

# RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS SOCIETY JOURNAL

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## From the Editor

There'll be no editorial musings from me this time, as there is too much practical business to deal with! Let me get straight down to it by drawing members' attention to a recent addition to our website. In 2012, Society member Allan Atlas directed a seminar in New York, out of which grew the remarkable online Vaughan Williams bibliography that can now be found on the Society's already remarkable website. It does not seek to include every word written about the composer – that would be unrealistic – but rather to include everything essential “for anyone wishing to write a comprehensive book about Vaughan Williams”. If Allan is the guiding spirit behind the project, congratulations are certainly due to Paulina Piedzia Colón and Devora Geller, who are responsible for editing, maintaining and updating. It's quite a daunting document, but an indispensable tool for Vaughan Williams enthusiasts and scholars for the foreseeable future. To see what I mean, visit the Society's website and click on “Resources”. And while you're there, take a little time to look around – there is an enormous amount of fascinating material.

The last issue of the *Journal* carried a pretty photograph of the street in Down Ampney where any Vaughan Williams lover would like to live, Linden Lea. I was unable to acknowledge the photographer at the time, and am happy now to let readers know that it was Robert Shave. Linden Lea is, apparently, not so rare a street name. Mike Gainsford has been in touch with photographic proof that if any members feel inclined to relocate to Bedworth in Warwickshire, they can also have this prestigious address.

We are aware that a very few copies of the last issue had missing pages, and others failed to reach their destination altogether. We

have sent replacements to those who told us about it, but please let John Francis or Mark Hammett know if *Journal 57* did not reach you in good order. Their details appear on the back page.

With *Journal 57* we sent out the AGM papers and the annual report and accounts. Members (especially those unable to get to the AGM on October 13) might like to know that these documents are available as colour PDFs in the “News and Events” section of our website. A full report from the AGM will follow in the February 2014 issue.

May I now remind you about the latest Albion Records release? The short, evocative orchestral piece, *The Solent*, is included, alongside a fascinating collection of other works, orchestral and vocal. This issue seems to have caught the public's attention even more than others in the distinguished Albion catalogue. As I write, it is at No 4 in the Specialist Classical Chart. Do get hold of a copy if you haven't already done so.

To close, a couple of points about the *Journal*, this issue and the next. You will find on page 16 a piece of Vaughan Williams-related fiction. I think this is the first time the *Journal* has published such a piece, and I have been very happy to do so. And then next year sees the centenary of the first performance of the original version of *A London Symphony*. Graham Muncy explains on page 10 why he thinks performing the original version is a good idea. I invite members who are interested in the *London*, in either version, to send in their thoughts for the February 2014 issue, to reach me by the end of the year.

William Hedley

### Ralph Vaughan Williams and literature in English

There thou art gone, and me thou leavest here  
Sole in these fields! yet will I not despair.  
Despair I will not, while I yet descry  
‘Neath the mild canopy of English air  
That lonely tree against the western sky.  
Still, still these slopes, ‘tis clear,  
Our Gipsy-Scholar haunts, outliving thee!  
Fields where soft sheep from cages pull the hay,  
Woods with anemonies in flower till May,  
Know him a wanderer still; then why not me?

Matthew Arnold  
from *Thyrsis*

[Vaughan Williams chose to omit some of these words in *An Oxford Elegy*.]

# Music & Politics in *49th Parallel*

John Morris

Readers of this *Journal* will know that Vaughan Williams used all his talents as a musician when composing for films. By the Second World War he was the established leader of British music and was already 70 when Muir Mathieson persuaded him to write for the Ministry of Information film *49th Parallel*. The Ministry's only feature film production of the War, it tells the story of the remaining crew members of a destroyed Nazi U-boat commanded by Lieutenant Hirth (Eric Portman), who travel across Canada in the hope of reaching the (neutral) U.S. border, the 49th parallel of the film's title. The film uses their exploits on the journey to tackle various aspects of Nazi ideology; its racism and its attitude to democracy, religion, the arts and to freedom itself. Jeffrey Richards has mapped all Vaughan Williams's wartime film music to the imperatives of the Ministry's 1940 guidelines for propaganda. *49th Parallel* speaks of "why we fight," the documentary *Coastal Command* (1942), of "how we fight," and *The Flemish Farm* (1943) of "the need for sacrifice." All of the films, writes Richards, are accompanied by "The People's Music" in which Vaughan Williams "draws freely and joyously on hymns, folk songs, marches and dances to celebrate their efforts" in an attempt to present his belief in democracy, Britain's shared heritage and civilized values.<sup>1</sup> As a believer in a united Europe as well as the idea of commonwealth, Vaughan Williams's film music can thus also be said to represent his political views, and perhaps even more:

The idea of the island race fighting a lone battle against Fascism reinforced elements in the national self-image that had already become strongly associated with Vaughan Williams, and his music became an important point of emotional focus for many listeners of the time, even to the extent of being credited with a prophetic message.<sup>2</sup>

The circumstances of Vaughan Williams's introduction to composing for film are now legendary. Muir Mathieson, who went to see the composer at his home in Dorking in the spring of 1940, "found him strangely depressed at his inability to play a fuller part in the War. He felt that the musician had done little to express the spirit and resolve of the British people... I told him the story of *49th Parallel* and tried to show how the cinema could help to achieve those very objects for which he was striving. His enthusiasm was wonderful."<sup>3</sup> The introduction had been possible through Arthur



The opening titles of *49th Parallel* (1941) showing the Canadian backdrop against which Vaughan Williams's stately theme is heard

Benjamin, a contact with whom Vaughan Williams had worked at the BBC before the War in a dramatized version of the Christopher Columbus story. Vaughan Williams recounts the telephone call one Saturday evening when Mathieson told him that he had "until Wednesday" to write the music.<sup>4</sup> He relished the challenge and by August was well on the way with the score. He had spent some time at Denham Studios in July, which he "thoroughly enjoyed," and was even ready to work on another film but was very frank with his publisher Hubert Foss at Oxford University Press about conditions, which were that he "liked the subject," he received "good money" for his efforts, and, especially that he had a say "as to when and how the music should come in." This seemed to be particularly important to him as, like other "serious" composers, he did not wish to compromise his musical integrity. However, he wrote in a letter that he was "prepared for anything," even "writing in seconds to the stop watch," which he found "rather fun," composing and scoring extra bars during the rehearsal interval.<sup>5</sup>

Many commentators have provided an analysis of the score. By far the most comprehensive is Jan Swynnoe's.<sup>6</sup> Of the Prelude, she writes that "It is almost impossible to write a theme that adequately suggests the resistance of a free democracy to the fanatical delusions of Nazism."<sup>7</sup> For Jeffrey Richards, it is a "broad, stately theme which musically encapsulates the breadth and majesty of Canada."<sup>8</sup> However, because this grand theme does not return until the end of the film – over two hours later – it does not therefore "serve the customary purpose of main titles music of advising the audience about the principal dramatic threads of the forthcoming diegesis. There is no hint in this music of the threat posed by the Nazis, or of their confrontations with a people possessing a very different ideology." And despite suggesting the expansiveness of the landscape and people of Canada, the theme, for Swynnoe, is "unmistakably English."<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, in their survey of Muir Mathieson's career in film music, S.J. Hetherington and Mark Brownrigg have noted that "through the use of a pastoral model to suggest the good, and an inversion of this to depict evil, Vaughan Williams' music posits Canada as a rural idyll, an eternal Eden that can both endure the war and prevail over the forces of evil."<sup>10</sup> Canada is thus a metaphor for *all* free nations and so too, by association, is this music.

The prologue, with its “Suitably Holstian, invert pedals on the high strings with gnomic, questioning clarinets describing abstract motifs beneath,” provides the cue for the main sequence which begins with the voiceover narrative and a map of North America.<sup>11</sup> Here, writes Swynnoe, “the clue is thrown out immediately that the main concern is not with the dramatic imperatives of the film, but with its message.”<sup>12</sup> The drama begins with the surfacing of a German U-boat and the four-note motif that accompanies it announces the presence of the Nazi evil. It is a “dark-toned” version<sup>13</sup> of the Lutheran chorale *Ein’ Feste Burg ist unser Gott*. Representing the Nazi regime, it appears twice more, on both occasions to underscore the impact of Nazi ideology.<sup>14</sup> Vaughan Williams’s views on the tune are illuminated by a letter he wrote to John Welch, in charge of broadcast religious services at the BBC. He “could hardly believe his ears,” when on D-Day after the 7.55am sermon the hymn sung was *Ein’ Feste Burg*. In his reply Welch explained that the hymn tune and others like it of German origin were, to those who knew their origin, the possession of the whole Church rather than any one nation. An exception was Haydn’s tune “Austria,” the German national anthem, which it was felt would be confusing to continental listeners who did not know English. In contrast to this, Welch wrote of *Ein’ Feste Burg* that it was “essentially in Church history the hymn of believers in freedom struggling against tyranny,” citing the example of when the leading Norwegian pastor was dismissed by the Nazis, who had put a quisling in charge of the Church, “the congregation assembled outside the Cathedral with the dismissed pastor, and sang to the Nazis’ dismay and anger *Ein’ Feste Burg* in Norwegian.”<sup>15</sup>

Besides *Ein’ Feste Burg* to denote the Nazi element throughout the film score there are references to many more musics – “O Canada” in the prologue, *l’Alouette* to represent the French Canadians, a Viennese waltz (in the Winnipeg sequence), and another German theme, known as “Anna’s Lied,” to highlight the peaceful nature of the local German Hutterite communities, as well as the modal tones of the music depicting the indigenous North American population. The sequence that concerns the German Hutterites is designed to demonstrate democracy and Christian love, and for “Anna’s Lied,” Vaughan Williams uses the German tune *Lasst uns das Kindlein wiegen*, a traditional Christmas folk song, which is first introduced as a soprano solo and then treated as a full orchestral prelude. In his 1912 study of the origins, evolution, and meaning of Christmas rituals and practices of many nations, *Christmas Customs and Traditions: Their History and Significance*, Clement Miles describes this ancient carol, heard in the Rhineland, sung “very slowly, in unison, by vast congregations, and very beautiful in its mingling of solemnity, festive joy, and tender sentiment.”<sup>16</sup>



Lasst uns das Kindlein wiegen,  
 Das Herz zum Kripplein biegen!  
 Lasst uns im Geist erfreuen,  
 Das Kindlein benedeien:  
 O Jesulein süß! O Jesulein süß!<sup>lvii</sup>

As if this was not rich enough, there is a sequence towards the end of the film that under closer scrutiny reveals a connection between music and politics care of the writings of German novelist Thomas Mann. The sequence, in which an English aesthete Philip Armstrong-Scott (Leslie Howard) is confronted with Nazi attitudes towards culture, is lent, write Hetherington and Brownrigg in their analysis, “a surreal edge with the inclusion of banks of Debussyesque piano arpeggios.” Here, they write, “Modernist high culture is allowed to stand up against the philistinism of the Nazis.” In this analysis the music is “marked as decadent and degenerate,” and described by Jeffrey Richards as a “tranquil, impressionistic piece, which opens with an English pastoral melody.”<sup>18</sup> After its elaboration, the melody returns and develops “the air of menace” which, in the context of the film, signals the arrival of the Nazis in the “hitherto peaceful location.”<sup>19</sup> In closer analysis of the context in which the music is heard, however, a further clue as to the message being conveyed is discernible. The most obvious aspect of the music – apart from its apparent source – is that it hardly penetrates the *mise en scène* at all and the piano cannot really be fully appreciated because of other diegetic sounds and the rather dense dialogue. In fact, in contrast to the rest of the score, its scoring for solo piano marks its significance for very specific – though unspoken – reasons. The camp sequence deals explicitly with the “degenerate” painting of Matisse and Picasso as well as the literature of Thomas Mann, but also provides a roundabout commentary on “degenerate” musical Impressionism. Following a period of study with Ravel in 1908, Vaughan Williams began to explore a way to counter the Teutonic imperatives in music that, to his mind, rather overwhelmed composition in England. By embracing Impressionism, he was able to free himself and his music from these “imperatives.” *The Lake in the Mountains* is certainly “impressionistic.” Debussyesque or even Ravel-like, it is the aesthete’s music, and in the context of the film, it is meant to signify Armstrong-Scott’s refinement by its relative erudition. The piece is “episodic and descriptive,” writes John Barr. “The succession of phrases and sections are off-set by contrasting keys... [which] seem to mingle the images of the lake, the mountains, and the local Indian culture.”<sup>20</sup>

