contrary, I can't help but hear the prophecy of an imminent, dreadful catastrophe in this violent and angry symphony. Adrian Boult, who conducted the premiere, was also of this view and interestingly Kalmar with the exception of the last movement – where he is quicker – adopts very similar tempi to

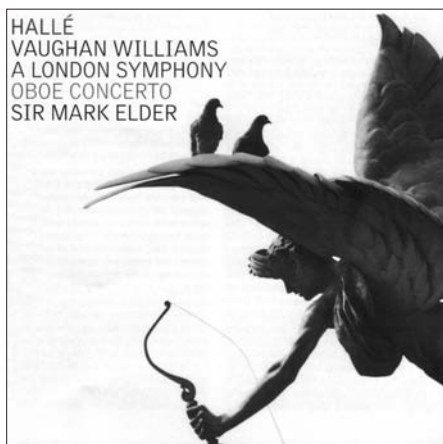
Boult's first recording of 1953. The orchestra play it as if it was in their blood, and Kalmar has a fine grip of its architecture, concentration and excitement. The savage opening of the first movement, once again, could have you out of your seat: my cat shot out of the room when the first few bars burst from the speakers! Thereafter, Kalmar is a little less impatient in his tempi than some conductors, notably the composer himself. In the maelstrom that this symphony creates we perhaps forget that there are moments of pastoral calm and the *lento* passage that concludes this first movement brings fine playing from the strings, icy consolation rather than benediction. The second movement has an air of loneliness and quiet foreboding with exceptional woodwind playing, the solo flute emerging from the darkness to bring a ray of hope at the end. The last two movements are played at a relentless pace and here the brass playing is both exciting and faultless in its precision. The *scherzo* snarls and sounds as poisonous as Ursula Vaughan Williams once suggested it was meant to be, before passing without a break into the finale. The energy of the last movement is breathtaking, the oom-pahs briefly parodying a military band before the music whips into an absolute frenzy, heading unstoppably towards the dramatic and enlarged return of the opening bars and then the final crashing F chord, the "slamming of the door" that ends the symphony. A fine performance, then, and the other music is challenging but superb, a successful concept and a welcome addition to any collection. The sound has amazing clarity and depth without a hint of distortion in the louder passages. Audience intrusion is virtually nil, and there are excellent and detailed liner notes that include the full Whitman text.

Robin Barber

**Vaughan Williams: *A London Symphony*; *Oboe Concerto***  
Stéphane Rancourt, oboe  
Hallé Orchestra/Sir Mark Elder  
HALLÉ CDHLL 7529

This is, I think, the first recording of *A London Symphony* since Richard Hickox' pioneering 1913 original version on Chandos, released in 2001. Here we have the more familiar 1936 final edition of the score. Sir Mark Elder, it seems to me, has suddenly blossomed as an interpreter of Vaughan Williams' music. This is a monumental score and he approaches it as

such. It is a very good performance overall, and the recording is excellent, but I have some reservations. The recording was made live in 2010 at the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, but you would hardly know it, as no audience sound is perceptible. The hushed opening is magical. After the murmurings in the basses the symphony slowly arises from the mists into daylight and off we go into the busy streets of the capital, with the tremendous forward momentum, colour and atmosphere that this kaleidoscopic first movement needs. Elder adopts almost exactly the same timings for each movement as did his great predecessor Sir John Barbirolli in the recording he made with the *Hallé* in 1957. The difference is in mood, Elder's version a majestic and truly symphonic account sometimes lacking the passion and intensity of Barbirolli. This is particularly noticeable in the slow movement, which, despite beautiful playing, never reaches the intense rapture captured in the earlier performance. Then to the scherzo, which for me lacked the bounce and excitement that the composer's sprung rhythms should bring to this lively but mysterious nocturne. The finale is much more successful, and after the anguished opening and sombre march the music builds in grandeur before the chimes usher in the nicely judged epilogue and the symphony fades into silence.



