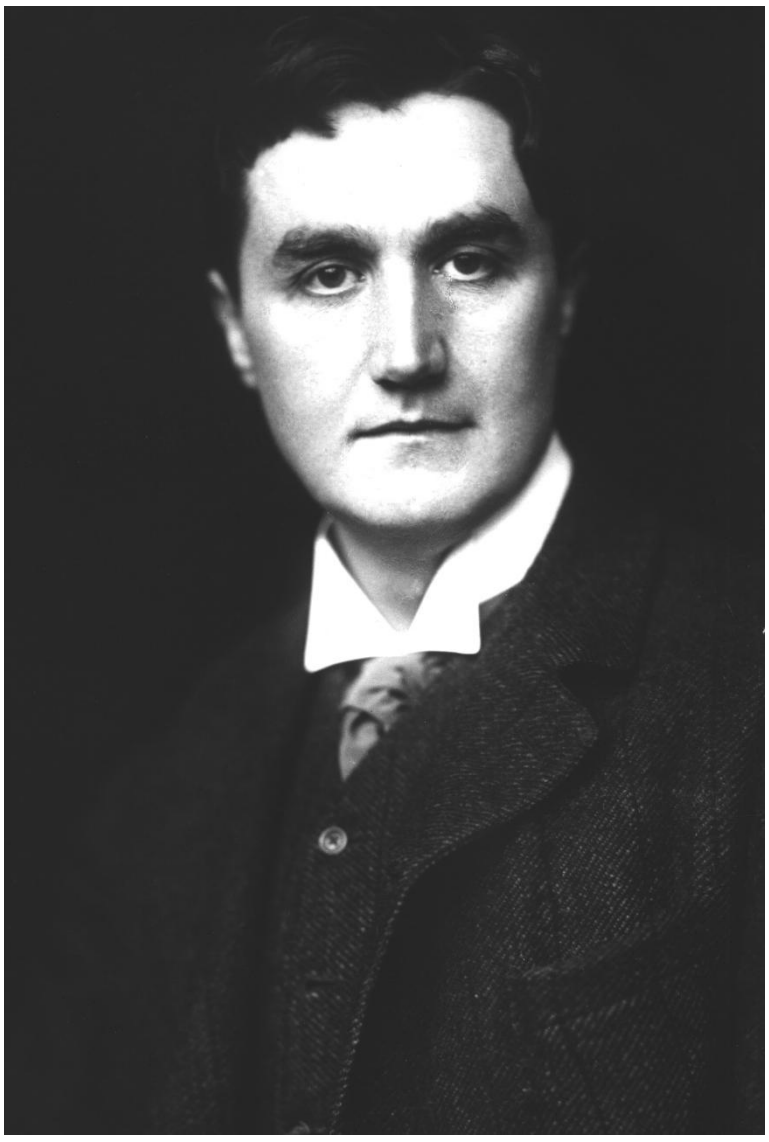
RVW: A Critical Discography

Part One



Orchestral Works, including Symphonies, Concertante Works, Music for Plays and Films, Brass and Wind Band Works, and Chamber Works