Scott’s “sophisticated” tastes also reveal themselves in his liking for lobster Thermidor and red Bordeaux. His, the aesthete’s perspective, is summed up in his motto: “Wars may come, wars may go, but art goes on forever.” But to Eric Portman’s Hirth, Leslie Howard’s affable Philip Armstrong-Scott is a weakling and Scott’s reading matter condemns him even further: an Ernest Hemingway novel, and Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* (1924), from which he quotes the briefest of passages: “Sein Alter wäre schwer zu schätzen gewesen” (“his age would have been difficult to estimate”). Apart from the music heard on the soundtrack, the closest reference to music is via this short quote. Scott is also conducting his own self education, just like the novel’s protagonist Hans Castorp. As tension mounts (after Portman reveals his identity) and a confrontation takes place, Scott’s prized paintings and the novel are thrown into the fire. Scott later “proves” himself by taking up a weapon to deal with the runaway Nazis, faces their bullets, and beats up one of his attackers, Lohrmann (John Chandos). This is a parallel to the fate of Mann’s character, Castorp, who faces his enemies on a First World War battlefield at the end of the novel, following his lengthy sojourn at the *Berghof*, a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps near Davos. Indeed, Scott would have been aware of the parallel. Emerging from the cave where he has dealt with Lohrmann, Scott and his men seem shocked at what he has done: “Well, he had a fair chance,” says Scott. “One

armed superman against one unarmed decadent democrat. I wonder how Dr Goebbels will explain that?!" The quote is, at first hearing, apparently arbitrary. The words introduce the character Settembrini, an Italian intellectual, through whom Mann first attempts to discuss the relationship between music and politics.<sup>21</sup> Their use is to obtain a subtle reference to music, as part of the ideological journey on which we are taken – through the ideas of liberal democracy and Christian values alluded to in the earlier part of the film, what Britain was fighting for (what was best in civilization, against the brutality and philistinism of Nazi Germany) – and how politics relates to the Arts.



Philip Armstrong-Scott (Leslie Howard) reading from *The Magic Mountain* with Lieutenant Hirth (Eric Portman) looking on in *49th Parallel* (1941)



Note the change of expression in Portman's face, who has heard the words from the novel

The film ends – after over two hours – with a reprise of the opening prologue. As if to underpin Vaughan Williams's democratic credentials and his political beliefs, this "big tune," akin to one of his hymn tunes, became the "secular hymn" *The New Commonwealth* set to words by Harold Child, librettist of *Hugh the Drover*, with whom the composer had collaborated for over thirty years. That he was willing to collaborate in a choral version illuminates his beliefs and what he fought for. As Jeffrey Richards writes: "Its optimistic and uplifting sentiments stress international brotherhood, the triumph of faith, hope and love over hate and fear, and emphasizes the tune's hymnlike properties, underlying the vision of the war as a struggle for Christian civilization."<sup>22</sup>

Judging by his letter to Harold Child of 18 May 1942,<sup>23</sup> Vaughan Williams was keen to ensure that the librettist had every possible means at his disposal: "Here is the 49<sup>th</sup> / 1 tune with a nonsense

verse attached to show the metre and suggested rhyme scheme," he wrote. To fit the tune, Vaughan Williams wanted something "rather high falutin', noble and sentimental – like about Canada or Unity of Nations ('Parliament of man the Federation of the world')" [sic].<sup>24</sup> The composer also took care to spell out the phrasing and time signature, and he was keen to suggest three verses. In the event, Harold Child produced just two:

See where the beacon fires of Faith  
Fling glory to guide us.  
There lies Man's upward way o'er death,  
O'er hate and fear.  
Trust we the light that burns so dear,  
And lift our eyes  
Whose faith sees what heavenly host of great allies  
March on beside us.

Hope we have won from our despair  
And joy out of pining.  
Fast anchored safe in waters fair  
We've lain at rest.  
Hark! From afar on wider quest  
Life calls us now.  
Then up on anchor, spread the sail  
And point the prow  
Where Hope is shining.

While the text of this "remarkably moving song" may today seem anachronistic it is "reminiscent of the idealism of John Addington Symonds, but Vaughan Williams' glorious, noble, hymn-like melody carries all before it."<sup>25</sup> And the Prelude's appearance at the BBC Proms in recent years, as well as on Armistice Day – in its arrangement for brass band – at the Cenotaph ceremony on the 90th anniversary of the end of the First World War, as wreaths were laid by the last of the surviving veterans, is testament to its enduring appeal.

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- <sup>1</sup> Richards, 1997: 322  
<sup>2</sup> Frogley (ed.), 1996: 19, quoting Michael Kennedy  
<sup>3</sup> Huntley, 1947: 56.  
<sup>4</sup> Huntley, 1947: 177  
<sup>5</sup> Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 322/3  
<sup>6</sup> *The Best Years of British Film Music, 1933-1958*, Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002  
<sup>7</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 91  
<sup>8</sup> Richards, 1997: 292  
<sup>9</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 92  
<sup>10</sup> Hetherington & Brownrigg, 2006: 160  
<sup>11</sup> Hetherington & Brownrigg, 2006: 161  
<sup>12</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 92  
<sup>13</sup> Richards, 1997: 292  
<sup>14</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 94  
<sup>15</sup> Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 379.  
<sup>16</sup> Miles, 1976: 109  
<sup>17</sup> "Let us rock the Child and bow our hearts before the crib! Let us delight our spirits and bless the Child: sweet little Jesus! Sweet little Jesus!"  
<sup>18</sup> Hetherington & Brownrigg, 2006: 166/7  
<sup>19</sup> Richards, 1997: 294  
<sup>20</sup> "The Solo Piano Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams: an Introduction" in the *Ralph Vaughan Williams Society Journal*, Issue 46, October 2009  
<sup>21</sup> *Doktor Faustus* (1947) is devoted to the subject.  
<sup>22</sup> Richards, 1997: 293  
<sup>23</sup> Cobbe (ed.), 2008: 338  
<sup>24</sup> Hugu Cobbe has this as "to fit the time." Vaughan Williams' handwriting was notorious. ☹️

# Vaughan Williams, Alfvén and Dohnányi

Rob Furneaux



Hugo Emil Alfvén



Ernő Dohnányi

Readers of the *Journal* might be a little puzzled by the above title. Indeed it may be the case that Alfvén and Dohnányi are composers who are not known at all to some members of the Society. There is little doubt in my mind that these composers should be better known in classical music circles. Why are they so little known in Britain? Well, it may be because they suffer from what I will call the “Second most well-known composer syndrome”. This occurs when a composer is somewhat under the shadow of another who is looked upon as that country’s flag bearer or most eminent composer. In Vaughan Williams’s case the overshadowing composer is Elgar; but during his lifetime this might also be applied to Walton and Britten – although such assertions are of course open to conjecture.

Dohnányi lies in the shadow of Bartók – Hungary’s best-known composer of the twentieth century (his name could also be joined by that of Kodály). Sweden, the country of Alfvén’s birth, being outside the central European hub of classical music, is not well known for its composers. Alfvén, whom it might be argued has a lower profile than either Vaughan Williams or Dohnányi, has an even greater task to gain general recognition; he in turn lies under the shadow of Sweden’s most revered composer, Berwald, not exactly a big name himself.

Each composer, it could be asserted, is known to the broader listening public by one piece of music: Vaughan Williams with *The Lark*, which reached the heady heights of No 1 in the Classic FM

top 100. Dohnányi achieved fame with his *Variations on a Nursery Song*, in which the tune “Twinkle, twinkle, little star” is subjected to ingenious variation. Alfvén achieved notoriety with his *Swedish Rhapsody No 1*, a veritable smorgasbord of Swedish folk-inspired melodies. Years ago I bought an LP containing the *Rhapsody* and for many years was not aware of *any* other of his works.

Besides their status as each country’s “No 2”, these composers have other intriguing connections. They were all born in the 1870s and died within two years of each other. Hugo Alfvén is an almost exact contemporary of Vaughan Williams, his dates being 1872-1960. Erno von Dohnányi’s dates are not far away, his life spanning the years 1877-1960.

These composers lived through one of the most turbulent periods of mankind’s existence, which included both World Wars. However, it is interesting to note that each experienced the conflicts from a different standpoint, Dohnányi’s nation being on the axis/Austro-Hungarian side, Alfvén’s being neutral and Vaughan Williams being on the allied side. There is little doubt that this situation had dramatic effects on each man’s life and as such was to greatly affect his music.

Dohnányi was born near Pressburg, now Bratislava in Slovakia, but then an important centre of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His father, an amateur cellist, was a school teacher. Before he was 10, Dohnányi took up organ studies – some similarity to Vaughan

Williams here. Unlike Vaughan Williams, he flourished early, enrolling in the Hungarian Academy in 1894, and rapidly becoming known as an accomplished pianist. He produced a piano concerto before 1900. In terms of its style and melodic sweep this concerto pre-empted those of Rachmaninov. But Rachmaninov was a rising star and his piano works soon overshadowed those of Dohnányi, putting his concerto into undeserved obscurity. Dohnányi produced his first symphony in 1900, an amazingly confident and polished piece suggesting maturity way beyond the composer's twenty-three years. Lasting an hour, it has impressive climaxes and a delicious intermezzo dominated by a wistful viola melody. A criticism – as with Vaughan Williams's original draft of the *London Symphony* – is its length; but unlike Vaughan Williams, Dohnányi did not shorten his symphony, which would have been advisable, and which upon listening becomes apparent.

Rather like Vaughan Williams's early works, there is a definite influence of late nineteenth-century composers. In Vaughan Williams's case it was Bruch and Dvořák; in Dohnányi's it is Brahms. With maturity Vaughan Williams was to shake off these influences and develop his own unique muse. Dohnányi conversely was to adhere more closely to the late Romantic idiom in many of his works – certainly into the 1920s – thus gaining him the reputation of being a stick in the mud when compared to his innovative contemporaries Kodály and Bartók.

The arrival of the First World War did not affect Dohnányi's life in the same manner as that of Vaughan Williams. There was no enlistment, no experience of the horrors of war at first hand. Instead, he settled in Budapest and assumed the role of keeping the music establishment alive by teaching at the Academy and organising concerts.

In 1918, as life in Britain began to take on a semblance of normality, Vaughan Williams returned to composition. Life on the losing side was not as straightforward. In Hungary, there was considerable turbulence at the collapse of the empire. At first, Dohnányi was appointed as Director of the Academy by the left-leaning Béla Kun administration. Within the year a right wing government under Admiral Horthy came to power. (An Admiral in charge of a country with no coastline!) Friction soon ensued, and Dohnányi was forced to resign when he refused to fire Kodály on the grounds of his political beliefs. He was partly rehabilitated in 1928, being readmitted to the Academy, and in 1934 becoming its Director once again. Unlike Vaughan Williams, administrative duties and teaching ensured that his time for composition was limited. Whilst Vaughan Williams produced his third and fourth symphonies and many other works, there was little output from Dohnányi. However, he gained a considerable reputation as a teacher, being meticulous in his training of young pianists. One lesson which was to prove invaluable to his students was devoted to the subject of "how to pack a dress suit."

Alfvén was born in Stockholm just five months before Vaughan Williams. At 15, he attended the Conservatory at Stockholm. He subsequently spent two years as a violinist in the Swedish Royal Opera Orchestra. Like Dohnányi he flourished early as a composer, writing his first symphony in 1897. Just a year later saw his second – much earlier than Vaughan Williams's second, but equally as ambitious. The symphony is of monumental proportions lasting around sixty minutes. Vaughan Williams's inspiration was London, whereas Alfvén's came from Stockholm,

or rather the sea and the archipelago of islands that surround Stockholm. Although it received performances outside Sweden (as the *London Symphony* did outside Britain), it did not become a staple of international concert platforms.