The Oboe Concerto is a studio recording and is most beautifully played by the French-Canadian soloist, Stéphane Rancourt, and with wonderful accompaniment from the Hallé strings. What an exquisite work of art this is, surely the finest and I think now the most frequently played of the composer's concertos. It has a yearning, pastoral atmosphere, though there are moments of darkness and agitated intensity in the last movement. The playing of the opening movement paints a wide Arcadian landscape as the composer reverts to his

familiar meditative style. There is a chirpy middle section where the soloist has a nice spring in his heels before returning to the earlier contemplative mood. The short second movement, which although a minuet has in this recording a fresh open air feel to it, is faultlessly played. The finale calls for truly virtuoso playing and Rancourt delivers with seeming effortless. The music ebbs and flows with the clear, lyrical oboe to the fore but there are moments of hushed quietness where time seems to stand still – perhaps moments of remembrance? The lush strings are wonderful throughout, never intruding, whether in soft murmurings or soaring to that ethereal, luminescent string sound that is the trademark of Vaughan Williams. The CD comes with authoritative notes by Michael Kennedy. I know of no finer recording of this concerto, but for an alternative version with a more chamber-sized accompaniment, Maurice Bourgue on Nimbus is excellent, with faster tempi in every movement.

*Robin Barber*

### **Vaughan Williams: *Symphony No. 9 in E minor***

with Parry: *Elegy for Brahms*  
BBC Symphony Orchestra/Sir Andrew Davis

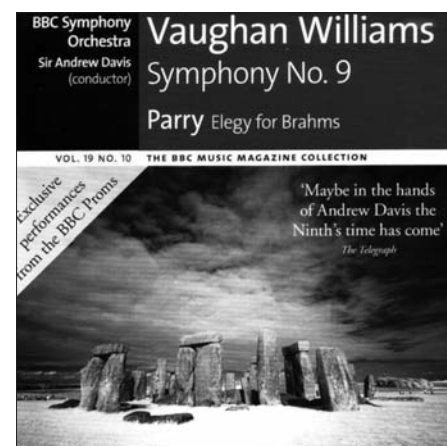
**BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE, Vol. 19, No. 10**

These are live recordings from the BBC Proms and were issued as the free cover disc of the July 2011 edition of the *BBC Music Magazine*. It is not, therefore, a commercially available CD, but is probably still obtainable as a back issue, and of course second hand. I would commend it to members as a very useful addition to a collection of recordings of this magnificent symphony.

Given the recent sad losses, Andrew Davis is now undoubtedly the most experienced conductor of Vaughan Williams' symphonies. His interpretation of the Ninth has grown immensely and this live performance from August 2008 has greater depth and understanding than the studio recording he made for Teldec in 1995, also with the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

The recording and playing are excellent, the BBC strings superb, and with excellent contributions from the essential, otherworldly, flugelhorn and the three saxophones that give the symphony its unique timbre. Here, the opening bars of

the symphony immediately give an impression of a vast, brooding, Wessex landscape that heralds the drama and exploration that is to come.



Comparing this performance to the earlier one, Davis is quicker in the first three movements but slows down the majestic finale to great effect. Several conductors have rushed through this great climax without realising what it was about. The comparison with Bruckner's monumental, slow burn, explosions of sound has been made before and this, indeed, is what this performance brings. At the awesome ending of the symphony your eyes should be turned to the heavens and the hairs tingling on the back of your neck and this performance does just this, a vision of the universe, but not a valedictory one.

In discussion after the rather unsatisfactory premiere of the symphony, the composer and Sir Adrian Boult agreed that the finale should be taken a good deal more slowly, but Vaughan Williams didn't live to sanction this. Some conductors such as André Previn and Bernard Haitink have adopted even slower tempi than Davis in this last movement, perhaps to give an expansiveness equivalent to Bruckner or Mahler in their later works.

The other work on the CD is Parry's *Elegy for Brahms*, a lovely piece, very well played and well worth listening to if you have not heard it before.

Should any Chandos recording manager be reading this review, may I make this suggestion? Davis is under contract with you, the late Richard Hickox' symphony cycle was left incomplete, with the *Seventh* and *Ninth* unrecorded. You could conclude this wonderful modern cycle with Davis conducting these two very powerful symphonies.

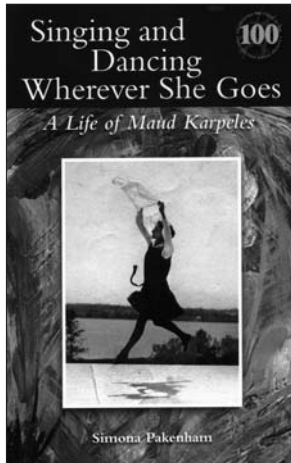
*Robin Barber*

# Book Reviews

## ***Singing and Dancing Wherever She Goes: A Life of Maud Karpeles***

Simona Pakenham

English Folk Dance and Song Society, 279 pages, ISBN 978-0-85418-216-9, £10



This is a delightful and well-written biography of Dr Maud Karpeles, who was one of the founders of the English Folk Dance movement before the First World War, and of the International Folk Music Council after the Second.

The late Simona Pakenham has built upon the foundation of Karpeles' own writings, using her unpublished autobiography, letters and diaries, as well as the reminiscences of her many friends and colleagues, to create an extremely readable account of an important figure in English music during the last century.

Maud Karpeles grew up in late Victorian London, the daughter of German Jewish immigrants. The middle child of five, she was closest to her younger sister, Helen. Growing up in a wealthy family, with eight domestic servants, she became aware at an early age of the poverty outside her home, and later joined the Fabian Society. She undertook social work in Canning Town, and it was there, in trying to create amusement for disadvantaged children, that she first realised the delights of singing and dancing.

In 1909, she and Helen attended a Shakespeare Festival in Stratford-upon-Avon, at which she met Cecil Sharp for the first time. She became his amanuensis, his biographer and his most devoted supporter. She travelled to the United States with him to collect folk songs in 1916-18, and later on her own to Newfoundland – the aim being to discover folk music which had crossed the Atlantic centuries earlier and been preserved in its original form. The result was the discovery of thousands of songs hitherto unknown in this country.

The EFDS flourished before and after the war, with thousands of enthusiastic supporters involved in festivals, workshops and schools. The loss of Cecil Sharp in 1924 was a major blow both to Maud and to the Society, and it was Vaughan Williams who stepped into the breach, becoming its Music Adviser. He had met Cecil Sharp soon after 1903, when they began collecting songs

independently of one another, and was a member of the committee of EFDS from its inception. He remained a close friend and supporter of Maud until his death, assuming the Presidency of the International Folk Music Council from its inception in 1947.

The IFMC became the epicentre of Maud's life for the remainder of her own life – she was its Secretary for nearly two decades and continued to serve it thereafter. She died in 1976, in her ninety-second year, after a life of extraordinary devotion to the cause of music. She was awarded the OBE in 1960, and received honorary degrees from two Canadian universities.

Simona Pakenham has done full justice to a remarkable life. The book is a good read, and members of the Society will find the frequent references to both Ralph and Ursula Vaughan Williams of great interest. There is also room in its 257 pages for an insight into the "politics" of folk music, which dominated meetings of the IFMC. There is, however, no mention of the left-wing attacks, led by Bert Lloyd and David Harker, on Cecil Sharp and his life's work, which erupted in the early 1970s. Given that Maud Karpeles' unpublished autobiography contained only limited references to its subject, Simona Pakenham has done a marvellous job in bringing this major figure of English music out of the shadow of her mentor, Cecil Sharp.

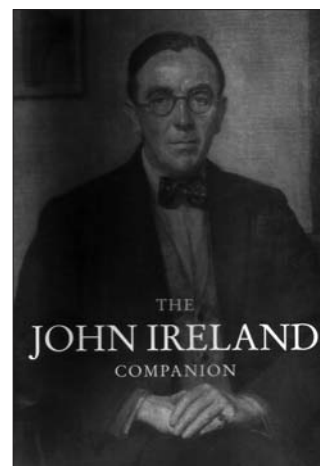
FOOTNOTE: Those who have access to YouTube on the internet can enter "Maud Karpeles" and then click on "The Kinora Films", where they can watch Maud and her sister Helen dancing with Cecil Sharp and George Butterworth in 1912. The past, as they say, is another country.

*Simon Coombs*

## ***The John Ireland Companion***

Edited by Lewis Foreman

Boydell Press, 530 pages, ISBN 978-1-84383-686-5, £40



Having accepted the challenge of introducing this book to Society members I was distressed by the bulk of the object the postman handed over. Then I read in the preface that the book is "not intended to be read from cover to cover at one go", and felt a certain relief! In fact, it makes compelling reading, one short

chapter leading to another, though I certainly can't claim to have read it "at one go".

The title of the first chapter, "John Ireland: A Life in Music", suggests a biographical sketch. This turned out to be only partly true. Colin Scott-Sutherland offers a tantalising glimpse of some of the main events in the composer's life, but these serve as a preface to a discussion of the broad themes to be found in the works. The commentary is clear and level headed, but a fairly broad knowledge of Ireland's catalogue is needed to get the most out of it, and I did miss that introductory story of the life. This is rectified, in part, later in the book.