A third symphony followed in 1906. This is a much shorter work, gaining its inspiration from the happy time Alfvén spent holidaying in Italy with Marie Kroyer, whom he was to marry. A lighter and uplifting piece, the symphony was not received as well as the second. (In general it doesn't seem to pay to write "happy" symphonies – dark and dour seems to meet with critical approval – but that's a subject beyond this article.)

There are a number of connections between the lives of Alfvén and Vaughan Williams. Most notably, both composers were very much part of the musical life of their countries. Rather like Vaughan Williams, Alfvén took a considerable interest in choral music, becoming Director of the Siljan Choir in 1904, a position he was to hold for half a century. Folk music was also of great interest to him; melodies based on folk music, sometimes borrowed, sometimes original, permeate many of his shorter compositions, including the *Swedish Rhapsodies*. These can be compared in some ways to the *Norfolk Rhapsodies* and *In the Fen Country*, their inspiration being grounded in regional geography.

Following the First World War, Vaughan Williams's music began a gradual change; first came the *Pastoral Symphony* with its wordless soprano, then came *Flos Campi* and the Piano Concerto. With *Flos Campi* he reached a peak of translucent orchestration and sensuousness. Alfvén also strove in this direction with his Fourth Symphony of 1919. In this fifty-minute work he too uses wordless voices, a soprano and baritone. Their voices beautifully intertwine in the last movement to the extent that some critics considered the work overly erotic. It was shunned by some more strait-laced Swedish commentators who dubbed the symphony "Sinfonia Erotica". In more recent times attitudes have changed.

Another connection between the two composers is film. Alfvén composed the music for three films during the 1930s and 1940s. All of these were Swedish/Norwegian productions and received limited international release: titles such as *Synnøve og Solbakken* do not exactly trip off the tongue.

Alfvén's film music, always thoughtful and evocative, gained praise in Scandinavia. Some of these scores are beginning to find their way on to disc, courtesy of Naxos. The films for which Vaughan Williams produced music were shown throughout the English-speaking world and the British Empire; thus he was guaranteed a wider audience. *Scott of the Antarctic* is, of course, rightly considered a film of considerable stature in all respects.

The effects of the Second World War in Sweden were less pronounced than in most European Countries. There were shortages and deprivations, and at one stage it seemed as though Sweden would come to the aid of Finland in its war against Russia. Sweden remained neutral, however, the threat passed, and Swedish musical life remained largely unaffected by the conflict. Alfvén continued conducting his choirs, although foreign trips were no longer on the agenda. There was competition from composers arriving in Sweden from other Baltic countries, such as Eduard Tubin from Estonia, but as a home-grown Swede, Alfvén did not find himself losing out to them.

The lives of Vaughan Williams and Dohnányi, being citizens of belligerent nations, were drastically affected by the conflict. As we know, Vaughan Williams was shocked to the core by the return of hostilities, and could not understand how the promise of a New World following the Great War could have disintegrated to dust. Consequently, his compositional output declined for some time, only being revived by his entry into the British film music world and other war work.

Dohnányi's native Hungary, not having the cushion of the English Channel to come to its aid, was in a far more precarious position than that of Britain. By 1941, Hungary was in alliance with the German Nazi regime and its army stormed into western Russia at the commencement of operation Barbarossa. Dohnányi again strove to keep the musical establishment functioning, but this became increasingly difficult in the face of draconian fascist edicts. By 1942, anti-Jewish legislation was beginning to be enacted, and he did all he could to protect Jewish members of his orchestra from being removed. Things came to head in 1944. Hitler, anxious that Hungary should not seek a separate peace with the allies, sent in troops and turned Hungary into a fascist puppet state. Dohnányi reluctantly disbanded the orchestra and fled westwards soon after the arrival of the Russians in late 1944.

Unlike Vaughan Williams, who it could be argued had not too arduous a time in London and the South East, Dohnányi suffered considerably. Not only did he flee to Austria, taking with him a few meagre possessions, but during the course of the war he lost both of his sons. One was killed whilst fighting in the Hungarian Army on the Eastern Front; the other was hanged for taking part in the abortive 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler.

Having fled west in 1944, there is some suggestion that Dohnányi's motivation was guilt, having collaborated with the Hungarian fascist regime; but there is no specific evidence for this. In truth he was an apolitical figure who did what he could for his musical colleagues at the time. In doing so he was considered suspect by Austria's post-war authorities; thus he moved on westwards to Britain where he stayed briefly before moving to Argentina. Argentina had become the domicile of many Nazis fleeing Germany at the time, and such a move did little to enhance his credibility. Finally, in 1949, Dohnányi was invited to take up a post at the State University in Tallahassee, Florida. At last he had found a residence where he could feel comfortable; he settled down to a regime of teaching and composition.

During the late 1940s there had been work on a second symphony – his last. It is a work for large orchestra including four trumpets and eight horns. There is little doubt that in its dark hues and persistent use of drums, the music seeks to reflect the tragic events which had overtaken Hungary and Dohnányi's family during the War. The symphony makes use of Bach's choral *Komm süsßer Tod, Komm, sel'ge Ruh!* in its original harmonisation, followed by a set of variations. This symphony dispels the generally held notion that Dohnányi could only write music in a Brahmsian, nineteenth-century style. Here we find a mature musical style

bearing comparison with Richard Strauss and Hindemith.

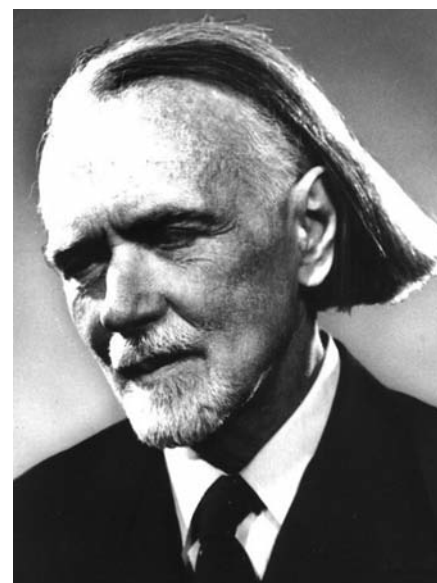
Dohnányi's Second and Vaughan Williams's Sixth are different beasts stylistically, but their messages are similar. Both are personal responses to the recent conflict. However, neither has a programme or any actual indication of its meaning.

A violin concerto (No 2) followed in 1949, and along with the late symphony may be considered one of Dohnányi's greatest achievements. Again the sound world of the piece is decidedly twentieth century in nature, dispelling the myth that Dohnányi was another Glazunov, unwilling or unable to adapt to modern trends in music. Like Vaughan Williams, he continued a very busy lifestyle into his late seventies and early eighties. Whilst Vaughan Williams spent much time composing and touring, Dohnányi continued teaching and, between 1949 and 1960, playing in more than 120 concerts.

Meanwhile, in Sweden, Alfvén had been working on a fifth symphony. After considerable gestation the first movement was



Franz Berwald



Zoltán Kodály

completed by 1942. In a comment worthy of Vaughan Williams, he declared it to be “technically and in other respects the least terrible thing I have ever produced.” The first performance of the complete symphony took place in 1953; Alfvén wasn't happy and continued to tinker with the last two movements during the 1950s, but in essence he was never satisfied. Unlike Vaughan Williams who, during the 1950s, produced his Symphonies 7, 8 and 9, Alfvén's compositional spark continued to diminish. Some small-scale pieces were completed, including the ballet *Den förlorade sonen* (The Prodigal Son), but these were only achieved by extensive use of folk song material and borrowings from earlier works.

These works were written in Alfvén's impressive, calligraphic handwriting. His manuscripts were of such high quality that several works were printed straight from manuscript, in stark contrast to Vaughan Williams, whose writing was notoriously spidery! Indeed, most of his later works needed their “face wiping” by Roy Douglas before they saw the light of day. Should

any of Vaughan Williams's works have been printed from the manuscript the resulting music would no doubt have sounded like Stockhausen!

During the latter period of both composers' lives they were much respected figures in the music of their respective nations. Both were known affectionately as "the Old Man of British/Swedish music". Dohnányi, by contrast, could hardly have been similarly viewed, having arrived in the United States only in 1949. The American music scene had its own stable of composers, including Barber, Bernstein and Copland. In addition there were high profile foreign imports such as Martinů.

In the last decade of our three composers' lives, developments in classical music caused the music of composers such as they to be thought of as old fashioned. All three composers took an interest in the changing musical scene, but were frankly mystified by the slide into dissonance and modernism. Vaughan Williams attended concerts of such music, on one occasion whispering to the student composer who was beside him: "If a tune should occur to you



Béla Bartók

don't hesitate to write it down." Likewise, Dohnányi did not favour the new music; he flatly stated in an interview: "There are nowadays very few composers who should be allowed to compose." Alfvén continued to assert that it was important to give people "light and warmth in music".

Octogenarian icons they may have been, but there was nothing they could do to halt the tide turning against them. As we know, Vaughan Williams died suddenly but peacefully one August night in 1958. In the USA, Dohnányi remained active and was beginning to be looked upon with affection by the American musical establishment. He was seen as a relic of another age, a dinosaur who had outlived other émigré composers (Martinů died in 1959.) During 1959 and 1960 he was lured to New York to produce up to date recordings of his music. This was a strain for a man approaching his mid-eighties, and during a recording session in 1960 he suddenly collapsed. He died a few days later, on 9 February. The Old Man of Swedish music was to last but a few months longer. He died on 8 May 1960, at the age of 88.

It cannot be doubted that all three men lived long and varied lives. From the evidence stated above there is little doubt that having been on the losing side in two World Wars and having lost two sons made Dohnányi's life the more traumatic. Vaughan Williams's experiences in World War One however, were undoubtedly harrowing. Alfvén, having lived in a neutral country, had a life least disrupted by world events. How did this affect their music? Both Vaughan Williams and Dohnányi produced some of their greatest music in response to world events (Symphonies 6 and 2 respectively). Alfvén, after a successful beginning lost the spark in the late 1930s and 1940s, but there is no evidence that this was as a reaction to world events.

Each composer's status in the classical music world remains open to debate. Vaughan Williams's star is rising. He no longer languishes under the coat tails of Elgar and cannot any longer be referred to as one of Britain's second-rank composers. An ever-extending list of recordings, productions of operas, and the efforts of the Society attest to this. His music is undoubtedly more progressive than that of either Alfvén or Dohnányi, and as such is likely to appeal to a wider audience. Moreover, Vaughan Williams's fecundity and variety of output can only enhance his burgeoning reputation.

Comparisons between Alfvén and Berwald are not really relevant, Berwald coming from a much earlier age. But there are signs that Alfvén is at last establishing a greater presence outside Sweden. His music is receiving more international attention, especially in recording circles. And although his music can be criticised for being often optimistic, largely conservative, and little affected by the changing tide of twentieth-century music, there is much that is praiseworthy. His music deserves a much wider audience and in the post-modernistic world there are encouraging signs that this will happen.

Dohnányi's position is more problematical. Unlike Kodály and Bartók, who spent most of their lives in Hungary, his desertion to the USA for an extended period after 1949 did nothing to enhance his status in Hungary. He remains – and probably will remain – a second-rank composer, behind his two illustrious colleagues. His perceived failure to absorb the new music of the post-war period also counts against him. But the best of his music does not deserve to languish in semi-obscurity. Anyone who has listened to his Suite in F sharp minor will know that. Have you listened to it?

#### ESSENTIAL LISTENING:

##### Alfvén:

Symphony No 1, Op 7  
 Symphony No 2, Op 11  
 Symphony No 4, "From the Outermost Skerries"  
*Dalarapsodi*, Op 47  
*Elégie (at Emil Sjögren's Funeral)*, Op 38

##### Dohnányi:

Symphony No 2  
 Suite in F sharp minor, Op 19  
 Violin Concerto No. 2, Op 43  
 Piano Concerto No 1 in E minor, Op 5  
*Ruralia Hungarica*, Op 32a  
 Four Rhapsodies, Op 11  
*Variations on a Nursery Song*, Op 25 🎶

# A London Symphony: Justification for performing the original version

Graham Muncy

Along with Elgar's First and Second and Parry's *Symphonic Fantasia* (Symphony No 5) of 1912, Vaughan Williams's *A London Symphony* in its original 1913 form must be regarded as one of the finest achievements in British symphonic music in the first quarter of the twentieth century. (The *Pastoral Symphony* of 1921 could also be included here, but that work occupies a very different, new world of sound and expression.)