Members will know they are in safe hands when they see the name of English music specialist and RVW Society member Lewis Foreman as editor of this mighty book. He has cast the volume in five sections. The first is entitled "The Man, his Circle and his Times". Reminiscences of Ireland from people who knew him are to be found here, as well as fascinating glimpses of his associates themselves. A discussion with the composer that first appeared in Murray Schafer's 1963 book *British Composers in Interview* prompted me to get the original down from the shelves and reread some of the nuggets Schafer managed to extract from such figures as Walton, Tippett, Berkeley and Britten, as well as others rather neglected now, such as Alan Bush and Humphrey Searle. The second section of the book is entitled "The Music of John Ireland", and if I single out three chapters this only serves to reveal the difficulty of reviewing a book as comprehensive as this one. Undaunted, I was particularly taken by the late Alan Rowlands' article about the Ireland style, by Roderick Williams writing from a singer's point of view, and by the article about Ireland on record, succinctly presented by Robert Matthew-Walker. Two short articles comprise the third section, "Ireland's Pupils on their Teacher"; the fraught relationship between John Ireland and the most eminent of all his pupils, Benjamin Britten, is not ignored. The following section collects together "Notable Articles on Ireland and his Music", and if by its very nature this is a bit of a random assortment, each piece is no less valuable for that. The final section is entitled "John Ireland's Writings on Music and Musicians". An undated, handwritten piece describes Ravel's reluctance to play the piano at a party, and the cascades of wrong notes that ensued. Ireland's short tribute to Vaughan Williams, from October 1958, is not particularly

revealing, but does include a characteristic anecdote. Vaughan Williams, listening to one of Ireland's works, noticed a similarity between a certain theme and one of his own. Ireland was perplexed. What was to be done about this? Vaughan Williams replied, "Well, we must both have cribbed it from something else, so we had better both leave it as it is – nobody will notice it."

Any reader interested in the music of John Ireland will find this book a marvellous source of information. A certain amount of technical musical knowledge is required for a few of the contributions, but much, perhaps most, is easily accessible to the non-specialist. A fair amount of information appears more than once, but this is the only criticism to be made of this remarkable work. It is handsomely illustrated and beautifully produced, and if all that were not recommendation enough, a CD is included, featuring Ireland's speaking voice and a wide range of historical recordings of the music. The book is dedicated to Richard Itter, whom many members will know as the proprietor of the Lyrita record label.

William Hedley

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## From the Chairman

This Christmas and New Year period has been full of excitement about the BBC 4 film on *The Lark Ascending*, and we were delighted that the Society was able to be involved in it. It was a pleasure and a privilege to return to Shirehampton Hall, where the work was premiered in 1920, for a televised performance, and after several lengthy phone conversations with the producers discussing the music, I am glad that the Society was acknowledged in the credits – although we do not take the blame for a couple of small errors that crept into the script! The inclusion of our much-loved President, Michael Kennedy, was a highlight of the programme, as he imparted, as usual, insightful gems to the viewers. The programme has been widely viewed and praised. Owing no television myself, I have now been instructed by several older friends in the delights of i-player: who says that older generations are less computer-savvy than younger ones!

This time of year sees me frantic with preparations for the forthcoming English Music Festival, and this year our highlight is the world premiere performance of Vaughan Williams' rather spectacular piano *Fantasia*. Recently recorded and released on Somm (and celebrated with a joint RVW Society/Somm launch, at which I was happy to see many Society members present), this work again offers us a new insight into the fledgling composer. Although it may have been his first proper essay in writing for full orchestra – he began work on it in 1896 – it is remarkably assured, and combines bold and impassioned statements with gossamer music of great tenderness. It does not refute the generally-held belief that Vaughan Williams took some time to find his musical voice, but it does impress us with the realisation that he was, nevertheless, a composer with both a wonderful imagination and the necessary skills of orchestration and musicianship to implement his musical ideas. If you have not yet heard this piece, I urge you to purchase the disc or, if you can, come along to the live performance at the EMF in June with the BBC Concert Orchestra and Mark Bebbington, the soloist on the recording.

May I also recommend to you, if you don't already have your copy, our latest Albion disc *On Christmas Day*. Yes, I know, Christmas seems a world away now, but these folk carols and folk songs are too gorgeous to be reserved exclusively for the Yuletide season. And whilst on the subject of Christmas, may I thank the many of you who were kind enough to purchase my book, *Music in the Landscape*, as Christmas gifts and comment favourably upon it? I was touched by the hugely positive feedback I received from Society members.

*Em Marshall-Luck*



**Mark Bebbington is the soloist for Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia*, to be performed at the 2012 English Music Festival.**

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