In its original form, the *London* is a unique artistic statement by its composer resulting from the various streams of influence and inspiration that he was susceptible to as a creative musician *at that time*. His later drastic revisions over many years tended, I feel, to be his take on the work from very different perspectives and viewpoints, quite understandable, and justified with a composer wishing his work to be acceptable and relevant to the listening public.

The brave new musical world that emerged after World War 1 left many composers feeling out of step with current musical thinking. Elgar's star was descending, and other major figures, such as Strauss and Stravinsky, were in the process of reinventing themselves. (Stravinsky was already revising and reducing his earlier ballet scores by 1919.)

Another issue was length tolerance. This seems to have been a problem with British listeners and critics, with the symphonies of Bruckner and Mahler remaining in the "long grass" until the second half of the century, and with the shorter symphonies of the likes of Franck and Sibelius becoming well established in the British concert repertoire throughout the first half. Vaughan Williams's later symphonies all tended to be shorter than his first two, and he always seemed conscious that undue length was a problem, suggesting cuts in the finale of the *Sea Symphony* and reducing the *Tallis Fantasia*. This problem of supposed undue length now seems to have disappeared or has perhaps become a minor issue; and of course, with a committed and vital performance, length is irrelevant anyway.

Arnold Bax was of the opinion that Vaughan Williams went too far with his revision of the *London Symphony*. Bernard Herrmann also regretted the loss of significant sections of the work. Interestingly, the late Richard Hickox who revived the original score in 2000, felt

unable to return to performing the revised version. It can certainly be argued that Vaughan Williams was a little too free with the demolition ball, even though he later referred to one of the deleted sections as "horrible modern music". Perhaps Bax and Herrmann had good points?

On the other hand, revision, often quite drastic, was an important part of Vaughan Williams's compositional and creative processes. One only has to look at some of his manuscripts, many appearing almost three-dimensional,

with layers of pasted paper and brown sticking tape!

To summarise: the "original" version of the *London Symphony* in its "heavenly length" was what Ralph Vaughan Williams had to say at that particular moment in time. It was his largest purely orchestral composition to date, and was well received by its first audience, colleagues and critics. His own doubts on a new work would always be there, but this symphony was the climax and culmination of his "First Period" and of that particular phase of the British symphonic tradition.

The four years that Vaughan Williams spent in the army had a radical effect on him personally and the world that he returned to afterwards was a very different place. The world of music had changed too, with new and radical ideas and often reduced circumstances, with pre-1914 practice becoming very passé. His revisions of the symphony work well and make it a very powerful, strong and moving work in a good and sympathetic performance. (It was the composer's own favourite of his symphonic family.) However, the revisions deny us the chance to hear the piece in the context of the time in which it was created, dropping some beautiful and lyrical episodes and losing much of the very special atmosphere of the composer's original creative thinking, particularly in the symphony's Epilogue.

As with the case of some of the Stravinsky ballet suites, where there are two or three versions in circulation, the musical world should be able to live with the two versions of the *London Symphony*. The Society should perhaps be encouraging wider circulation and awareness of the original version. It would be nice to think there might be some performances in its centenary year – 2014 – and even publication of the full score by Stainer & Bell to increase awareness in the wider musical world. 🐾

# Vaughan Williams and Britten

John Treadway

Like our Editor, William, I attended the Philharmonia Orchestra's concert in the Royal Festival Hall last February. I agree it was an unusual and interesting programme and it was the first time I had heard Britten's *Young Apollo*. As it required a piano and the services of a soloist, it wasn't surprising that the promoters turned to Mozart for a delightful and appropriate accompanying concerto. The highlight of the evening for me, however, was the performance of the *London Symphony*. The more I hear it, the more of a masterpiece I think it is. I can't help comparing his wonderful scoring of the opening of the second movement with Ravel's brilliant orchestration in *Daphnis et Chloé*, and of course, we shouldn't be surprised by this.

For me, Andrew Davis's interpretation was carefully paced, with a real understanding of the work and he was obviously "in tune" with the orchestra. Being a seasoned audience member as well as a regular concert steward, I can tell when the players are at one with the conductor, and this was such an occasion. His ovation at the end from both audience and orchestra was justly deserved. In my opinion, he remains the best current interpreter of the symphonies.

Before continuing, I should declare my hand with regard to Britten. I enjoy much of his music and see in it a greatness that is also there in, for example Walton's First Symphony, Tippett's *Concerto for Double String Orchestra* and Elgar's "*Enigma*" *Variations*. But as with any other composer, I think his output is not all of the same quality, and certainly there are some works that I do not like or, at the moment, fail to appreciate.

In his anniversary year, Britten has been feted and lauded worldwide with presumably eye-watering royalties. He has had a high profile presence at the Proms, alongside Wagner, to the detriment of Verdi, another composer whose anniversary falls this year. The English National Opera and the Royal Opera House have honoured him in their current seasons, and in Suffolk, where I live, the coverage has been immense. This isn't surprising, since no other composer has a base such as his at Aldeburgh, other than perhaps Wagner in Bayreuth. It now has the largest archive in the world of a composer's oeuvre. Aldeburgh Music's director has been awarded a CBE and there is a staff of around fifty, some of whom are admittedly part time. Their work involves arranging regular concerts and the annual festivals, as well as the admirable year-round training programme for young artists. From this considerable number there are eight people whose responsibility is fundraising and an equal number who are assigned to marketing. It is no wonder, therefore, that there is regular generous funding from the National Lottery, English Heritage and Arts Council England, together with substantial corporate body financing, aiding performances of his works world wide.

The Aldeburgh Festival and Snape Maltings, the inspired legacy of Britten, have brought high profile arts to this quiet area of England, as well as money from tourism. I have been privileged,

in this anniversary year, as an Aldeburgh Festival steward to see, free of charge, the magnificent production of "Grimes on the Beach" twice, including real sea mist and the sound of waves, two of the Church Parables, and the really unexpected joy of watching a performance of Britten's *Frank Bridge Variations* danced by the Royal Ballet in Snape Maltings. This wonderful piece must surely feature in a future Royal Opera House season. It could be staged alongside *Job!* Britten also has a whole chapter to himself in the recent survey of twentieth-century music, *The Rest Is Noise*, an influential work by the New York critic Alex Ross, whereas Elgar and "folkish" Vaughan Williams barely merit a mention. (The very use of the word "folkish" suggests to me that Ross does not really know much about Vaughan Williams's music.)

My real problem lies with Britten the man, and interestingly it was this, as well as his musical legacy, that been hotly debated this summer in the pages of the *East Anglian Daily Times*. It is said that composers are difficult individuals. Their creativity, drive and, in some cases, "genius" tend to make them hard to live with, and Britten is often cited as a case in point. In the preface to his recent stage play *The Habit of Art*, an exploration of the relationship between Auden and Britten, Alan Bennett writes, "I find Britten a difficult man to like...both Britten and Pears were notorious for cutting people out of their lives...friends and acquaintances suddenly turned into living corpses."

This was the lot of Eric Crozier, Charles Mackerras (partly his own fault) and Robert Tear to name just a few on the receiving end. Boys could also be cut off when they performed less than perfectly, or if their voice broke, as happened to David Hemmings when on an English Opera Tour of *The Turn of the Screw*.

Britten was homosexual at a time when to be so was very difficult, and he was also pacifist, but then so was Tippett. On Britten's return from self-imposed exile in America in the middle of the War, he applied to be exempt from all non-combatant war service on the grounds that "I can help my fellow human beings best, by continuing in the work I am most qualified to do by the nature of my gifts and training, ie the creation or propagation of music." Tippett took the same line and made a similar statement. Vaughan Williams appeared in court on his behalf, although he himself was obviously not a pacifist. It made no difference to the tribunal's decision, even though Tippett was a fellow composer and had taught at Morley College, that educational beacon which was set up to enable workers to attend evening lectures to better themselves. He was sentenced to three months' imprisonment.

Both Humphrey Carpenter's 1992 biography and the more contentious recent book by Paul Kildea make it plain that Britten was capable of making disparaging remarks about other composers, and this he certainly applied to Vaughan Williams. It may have been partly caused by the very different circumstances in their upbringing and financial status, coupled with the uncomfortable time he had at the Royal College of Music, where Vaughan

Williams was on the staff. (Vaughan Williams was part of the panel that admitted Britten to the College, but Britten's composition teacher, when he bothered to turn up, was John Ireland.)

Britten enjoyed singing in the choir for a performance of the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*, and commented that the *Tallis Fantasia* was beautifully scored but overlong; but in general he had no time for the music of Vaughan Williams and made that plain. He coined the phrase "Brahmsish" and "RVW-ish" for works he disliked, and the "*Wasps*" Overture even made him feel sick! Perhaps the unkindest cut was when Lennox Berkeley arrived at the Mill House in Snape, one evening shortly before the War, carrying the scores of Vaughan Williams's Fourth Symphony and Walton's First. Humphrey Carpenter, who is also an important character in Bennett's play, records that the two spent the evening laughing at what they considered to be the clumsy, amateur nature of the scoring in both works.

There is a commonly held view that in some ways Britten never grew up, that his keeping of schoolboy diaries into middle age and his surrounding himself with young boys exemplified this. There was a fragility to his personality, and whilst he could dish out harsh criticism of others, he found it almost unbearable to hear or read criticisms of his own works. I have heard stories from people who

knew him well, who recall that he would avoid music critics like the plague, even not turning up to a pre-arranged meeting.

So where does this leave me in relation to Vaughan Williams? I don't believe from my own reading that Vaughan Williams reciprocated in any way. There is the largely unsubstantiated comment attributed to him about Britten's "beastly music", but there is so much to counter this view. He liked *A Boy Was Born*, and preferred it to the later *Ceremony of Carols*. He refused to be drawn on *Gloriana*, other than to say a composer had the right to create such a work in a coronation year. Perhaps the opera's poor production and its reception by the press was a painful reminder of what had similarly happened to *The Pilgrim's Progress* just two years earlier, which also marked another national celebration, in that case the Festival of Britain. Vaughan Williams attended the first night of *Peter Grimes* at Sadler's Wells, as well as performances of *Billy Budd* and *The Rape of Lucretia*. The most notable support came at a pre-war Norfolk and Norwich Festival where *Five Tudor Portraits* was coupled with Britten's *Our Hunting Fathers*. The orchestra is alleged to have made rat-like noises when rehearsing Britten's work, and generally fooled about. Vaughan Williams stepped in and told them to behave and treat the work with respect.

That Vaughan Williams had a temper, particularly aimed at latecomers to concerts, and that he disparaged Mahler is in no doubt, but he was, by all accounts, a generous and insightful human being. People attest to enjoying his company and his friendship. One long-standing member of the Leith Hill Musical Festival told me she became a member of the RVW Society as much for the man as for his music. Countless stories are told of his interest in other musicians, and support for composers in difficulty like the communist Alan Bush, and of course with his tent companion, Henry Steggle, during the First World War.

So what of the place of his music in the twenty-first century? The excellent RVW Society website attests to the increasing number of performances of his works, not just in the UK, but increasingly in Europe too. Conductors like Mark Elder and Andrew Manze are programming his works and Lang Lang has recently performed the Piano Concerto in Europe, helping to dispel its supposed "unplayability", or the need to perform it in the later arrangement for two pianos which in itself limits any chance of its being performed! In due course, and away from commemorations, I think that Britten, Vaughan Williams and Elgar will find an equal place as the three most significant English composers of the last century, each with their own strengths; but for me, Vaughan Williams will always be the greatest. Yes, like all composers the output is uneven, but at its best it speaks to me in a way no other composer's music does. I do find it visionary and in it I begin "to see past facts to the very essence of things". To use his own words, writing about music in a letter to the children of Swaffham Primary School, where a house was named after him, it is a means "by which we can look through the magic casements and see what lies beyond." 🐦



Benjamin Britten

# To Complete or Not to Complete, that is the Question

Simon Coombs

The tremendous growth in the amount of Ralph Vaughan Williams's music that has been made available in recent years has led to a discussion among the officers of the Society, later broadened to include the membership, about the desirability of seeking to record it in its entirety, as has been done in the case of other major composers, such as Sibelius. The Editor has asked me to sum up the debate and to suggest what should be the way forward.

In the very first edition of the *Journal*, published in September 1994, Lewis Foreman wrote an article entitled "The unknown RVW – a matter for debate", which made the case for a significant expansion of his music that was available for recording. He listed twenty-seven works, two incomplete, which he thought to be worth bringing to the attention of the musical world. He made a particularly strong case for the *Serenade in A* (1898), of which he said "This is music that needs no apology – it should be on CD, now." He had to wait until 2012, but now it is! Among the other works he listed are the following (I give the dates of recording in parenthesis): String Quartet in C minor (2002), Quintet in D (2002), *The Garden of Proserpine* (2011), *Bucolic Suite* (2012), *The Solent* (2013), *Norfolk Rhapsody No 2* (2002), *The Pilgrim Pavement* (1999), *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* (2009) and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (2013). The majority of the works in this list have now been recorded, thanks largely to the efforts of Stephen Connock, who has cajoled record companies, raised funding, masterminded recording sessions, written sleeve-notes, and finally started the Society's own CD label, Albion Records.

As early as the second edition of the *Journal*, a very different view was expressed by Roy Douglas, who is now one of our Vice-Presidents. He wrote "I spent some time in 1958-59 with Michael Kennedy, in examining scores of many of these [early works] and found them embarrassingly feeble: themes usually commonplace, harmonies mostly lacking in originality, and construction sometimes verging on the clumsy: hardly anything characteristic of the composer we know and love. I feel strongly that it would be unkind to RVW, and possibly damaging to his reputation, to revive works which he himself had obviously decided to consign to oblivion because of their amateurishness." In a follow-up article in 1996, Roy Douglas insisted that "any attempt to reinstate an earlier version of the *London Symphony* is not to be encouraged" that would be "unfair to the composer and contrary to his known wishes".

In June 1998, a letter to the *Journal* from a member, Tony Hutt, asked whether works such as the *Norfolk Rhapsodies* Nos 2 and 3,

*Boldre Wood*, *Harnham Down* and *The Solent* were extant and what were the chances of hearing them recorded. I am pretty sure that he was not alone in wondering!

By 2012, the situation had changed substantially, and the argument had shifted to new ground. Anyone who has heard

“...I feel strongly that it would be unkind to RVW, and possibly damaging to his reputation, to revive works which he himself had obviously decided to consign to oblivion because of their amateurishness.

Roy Douglas

works such as the *Serenade in A* and who still would rather that it had been suppressed, is clearly in a small minority, to judge by the rapturous reception which its first recording received last year.

So in June 2012, I wrote an article inviting readers' views on the question which remains – whether to follow in the footsteps of the Swedish record company, BIS, who have now recorded every note written by Sibelius, including four fragments which may, or may not, be from the missing Eighth Symphony. I asked the question in this way: "Should it be our objective to seek the recording of every one of Vaughan Williams's works, or should there be a point at which it is decided that what is still unrecorded should remain so, for fear of harming his reputation? If the latter view prevails, who will decide when to stop, and on what grounds will the decision be based? If the former view is adopted, who should bear the cost of making what could turn out to be uncommercial recordings of unfinished works and fragments? Do we serve the memory of Vaughan Williams better by committing his music in its entirety to the judgment of history, or do we risk his place in English music by exposing lesser works to the public ear?"

The response to these points came in the next edition of the *Journal*. Seven readers wrote to the Editor and they seemed to be generally in favour of the objective of a "Complete Edition". None suggested that Vaughan Williams's reputation would be damaged by publishing and recording lesser-known works. Indeed, most

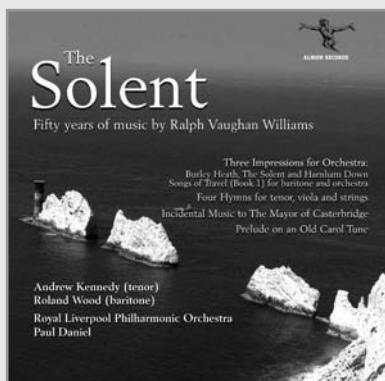
seemed to think that, so far, the revelations of the last few years had tended to enhance the composer's standing, as well as giving insights into his development as a young man feeling his way.

The question of how to afford substantial further recording projects was touched on, not without reason. I think we should bear in mind that at present Vaughan Williams is very much "box office". The immense popularity of *The Lark Ascending* and the *Tallis Fantasia* has meant that companies such as Naxos and Dutton Epoch have been willing to record *Willow Wood*, *Heroic Elegy and Triumphal Epilogue* and the *Serenade in A* in recent years, following on Chandos with *Nocturne* and *Six Choral Songs to be Sung in Time of War*, and Hyperion with their three CDs of chamber music from the Nash Ensemble. There is no question, therefore, of our own Albion Records having to shoulder the whole burden from now on, and I would not rule out the possibility of EM Records showing an interest in some of the choral and vocal pieces that remain to be set down.

Finally, we come to three works of interest which are unfinished or have been lost. Roy Douglas felt that any effort to complete the

Cello Concerto or to orchestrate the opera *Thomas the Rhymer* would be "regrettable". David Matthews has given us a glimpse of the concerto's slow movement, which does not appear to have offended anyone, and in the same context, Anthony Payne has orchestrated the *Four Last Songs*. It would make an interesting challenge to tackle *Thomas the Rhymer*, but how about the real "last frontier"? The score of *Norfolk Rhapsody No 3* was lost some time after its first performance in 1907, but we know the folk songs which were used and the programme note for that occasion gives plenty of indications of what it was like – would either of the above mentioned gentlemen care to accept the challenge? If the third *Rhapsody* turned out to be as beautiful as the first two are, we should all be the gainers, should we not?

Yes, I am a completist by instinct, and I hope that the Society and its members will continue to act as a catalyst to achieve further revelations, whether by calling for specific recordings, or by supporting Albion Records financially. I see no need for censorship for what remains to be heard, and every reason to press on with the exciting enlargement of our enjoyment and understanding of the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams. 🐾



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# Music You Might Like

Simon Coombs

There are 309 composers whose names begin with D currently represented in the Naxos discography, of whom thirty-two are to be found on my more modestly sized shelves. The French are well to the fore, and figure strongly in my top ten, but they also show well in the realms of early music. Who can resist the rhythmic delight of the music of the troubadours, or *trouvères*? My especial favourite composer from that time is **Gautier de Coincy**, whose song *Efforcier m'estuet ma voiz* is the stand-out track on a CD from Harmonia Mundi entitled 'Miracles of Notre Dame' (HMU 907317). I have long been a lover of the organ music of **Louis Claude d'Aquin** – his *Douze Noël*s are available in several different versions and are well worth exploring.

Coming nearer to modern times, we begin our top ten with **Conrado del Campo**, a Spanish composer whose music is almost unknown in this country. His *La Divina Comedia – El Infierno* is on an ASV CD (DCA 1100) which makes a good introduction to his darkly-hued late romantic style. The "big tune" takes eight minutes to arrive but is worth the wait – Paolo and Francesca come to mind. **Ernő Dohnányi** is at No 9. The agreeable *Variations on a Nursery Song* is his best-known work, but much of his other music is in an idiom which I find rather grating. His early compositions are more easy on the ear, however, and you can find them on a Hungaroton CD (32684) – try the Scherzo of his Symphony in F major, with its highly original opening, or the *Valse sentimentale*.

England's first entry in the list is **Sir George Dyson**, whose music has been splendidly covered on the Chandos label in the last two decades. The two CDs of *The Canterbury Pilgrims* (CHAN 9531(2)) make a good starting point for those who have not tried him. At No 7 is the first French composer in the top ten, **Henri Duparc**, whose small output of *mélodies* is widely available and exceptionally beautiful. My preferred version is by Sarah Walker, Sir Thomas Allen and Roger Vignoles on Hyperion (CDA 66323), but there are plenty of alternatives, and some readers may well want French singers in this repertoire. **Paul Dukas** is thought by many to be a one-hit wonder, as the composer of *L'Apprenti sorcier*, but there is a great deal more to enjoy in his output. Once again, Chandos have served him well, with a double CD (CHAN 241-32) which includes his three-movement Symphony in C major and the sombre overture after Corneille, *Polyeucte*, as well as some of his piano music.

Another French composer at No 5, and another with a small output, **Maurice Duruflé** was one of the finest organists of the last century and wrote a number of pieces for organ. His greatest work, however, is his Requiem of 1947, a grave and beautiful cousin of Fauré's Requiem. It is available on Hyperion (CDA 66191) with Sir Thomas Allen and Ann Murray as soloists. Another Hyperion disc (CDA 66368) has John Scott at the organ of St Paul's Cathedral in a good selection of his other works. At

No 4 is the French composer of ballet and opera, **Léo Delibes**. The "Flower Duet" from his opera *Lakmé* needs no introduction, but for me, his ballets, *Sylvia* and particularly *Coppélia*, contain his best music. For anyone who does not know *Coppélia*, a treat is in store. The music, especially in Act 1, rivals that of Tchaikovsky both in melody and in infectious rhythm – try the "Valse lente" or the "Csárdás" and "Danse hongroise" for starters. My own CD from the Royal Opera House Orchestra seems now to be unavailable, but there are plenty of other recordings to choose from, including DVDs.

For once, the top three does not contain any neglected or undervalued composer. At No 3 is **Frederick Delius**, a Yorkshireman, even if he did live in France for most of the last fifty years of his life. Readers of the *Journal* will no doubt know his music well. My own favourites are the four concertos, the *Florida Suite*, and the lesser known *Idylle de Printemps*, which Naxos recorded in 1995 with the English Northern Philharmonia under David Lloyd-Jones (8.553535). Another interesting rarity is the tone poem, *Hiawatha*, which Dutton Epoch released in 2009 (CDLX 7226), and which received its world premiere concert performance at the English Music Festival that year.

**Claude Debussy** is the last member of the French contingent. Again, much of his best music is extremely familiar, but amongst his early works are a number of gems that deserve to be better known. His unfinished opera *Rodrigue et Chimène* contains love music that echoes and even rivals *Tristan and Isolde*. Kent Nagano conducted it on Warner 4509985082, but this CD may be hard to find at present. Debussy won the Prix de Rome in 1884 with *L'enfant prodigue* – this and other pieces which he wrote as entries for the competition before he won, together with works written in accordance with the rules after he won, are to be found on a double CD from Glossa (GCD 922206), all of which are worth exploring. *Le Printemps*, another piece written in 1884, is particularly beautiful.

The final composer in the list is **Antonín Dvořák**. Few composers of the nineteenth century had such an inexhaustible fund of melody at their disposal – one thinks of Schubert in this respect. Many of his works, particularly the symphonies, the three concertos and some of the later chamber works are very well known, but among the less familiar works are the Overture *Othello* (Op 93), the *Miniatures* (Op 75), the *American Suite* (Op 98) and the opera *King and Charcoal-Burner*. All of these have the same rich strain of melodic invention as the "New World" Symphony and the "American" String Quartet.

I hope that admirers of **d'Albert**, **Diepenbrock** and **Dowland** will forgive me for the brevity of this review, and that supporters of d'Indy will be prepared to wait patiently until we reach the letter 'I'. It will be necessary to combine the next two letters as the Es are not too well represented. 🍷

# Dawn Offensive

Andrew M. Seddon

## France, 1916

Ten minutes, Sheffield thought, was a *long* time for a man waiting to die. Others might – and did – think the precious time too short; he, who'd been through this before, knew otherwise. The minutes – every second of them – were long.

He leaned against the damp, wood-reinforced wall of the trench, his Lee-Enfield rifle cradled in his arms, his breath – let out in a long exhalation from between pursed lips – misting in the morning chill.

He looked upwards, as if the few minutes that had passed since he had last done so would reveal a difference. To his mild surprise, the sky had changed. Where before the narrow ribbon of sky visible above the parapet had barely begun to lighten, now, flowing mist obscured the predawn glow, bringing with it a light drizzle. He wondered whether it would blow over or if it presaged a downpour.

Time would tell that, too.

He lowered his gaze and studied the other men of the company ranged alongside him. Lieutenant Carstairs appeared unconcerned at first glance, but his repeated checking of his watch betrayed him. One man prayed a rosary, his brow wrinkled in concentration and his lips moving soundlessly, while others gazed longingly at photos of wives and girlfriends they almost certainly would never see again. Several smoked. One or two looked as though they would vomit.

He couldn't blame them, these young men whose lives were about to end before they'd barely begun. He'd vomited the first time, too.

A passing stretcher bearer offered him a drag on a cigarette, but he refused with a motion of his hand, and the man disappeared into the maze of trenches called the Labyrinth.

In a few minutes, the order would come and they'd go over the top and charge across the barbed-wire entangled desolation of no-man's land, past the unretrieved, rotting bodies of those who'd perished before, and right into a nightmare of rattling German machine guns.

It was how this war was being played. They'd charge the Germans and be cut down before even reaching the enemy lines. In a few days, the Germans would return the favor and be mowed to pieces by British guns. New recruits would arrive to replace the fallen. And the cycle would repeat itself, over and over and over again.

"What's it like, sir?" a young soldier – too young even to need to shave – asked him.

Sheffield grimaced. He was only a few years older than this raw recruit, and yet it might have been decades; at twenty four, he was a seasoned veteran, "Lucky Sheffield", who'd survived almost two years of unrelenting carnage. The average life expectancy of a soldier posted to the front was a scant two weeks. Sheffield had no right to be alive.

"It's hell," he replied, "hell like you've never known." He laid

a hand on the young man's shoulder. "You run, you shout, you shoot if you catch sight of Jerry, and you die. It doesn't last long – no more than a few seconds for most."

Much quicker than the interminable waiting.

Ten minutes. Ten minutes that stretched literally into eternity...

He opened his mouth and shut it again. Why worry the young recruit further? Why mention the unlucky ones who sustained mortal wounds and took hours to die in agony, crying for help that never came? They'd all be dead eventually, having done their part for king and country, shedding their blood like countless others in an endless conflict that was bleeding Britain dry.

The young man must have read his thoughts in his eyes, for he paled and turned away.

Sheffield shook his head. Long gone were the days when enthusiastic volunteers – himself among them – had confidently asserted that the Germans would be beaten in no time. "We'll be home for Christmas" had been the assured – but mistaken – conviction.

Most of those early volunteers were now lying beneath French soil, where poppies bloomed in Spring...

Sheffield remembered the last time he'd gone over the top. It had been at dawn, just as it was now, with the first rays of the sun peeking over the horizon, and the thunder of artillery still ringing in his ears. When the order came, he'd scrambled over the top of the parapet, stumbling and lurching over shell-pocked ground to the accompaniment of the insane chatter of German guns, watching his fellows crumple into motionless, blood-spattered heaps, before he himself had gone down after a hammer-blow struck his head.

Perhaps he'd crawled back to his trench. Perhaps a brave comrade had dragged him. He had no idea. Because his next memory was of music – a melancholy, yet oddly peaceful melody, that he didn't recognize.

He realized that a man was humming it.

He must have made a sound, because water trickled over his lips, and a hand rested on his shoulder. "Don't try to speak, and for pity's sake lie still. You're in an ambulance on the way to the Main Dressing Station at Ecoivres."

His eyes didn't want to focus, and the jolting and swaying of the ambulance didn't help. But the wagon orderly appeared to be a solid man perhaps in his forties; a man who, at his age, could have remained safely in England with honor, but who had undoubtedly volunteered to enlist in the medical corps.

The ambulance lurched heavily and Sheffield lost consciousness again.

The succeeding days were no more than a confused haze during which he drifted in and out of consciousness until finally a semblance of normality returned and he was allowed to resume certain activities.

He met the wagon orderly again, some while later, after his wound had healed and the medics had assured him that he'd be fine

to return to duty as soon as his headaches and blurred vision eased.

It was dusk, and he'd gone outside to stretch his legs. Strangely, for once the guns were silent, and for a brief, blissful interlude, peace reigned over the battered French countryside. He chanced upon the wagon orderly sitting on a hillock beneath the ragged skeleton of a shattered tree, looking over the fields of muted grey towards the tower of Mont St. Eloi in the distance, humming the same melody.

"Sheffield," he introduced himself. "Thanks for bringing me in."

"Vaughan Williams," the man replied, regarding him with deep-set, serious eyes. "I'm glad to see you made it. So many don't."

Sheffield sat down beside him. "What's the tune?" he asked. "I don't recognize it."

"There's no reason that you should, since I haven't finished it," the orderly replied with a faint smile.

"You're the composer!" Sheffield exclaimed, dismayed by the sluggishness of his mind.

The other man nodded. "I am."

"I've heard both of your symphonies. They're quite different from each other. Are you working on a third?"

"Possibly," Vaughan Williams replied softly, as from the gathering darkness came the renewed thud of distant artillery. "Possibly." His gaze seemed to look beyond the lines of trenches, as if seeing a different landscape, the landscape of home, of England, recollected - or, Sheffield surmised, the faces of friends lost, devoured by the horror and brutality of the war.

*There is music in the midst of desolation...*

He couldn't recall where he'd heard it, but the line, strangely apropos, came to him unbidden.

He rose quietly to his feet and stepped away, not wanting to disturb his new acquaintance further, while wishing that he too could find some solace in creating music, even if it was only in his own mind...

The cold splatter of heavy drops of rain disrupted his reminiscence. The sky overhead was battleship grey.

He glanced at Carstairs. The lieutenant caught his look, and raised three fingers.

Something exploded directly overhead, and Sheffield ducked

involuntarily before realizing it was thunder and not a German shell. Even before the reverberations faded, a drenching rain began to pelt down.

Several men cursed.

Now they would die in mud, with not even air for their final breaths.

Surely there were no more than seconds left.

And then another uniformed figure emerged into the trench, a sodden courier handing a message to Carstairs. The lieutenant read it, then shoved it in his pocket and yelled, "Stand down, men. Jerry will have to wait for another day to feel British steel."

The young soldier who'd asked Sheffield what it was like to go over the top looked as if he was about to pass out.

Sheffield put an arm on his shoulder to steady him.

"It's not often that we get a reprieve," he said. "The brass must not want to get their gold braid wet."

The lad managed a weak smile.

"Let's go inside before we're soaked to the skin," Sheffield added, steering the youth ahead of him towards the billets carved out of the trench, although both men were dripping wet already.

Once inside, he sat by himself with his hands wrapped around a cup of hot tea and listened to the assault of the pounding rain; rain that had disrupted the deadly affairs of men; rain that had kept them alive for one more irreplaceable day – one more day in which to think of family or friends, to read, to rest, to play cards, to enjoy the company of comrades.

One more day of endurance in the face of almost unbearable conditions.

One more day of *life*.

But the respite, he knew, was only temporary. For tomorrow, or the day after that, or another day soon, would come the summons to a new offensive – and once again there'd be the long minutes of waiting that, each time he experienced them, seemed longer than the previous occasion.

Ten minutes *was* a long time.

He hummed Vaughan Williams' haunting tune to himself, thankful that it hadn't eluded him. It was, he thought, almost a prayer in music instead of words, and it brought him solace. 🐦



## Meet the Team

The Ralph Vaughan Williams Society is managed and run by a team of willing volunteers. Those members of the Society who live in far-flung corners of the globe, or who cannot get to the AGM for other reasons, will probably not know these individuals. So here is the first in a series introducing the trustees and officers.

We start, naturally, with the Chairman. A clutch of others will follow in the February 2014 edition.

I came to Vaughan Williams very early – indeed, it could be said that Vaughan Williams’s music set me on my current course and career. My father used to sing *Linden Lea* to me as an infant and, even at that early age, I fell deeply in love in the sound world and with the beauty, innocence and radiance of the work. It remains one of the most powerful and moving pieces for me today, simply not a work I can listen to dry-eyed!

I went on to attend St Paul’s Girls’ School for its connections with Holst, Vaughan Williams and Howells, and, after several years of deep immersion in the music of British composers and of dreamily wandering the music wing and taking my poor practical musical skills out on the organ in the Great Hall and harpsichords in the practice rooms, I emerged with a burning desire to restore British composers to their rightful place in the musical scale of things. The music scene at that time was one where English music

barely featured, and when it did, it was those standard “popular” works so beloved of Classic FM listeners today – which is not to deny that they are great pieces! It was whilst at school in my mid-teens that I spotted an advertisement in the *BBC Music Magazine* for members to help found and join a proposed Ralph Vaughan Williams Society. I thus attended the first public meeting of the Society and became a Founder Member. I even served as Assistant Editor for the *Journal* in its early editions, and issue no 3 ran a short article about me, as the youngest member. A photograph shows me, aged fourteen, about the time I first joined the Society, sitting on a school desk clad in a Classic FM Masterclass jumper!

After reading *Greats at Oxford*, I founded the English Music Festival, which I have run ever since. At the EMF we have been privileged to host the premiere performances of many recently unearthed early Vaughan Williams works; and the Festival has expanded into, amongst other projects and schemes, a record label and publishing arm, EM Records and EM Publishing. Vaughan Williams, of course, has a presence here, with our sixth disc featuring his darkly glorious Violin Sonata.

In the meantime, I joined the Board of Trustees of the Society. I had been involved in many British composer societies previously, but never had I joined the committee of so well-organised and – dare I say it? – “sane” a Society. I was therefore deeply honoured to take over from my dear friend Stephen Connock, whose vision the Society was, and whose drive and energy first made it possible, as the second Chairman.

Vaughan Williams remains a daily part of my life, both in terms of being surrounded by his music as part of what I do – currently hearing the strains of the *Concerto Accademico* drifting up from downstairs in preparation for the next EMF event – and also by the fact that I still turn to it as music of choice to suit many varying moods. I am often asked which symphony I like best. The answer is always whichever one I’ve heard most recently (although I tend to err towards the *Sea*, *London* and *Fourth*.) His “masterpiece”, for me, though, is probably *Riders to the Sea*. What work can rival the drama and intensity of that truly great opera? And yet I could not live happily without the songs, either: *Songs of Travel*, *On Wenlock Edge*, *The House of Life* and, yes, I always come back to it – *Linden Lea*. ☺



Em Marshall-Luck(left) and Æthelwulf

# Letters

## ARCHIVE MATTERS

I thought members of the Society might like to know of a recent unique upload on YouTube, Vaughan Williams's *Pastoral Symphony*, played by the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy in 1972 to mark the composer's 100th birthday. I say unique because as far as I know, this is the only extant performance by this great American orchestra of any of Vaughan Williams's symphonies. In addition, YouTube is the only place you're likely to hear it, unless some CD company issues it commercially. I see that under the video someone has commented "Absolutely amazing" and I have to agree!

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=rI9Jc4ni1yA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rI9Jc4ni1yA)

Incidentally, I hope everyone is up-to-date with what YouTube has to offer. Tap "Vaughan Williams" into the "search" field and you get 129,000 results, videos and audio recordings from all over the world of any number of his works. One of my favourites is a TV relay from Madrid with the Orchestra and Chorus of Radio & Television España in the *Sea Symphony* – "Contempla el mar"!

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXMnrBuU4Z8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXMnrBuU4Z8)

The Eighth Symphony from Charles Munch and the Boston Symphony Orchestra is also on YouTube, in addition to being released on CD by Pristine Audio. This is also a very fine performance, witness some of the entirely laudatory comments underneath the video: "A wonderful performance, full of energy and emotion." "This is easily the most persuasive performance of VW8 I've ever heard (and I own several versions on CD, including Barbirolli and the much-praised Haitink versions)." "Charles Munch brings a vigor and punch to RVW's great symphony that is so lacking in most performances."

I should add that for these musical items, extension speakers plugged into your computer make all the difference. An inexpensive set of two tweeters and a woofer can do the trick amazingly well!

Earlier mention of Ormandy reminds me of something that Mark Obert-Thorn, the transferring engineer, told me two or three years ago. He was going to produce a Philadelphia Orchestra centennial boxed set of CDs, covering their history from the days of 78s, that would have included many live broadcasts. On the list of broadcast tapes from CBS, he remembered seeing the US premiere of Vaughan Williams's Eighth under Ormandy (5 October 1956) as being archived in the Library of Congress. However, the Philadelphia Orchestra went bankrupt shortly after this project was first mooted, so the whole thing was shelved. As a result, Mark didn't follow this up, so we don't know for sure if the tape has indeed survived in the Library of Congress, nor, if it has, what kind of sound or condition it might be in. So I was wondering if any US members might be willing to follow this up, and see if the Library of Congress does still have that tape. If it does, it might be possible to try and get hold of a copy for the Society's own archive. I'd love to hear those Philadelphia strings in the "Cantilena"!

**Edward Johnson**  
London, UK

## LESSER KNOWN LITURGICAL WORKS

In issue 57 of the *Journal*, I read with much interest the review by Robert Shave of the 2013 Leith Hill Musical Festival, and in particular that of the concert of Coronation music. The *Festival Te Deum* is indeed a rarity. A glance at the Radio Times 1937 Coronation Number refers to the *Festival Te Deum* as being the most important of the new works composed for the Coronation, and that it will be sung during the Recess, when the King and Queen go into St. Edward's Chapel.

Having a keen interest in archive recordings and broadcasts, I was delighted that the first time I heard it was on Pearl GEMM CD 9342, taken from the complete recording of the 1937 Coronation. It is interesting to compare this to the performance by the Choir of Westminster Abbey, directed by Douglas Guest, on Chandos 6550. This has just the Abbey organ, whereas the Coronation performance has the full Coronation Choir and Orchestra. Whilst the Coronation performance has all the atmosphere of immediacy of a live broadcast, as well as a sense of occasion, the much later Westminster Abbey Choir recording is refreshingly sharper in audio focus.

Westminster Abbey is my link to the *Te Deum in G*, the setting made for the Enthronement of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang, in 1928. A while back, my wife and I heard it while attending Choral Matins at Westminster Abbey, the Abbey Choir giving a glorious rendering. We were sitting in about the third row back in Poets Corner. I first heard the *Te Deum in G* many years ago, on vinyl, HMV CLP1918, Music for Matins and Evensong, recorded by the Choir of Wells Cathedral, with Denys Pouncey directing the Choir and Anthony Crossland at the organ. The *Te Deum in G* is also included on the aforementioned Chandos CD, in a splendid rendering by the Choir of Worcester Cathedral, directed by Christopher Robinson. Let's hope both settings will be aired more often in choral concerts.

**Peter Foster**  
Dorset, UK

## SAD COMMENTARY

I have enjoyed my membership of the Society for the past seventeen years, and fully support the Society's dedication to "widening the understanding and appreciation of the life and music" of Vaughan Williams. One might imagine that, partly through the Society's efforts, the goal of establishing the widespread knowledge of and respect for the works of this great master has largely been achieved. However, there is likely always to be evidence to the contrary.

On the evening of 13 June 2013, the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C., performed the *London Symphony*. Here are a few excerpts from the review of the concert written by a music critic for the *Washington Post*, Robert Battey.

Describing this "long, rarely heard Vaughan Williams symphony,"

Mr. Battey suggests that “[m]any otherwise knowledgeable music lovers are surprised to learn that Vaughan Williams wrote any symphonies, let alone that he wrote nine. His symphonies have not held their place outside Britain.” And “Williams relies heavily on formulaic harmonic devices...rather than on the much more difficult work of constructing architecture through functional harmony and key relationships. The trouble with all this is that little of (his music) sticks in the head afterward.”

Now, Washington is no backwater, and one would expect a newspaper of the stature of the *Washington Post* to use music critics of considerable knowledge and experience. But it is hard to accept how any reputable music expert would find Vaughan Williams’s symphonies to be largely unknown, or that the *London Symphony* relies mostly on “bumptious folk songs, stirring British hymns and twee pastorals.”

Of course, this is only the opinion of one critic, and there is no universal law that everyone must love the offerings of Vaughan Williams. But at least the expressions by Mr. Battey offer ample justification for the continued efforts on the part of the Society and all lovers of Vaughan Williams’s creations to promote and encourage his body of work.

**Dennis Siebert**  
*Virginia, USA*

#### **OXFORD AND THE SOLENT**

I received my copy of the latest Albion disc today. It is very interesting to hear the *Three Impressions*, and hear how the “compositional voice” was developing. However, I was particularly struck by how familiar one of the themes in Harnham Down was. Eventually I recalled that it was later used as the main theme in *An Oxford Elegy*, and is indeed played by the orchestra as the chorus sings the very words which headed the earlier piece, “Here will I sit and wait...” – another instance of Vaughan Williams’s inspired recycling! I was slightly surprised that the booklet note did not refer directly to this, as it is an interesting parallel with his similar, if more frequent, re-use of the theme from *The Solent*.

**Charles Paterson**  
*Leicestershire, UK*

#### **PLUS POINT, MINUS POINT**

I am writing to say how much I liked the two photos of Vaughan William, taken by Peter Bull, that featured on the cover and inside the February 2013 issue of the *Journal*. They are amongst the best photographs I have seen of the composer, capturing his warmth and humanity, especially the one on the cover.

On a separate note, in the October 2012 issue, Nigel Blore asks if there are any major Vaughan Williams works that members of the Society find difficult to admire. Like Nigel, I had rather struggled with *A Sea Symphony* (which I have just enjoyed live on TV from the Proms). For forty years this work was something of a Vaughan Williams “blind spot” for me. My opinion totally changed when I heard the Bernard Haitink recording on EMI, an absolute revelation, and I realised what I had been missing all

these years, although the best music is definitely in the finale. The only other work I have trouble appreciating, other than *The Wasps* Overture, is the *Serenade to Music*. (I prefer the orchestral only version.) I don’t know why, but I was recently discussing it with a friend (also a great admirer of the composer) who shared my view. He thought that the *Serenade to Music* had an uncharacteristically self-congratulatory element to it which is unappealing, and I have to agree. However, I doubt whether any one else here will!

**Jeffrey Davis**  
*East Sussex, UK*

#### **LINDEN LEA AND THE APPLE TREE**

Today I received issue 57 of the *Journal*. On page 34 is a photo of Linden Lea. I did not take this photo, but ask your attention for the story below.

About ten years ago we were on the way to Cornwall and visited Down Ampney. In the church where Ralph Vaughan Williams was baptised by his father we sang together his setting of *Come down, O Love Divine*. On the way to Poulton, just outside Down Ampney, I saw on the left, Linden Lea. Just one street, built on top of the hill. In the middle of the slope, again on the left, I saw an apple tree and concluded immediately that this had to be Vaughan Williams’s apple tree of Linden Lea.

Today this is history. A new housing estate has been build on this slope. I hope the apple tree is still there!

**Gerrit Jan Niemeijer**  
*HN Haren,*  
*The Netherlands*

#### **THE GRAND OLD MAN**

I am now in a position to acquaint readers with a truly amazing fact. Having diligently read the *Journal* for many years, I have been surprised that at no time had any reader mentioned the fact that the great composer is enjoying a longer old age than many had thought.

I can now reveal that he is alive and well and still living in London. Evidence for this comes from the words of Katie Derham at the Last Night of the Proms on 7 September. Following an interview with Nigel Kennedy, who was just about to play *The Lark Ascending*, the camera returned to Katie, who realised that she had a few moments to fill before Nigel appeared on stage. Peering down at her notes for inspiration, she returned her gaze to the camera and said, “Vaughan Williams started writing *The Lark* in 1914, on the eve of the First World War, and he is now coming onto the stage.”

What a revelation! I thought. Sadly, we were only graced with the appearance of Nigel Kennedy in the next few moments. The great man – now of course at the ripe old age of 141 – was obviously seated in the wings and too bashful to appear.

**Rob Furneaux**  
*Devon, UK*

# Concert Reviews

## ANDREW MANZE AND THE NINTH IN GLASGOW

The BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra's cycle of Vaughan Williams symphonies reached No 9 on 2 May, and as it was broadcast live from the Glasgow City Halls, many of the *Journal's* readers will have heard the performance.

Whereas the programming of the Vaughan Williams cycle in 2011-2012 saw imaginative pairings of Vaughan Williams with Bach, Purcell and Britten, in 2012-13 his regular concert partner was a Beethoven piano concerto. The Fourth Piano Concerto accompanied Vaughan Williams's *Pastoral Symphony* in October. No 9 was allocated the "Emperor" Concerto. To me, this is not good programming, the stylistic and mood changes too extreme. Also, the initial programme layout had the Prelude to Act 1 of Wagner's *Lohengrin* and the Beethoven (with Steven Osborne) in the first half and, in the second half, the Vaughan Williams. By the time the night came, Vaughan Williams had been "relegated" to the first half and Steven Osborne's rendering of the Beethoven was in the star spot.

I might as well get this out of the way first – here's what the experienced music critic of *The Herald*, having extolled the virtues of Osborne's Beethoven, had to say about the Vaughan Williams:

As for Vaughan Williams's Ninth Symphony, all I can do is be honest. I think it's an absolutely dreadful piece, packed with pointless pastoralisms, daft fanfares, cruddy chorales, stupid marches and jagged dissonances that meant something in the Fourth Symphony, but had no context here. Probably the worst symphony I've heard. Ever.

Whether one agrees or not (and I certainly do not), it is striking that there is not a word about the performance, just an attack on the piece, the author choosing not to let objective criticism get in the way of what he thinks is a smart turn of phrase (that reads a little as though it's come out of a schoolboy's paper.)

Elsewhere in this *Journal*, I have seen Vaughan Williams's last symphony coming in for a bit of stick. To my ears, it is one of the most interesting, moving and rewarding of the cycle, its conflicting passion, violence and visionary outlook almost a marriage of the Fifth and Sixth symphonies – though this view is perhaps coloured by the knowledge it was the last to be written. (However, sketches for a symphony were found amongst his papers after his death; perhaps further symphonic thoughts were to follow the Ninth.)

Prior to the concert, we were treated to a talk about the work by the ever-enthusiastic Andrew Manze and his special guest, the composer, Anthony Payne. I cannot imagine a finer ambassador for anyone's music than Manze, though he conceded that it is a very loud symphony (though I think I've heard louder!) Both speakers said we were in for a treat, and they were right. From the very opening bars through to those great sweeping, cascading chords that close the work, I was enthralled, and the orchestra seemed on top form. Whether the players liked it or not, it had at least the merit of being an unusual and little-performed work, and

there was nothing perfunctory in the performance. Hearing the symphony live was a special occasion for me, being the first time, as far as I'm aware, that it has been played in Glasgow since at least the mid 1970s when my devotion to Vaughan Williams's great music began.

Afterwards, speaking to friends, opinions were mixed, ranging from "I don't get it" to "magnificent". I feel that if ever an Vaughan Williams symphony repays repeated listening, it is the Ninth. Kate Molleson in *The Guardian* wrote perceptively:

Strange and agitated, full of abstruse non sequiturs and restless flashbacks, [it] remains a challenging listen more than half a century after its 1958 premiere. It's not nostalgic or particularly defiant; its blazing final chords are blurred with dissonance and unnervingly inconclusive...Manze sculpted lines of searing intensity through the densely loaded score; there's a clarity to the textures he draws from this orchestra that really focused and drove the symphony's wayward energy. As in Wagner's Prelude to Act One of *Lohengrin*, which opened the concert, the passages of high, shimmering strings were especially ravishing...generally his choice not to overegg the extremes, and the orchestra's bold responses, made this as forthright and coherent a performance of the work as you're likely to hear.

It's all a matter of taste, but I'm with Ms Molleson on this one!

*Jim McGrath*

## A SEA SYMPHONY LAUNCHES THE PROMS

The 2013 BBC Proms opened on 12 July with a programme that included the customary "choral blockbuster", and this year it was Vaughan Williams's first venture into the symphonic repertoire that occupied the second half of the concert, his massive *Sea Symphony*.



Sakari Oramo

A warm evening needed a cool head for the newly appointed chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Finn, Sakari Oramo. In an interview beforehand he admitted that, as a non-native English speaker, he had some difficulty fully understanding Whitman's text and the way Vaughan Williams matched the music to it, so I was just a bit concerned how this performance would sound. "Big stuff" was Stanford's opinion on a first hearing of his erstwhile pupil's first symphony, and that is exactly what Oramo delivered, with a huge choir consisting of the BBC Symphony Chorus and the BBC Youth Choir, made up of five choirs from around the United Kingdom, plus, of course, the large orchestra.

The opening “Behold, the sea itself” was, from where I was sitting, just a little understated, but thereafter Oramo directed a fast paced, exciting and entirely sympathetic performance of the score, one which if not kept under a tight rein can sprawl, particularly in the last movement. The opening movement can in some interpretations sound a bit jingoistic and too nautical, but not here. Oramo’s realisation was a breath of fresh air, the choirs were magnificent, wave upon wave of highly committed singing, a huge sound. Sally Matthews and Roderick Williams were the two soloists who sang with gusto and good rapport.

The slow movement, “On the beach at night, alone”, a mysterious nocturne, was beautifully realised, with hushed orchestral sound evoking the quiet clash of the waves on the seashore. Baritone, Roderick Williams, gave an assured performance of the thought-provoking words. The scherzo, “The Waves”, is a showpiece for the choir and what we heard was a tour de force, impeccable singing of this exciting, windswept piece, from the massed forces. The finale, “The Explorers”, can be a difficult movement to bring off. It is by far the longest, and contains text that is Whitman at his most metaphysical. It is important not to let it meander, for there are moments of exquisite beauty that should not be delayed too long. I think Oramo held it together very well, and once again the choir and soloists were wonderful. Particularly memorable were the passages “Bathe me O God in thee” and “O thou transcendent”. The ending, where the slow tug of the sea gradually fades out, was heard with rapt attention by the packed Albert Hall audience, and was followed by very enthusiastic applause for what had been a terrific performance. Oramo looked exhausted at the end. I think he put a tremendous amount of energy into getting this performance right, but perhaps the greatest accolade would have to go to the choirs, who were simply superb. This performance could have been dubbed Vaughan Williams’s “Symphony of a Thousand”. Mahler composed his magnificent Eighth Symphony in 1906, just as Vaughan Williams was incubating the *Sea Symphony*, and I was struck by some of the similarities between these two great choral works. “Veni, veni, creator spiritus!” and “Behold, the sea itself” are equally arresting openings to their respective spiritual journeys.

The first half of the Prom was a mixed bag. *Harmony*, by Julian Anderson, was a BBC commission receiving its first performance. For choir and orchestra, it left me unmoved. Then, an undisputed masterpiece by Britten, the Four Sea Interludes from *Peter Grimes*, which received a fine performance. Following this, the pianist Stephen Hough joined the orchestra to play first Rachmaninov’s *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, followed by Lutosławski’s *Variations on a Theme by Paganini*, an interesting juxtaposition, with fine playing from Hough, the familiar romanticism of the first piece contrasting with the spiky and jazzy second one. All in all, this was a great debut for Sakari Oramo as Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and it bodes well that he has such affinity for English music.

Members might like to know that they can watch the entire broadcast performance of *A Sea Symphony* on YouTube:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qw-3jdtfro](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qw-3jdtfro)

Robin Barber

## INAUGURAL CONCERT AT LEITH HILL PLACE

This concert took place on Saturday 31 August. In arranging it on behalf of the RVW Society, I had no idea just how beautiful the setting would be, enhanced by a wonderful summer evening. Looking south from the terrace it was hard to believe that this was a view over the crowded south of England; commuter Surrey no less. I would imagine that this hasn’t changed significantly since Ralph was brought here, aged three, by his mother following his father’s untimely death.



Jessica Coleman (violin) accompanied by Alison Rhind

The Society and the National Trust have not always seen eye to eye about what should happen to the house, but the Trust has now realised what wonderful potential it has. Arriving mid-afternoon, I found a welcoming hall display about the composer, quotations from his articles and, elsewhere, a sound guide to accompany a visit through the upstairs rooms. Obviously the house is “work in progress”, but a lot has been done in a short time, and Gabrielle Gale, the Operations Manager, and her staff are to be congratulated on what has been achieved so far. Just as impressive was the obvious enthusiasm of the rangers and house guides for the whole project. There are further events to follow and they have the services of a young composer, Stef Conner, whose next task is to organise a folk singing day in mid-September, and a concert by an aspiring young pianist to include part of Vally Lasker’s piano arrangement of *Job*.

Jessica Coleman, a very promising young violinist now entering her second year at the Royal College of Music, was accompanied at the piano by RCM staff accompanist Alison Rhind. The full house of more than sixty people gave them an enthusiastic reception. Vaughan Williams was represented by the *Romance and Pastorale*, alongside Ravel’s Violin Sonata. Then, following drinks on the terrace, we were treated to *The Lark Ascending* in its original version.

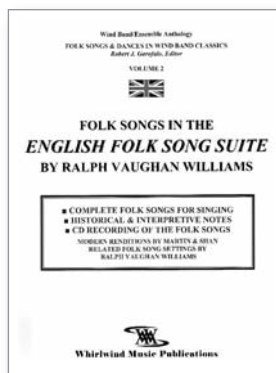
A second concert, organised by the Society’s Publicity Officer Karen Fletcher, will already have taken place by the time you read this. She and I were struck by the number of visitors who took the trouble to write positive comments and suggestions on the board in the hall. Some asked whether the Trust would arrange a Christmas Concert. Space of course will be a problem, but just think of those wonderful carol arrangements ringing round this great house warmed by open fires!

John Treadway

# Book Review

## Folk Songs in the *English Folk Song Suite* by Ralph Vaughan Williams

Edited by Robert J. Garofalo  
Whirlwind Music Publications  
www.whirlwind-music.com



Many years ago, my grammar school music teacher suggested I listen to an LP of English music played by the Eastman Wind Ensemble. I was very sniffy indeed about this, but my goodness how things changed with the opening bars of Holst's Suite No 2! Then there was the finale, where the sheer brilliance of the composer in bringing in "Greensleeves" as a counterpoint to the Dargason actually did bring tears to my eyes (as it still can, if I'm in the right mood.) The rest of the LP was almost as striking, but since then I've struggled to find much in the way of interesting wind band repertoire, and living, as I do, in a region where wind ensembles flourish, I find much of what is written for the medium disappointingly mediocre.

Robert J. Garofalo is an American conductor, academic, and President of Whirlwind Music Publications. He is credited as the editor and designer of this fascinating publication, though I suspect he has also written most of it. It is the second volume of five dedicated to the use of folk song in music written for wind band. Volume 1 deals with Gordon Jacob's *Old Wine in New Bottles* and Vaughan Williams's *Sea Songs*. Later volumes cover the Holst *Suite* already mentioned, Grainger's *Lincolnshire Posy* and *Suite Française* by Darius Milhaud. As an explanation of the aims of the series I can do no better than to quote Garofalo himself in the preface to the present volume: "This anthology is designed to provide conductors with the inspirational source music – folk songs and dances – used by composers in selected wind band/ensemble masterworks. Each volume in the series includes historical and interpretive notes, complete folk music scores, and a compact disc recording of the folk music."

Chapter 1 is entitled "Historical Notes", and features as succinct a summary of Vaughan Williams's early career as you could hope to read. It also deals with the friendship between Vaughan Williams and Holst – wholly appropriate, given both composers' interest in folk song as well as in wind band music. Most of the chapter, however, is taken up with the historical background to the *Folk Song Suite*, and Garofalo's researches have turned up a fair amount of information that I had not encountered elsewhere. Inevitably, in a publication of this kind, much of the information is of a specialist nature, but the text is thoroughly readable and accessible to the non-specialist, and will

surely be of much interest to Society members who are keen enough to want to explore one of the composer's byways. Since one of Garofalo's priorities is authenticity, a particularly interesting passage in this first chapter deals with his attempts to locate the original manuscript. As part of this quest he contacted Michael Kennedy, whose letter of reply is reproduced in the book. In the event, it appears that the original manuscript score is lost. However, by a skilful blend of imagination and deduction, Garofalo has come to the conclusion that the published instrumentation may not be exactly what Vaughan Williams intended at the outset. Having detailed "what this writer surmises to be the composer's manuscript instrumentation" he then makes the sober judgement that "Whichever way one chooses to perform this masterwork, one should now be better prepared to interpret the *English Folk Song Suite*."

This is the aim of Chapter 2, which is made up of a highly detailed series of interpretative notes. These, certainly, are of primary interest to conductors and members of wind ensembles, but again, and surprisingly, given the technical detail, the writing is such that few readers would be excluded.

For those Society members particularly interested in folk song, Chapter 3 will probably be the most satisfying. It is an exhaustive study of the nine folk songs used by Vaughan Williams in his *Suite*. The early part of the chapter summarises much of what we already know about Vaughan Williams's folk song activity, and not neglecting the other actors in the drama. Garofalo then deals with each song in detail. The songs' geographical origins are given, along with details of how, when and by whom they were collected. The words and melodies are analysed, with much insight, and, where appropriate, with reference to regional variants. The chapter ends with the sheet music for each song, complete with as many verses as any of us could wish for.

A fascinating plus to this publication is the accompanying CD. First of all, the nine folk songs from the *Suite* are sung, in various vocal combinations – including an autoharp – by Martin and Shan Graebe. Folk song devotees may already have encountered these singers, but they were new to me. Their renditions of the folk songs are clearly the result of much research and thought, but their style is an individual one that some might find an acquired taste. The four remaining tracks are "Dives and Lazarus" and "High Germany", arranged for men's voices by Vaughan Williams and given in beautiful performances by Opus Anglicanum. There then follows "John Barleycorn" from *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons*, in a performance taken from our own Albion Records disc, ALBCD 010. The CD ends with Boult conducting the London Symphony Orchestra in the March from the *English Folk Song Suite* in the orchestral arrangement that Gordon Jacob produced at Vaughan Williams's request.

This is an engaging and informative publication, of particular interest to those who play in or conduct wind ensembles, but with more than enough material in it to interest any member of the Society, more especially those particularly interested in the crucial subject of Vaughan Williams and folk song.

*William Hedley*

## From the Chairman

At long last, Vaughan Williams's childhood home has opened its doors to visitors and welcomes them in to explore his music and life, as well as celebrating the other luminaries associated with the house and our composer, such as Darwin and the Wedgwoods. Visitors have flocked in; and with the launch concert sold out, high footfall and immensely positive feedback, the future looks rosy for Leith Hill Place. People of all ages are drawn in – and tales abound of children entranced by the Vaughan Williams musical experience, as well as those of elderly generations being deeply moved by the distinctive atmosphere of the house. What would Vaughan Williams have made of it? Well, my guess is that, with typical modesty, he would have been puzzled, wondering in bemusement as to why on earth anyone could make such a fuss about his old childhood home. Nevertheless, he would surely have been delighted at the thought of the fabric of the house gradually being repaired and restored, and he would have approved of anything that opened up the doors of the wonderful, magical land of music to people, young and old. I am sure you will join me in sending the National Trust our heartiest congratulations and thanks for having made possible the realisation of a long-standing ambition of our Vice-President, Stephen Connock. Nor should we forget the public campaign by film maker John Bridcut. All this faith and vision has combined to turn a crumbling and slightly foreboding old building into something really special.

Further congratulations are due to Stephen Connock and his colleagues at the Society's offspring record label, Albion, for a particularly spectacular latest release in *The Solent*. Performances are (needless to say!) of an extremely high standard and the music – which ranges over the course of the works represented on the disc from gentle and dreamy to deeply impassioned – is most certainly worth hearing. I find myself particularly fond of the incidental music to *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, yet it is wonderful to have a recording of *The Solent*. Despite having heard it live, of course, at its world première performance at this year's English Music Festival, it is a work that, though attractive at first, nevertheless rewards further listening. (What Vaughan Williams doesn't? Our composer is one of such depth, integrity and musical intelligence that repeated hearings of almost any work of his offer new insights and reveal new vistas or structures previously unnoticed.)

As ever, I look forward to hearing your own opinions and thoughts about Vaughan Williams and his music at the AGM. Don't forget, this is your opportunity to express your views, as a member of the Society, regarding its running, strengths and weaknesses and the direction it is taking – or the direction you would like to see it taking. All feedback is always welcome and the AGM is the best forum for that. So I very much hope to see you there!

*Em Marshall-Luck*



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