Ronald E. Grames

2026-D Edition

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION **5**

COLLECTIONS **7**

SYMPHONIES **7**

Symphonies 1–9 Complete 7

A Sea Symphony (Symphony No. 1) 9

A London Symphony (Symphony No. 2) 11

A Pastoral Symphony (Symphony No. 3) 14

Symphony No. 4 in F minor 16

Symphony No. 5 in D major 17

Symphony No. 6 in E minor 19

Sinfonia antartica (Symphony No. 7) 21

Symphony No. 8 in D minor 23

Symphony No. 9 in E minor 25

CONCERTOS AND ORCHESTRAL WORKS WITH INSTRUMENTAL SOLO **27**

Piano Concerto in C major 27

Violin Concerto in D minor (formerly Concerto Accademico) 28

Oboe Concerto in A minor 30

Bass Tuba Concerto in F minor 32

The Lark Ascending – Romance for Violin and Orchestra 34

Flos Campi for solo viola, small orchestra, and wordless chorus 38

Fantasia on Sussex Folk Tunes for cello and orchestra 40

Fantasia for piano and orchestra 41

Suite for Viola and Small Orchestra 41

Fantasia (quasi variazione) on the Old 104th Psalm Tune 43

Romance in D♭ for harmonica with strings and piano 44

David Matthews: Dark Pastoral for cello and orchestra 45

ORCHESTRAL WORKS **47**

Job: A Masque for Dancing 47

Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis 49

Charterhouse Suite 53

The Wasps: Overture and Aristophanic Suite 53

Old King Cole – Ballet 56

The Running Set 57

Two Hymn-Tune Preludes 58

Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus 59
Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1 60
Norfolk Rhapsody No. 2 62
David Matthews: Norfolk March 62
In the Fen Country (Symphonic Impression) 63
Fantasia on Greensleeves 63
Concerto Grosso 66
Partita for Double String Orchestra 67
Four Impressions for Orchestra: In the New Forest – Burley Heath and The Solent 68
Harnham Down 69
Serenade in A minor 70
Bucolic Suite 71
Heroic Elegy and Triumphal Epilogue 71
Music for an EFDS Masque 72
Prelude on an Old Carol Tune 72
Flourish for Glorious John 73
INCIDENTAL MUSIC FOR STAGED AND RADIO PLAYS 75
Music for Staged Productions 75
Music for The Pilgrim's Progress 75
The Wasps – Incidental Music 75
Incidental Music to Greek Plays by Euripides 76
Incidental Music to Plays by Shakespeare 77
The Death of Tintagiles – Incidental Music 79
The Blue Bird – Incidental Music 79
Music for Radio 80
The Pilgrim's Progress – Incidental Music 80
Incidental Music for Richard II 81
Incidental Music for The Mayor of Casterbridge 82
FILM MUSIC 83
49th Parallel (1941) 83
Coastal Command (1942) 85
The People's Land (1943) 86
The Flemish Farm (1943) 86
The Stricken Peninsula (1945) 87
The Loves of Joanna Godden (1947) 87
Scott of the Antarctic (1948) 88

The Dim Little Island (1949) 89
Bitter Springs (1950) 90
The England of Elizabeth (1955) 90
The Vision of William Blake (1957) 91
WORKS FOR MILITARY OR BRASS BAND 92
Music for Military/Wind Band 92
English Folk Song Suite for Military Band 92
Sea Songs – Quick March 96
Toccata Marziale 98
Douglas Wagner: The Golden Vanity March 99
England's Pleasant Land 99
Flourish for Wind Band 100
Music for Brass Band 101
Henry the Fifth Overture 101
Flourish of Trumpets for a Folk Dance Festival 102
Flourish for Three Trumpets / Four Cambridge Flourishes for Four Trumpets 103
Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes 103
Variations for Brass Band 105
CHAMBER WORKS 108
String Quartet in C minor 108
Quintet in D major 109
Sonata for Horn and Piano 110
Piano Quintet in C minor 110
Ballade and Scherzo 111
Nocturne and Scherzo 111
String Quartet No. 1 in G minor 112
Phantasy Quintet 113
Suite de Ballet 114
Two Pieces (Romance and Pastorale) 115
Romance for Viola and Piano 116
Six Studies in English Folk Song 117
Cello 118
Violin 119
Viola 119
Clarinet 120
Flute and Piccolo 121

Saxophone 122
Double-Reed Instruments 122
Brass Instruments 123
Miscellaneous 125
Suite for Two Pipes 125
Suite for [Four] Pipes 126
Canzona for Three Pipes 127
Carol, Musette, and Christmas Dance (Viola Suite for Four Pipes and Piano) 127
Household Music: Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn Tunes 127
String Quartet No. 2 in A minor (For Jean on her Birthday) 129
Violin Sonata in A minor 130

INTRODUCTION

There was a time, within the memory of some members of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society, when recordings of the works of our honored composer were to be treasured for their very existence. In the March 1963 *Gramophone Catalogue*, the earliest I own, the Vaughan Williams listing covers barely three-quarters of a page. Fortunately, those pioneering recordings were most often made by champions of the composer's work, conductors bringing deep insights into his music grown out of years of friendship and shared experience. By the time that Society co-founder and Vaughan Williams authority Stephen Connock produced his first *A Selective Discography* in 1994, the situation had changed dramatically. The catalogue of recordings had grown significantly, and while many of the performances – classic and new – were worthy, it was apparent that some guidance to those wishing to explore the repertoire would be helpful, both to recall recordings of special merit to experienced members and hidden treasures they may have missed, and to assist the newer listener in locating recordings that establish important benchmarks in the catalogue.

Other projects forced Stephen Connock to retire from further work on this document in 2011. It has been updated at least once since, but so much has changed in the rapidly evolving classical music market – notably much consolidation of catalogues – that a more thorough revision was needed. This I have undertaken, based on my own knowledge of the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams, acquired in a half of a century of building and listening to an extensive collection of recordings of his music and on my experience as a reviewer for a major U.S. classical music journal for over nine years. My version of this discography has been informed by the work of my eminent predecessor, though those comparing them will find differences in perspective as well as a considerable expansion. My views will at times appear to reflect a critical consensus, but at other times may contradict it. Some may reflect an aesthetic shaped by a lifetime in the United States as opposed to the United Kingdom. In all cases, assessments will be driven by a study of the published scores. Despite the composer's occasional statements that tempos, for instance, are "a matter of opinion," it seems incumbent upon me to give special weight to the instructions left by him for the performance of his music – matters of tempo, as well as of dynamics, balance, and expression – something that has not been a constant among conductors, performers, or critics. To that I will add my own more subjective sense of the artistry of the performances. Ultimately, the opinions expressed here are my own. As in any such venture, there will be those who disagree with my choices, in terms of inclusion or exclusion as well as of characterization. I hope, ultimately, that this new iteration will be found worthy of its previous versions; that it will generate enlightening and enlivening discussions and lead to joyous and moving discoveries. If it does, it will have served its purpose well.

On a technical note: Of necessity, I have chosen to expand the scope of this listing to include releases that are available only as digital file downloads or which are currently out of publishers' catalogues. Physical discs may still be many collectors' preferred storage method of acquiring music of lasting value, but it would be foolish to ignore the fact that many fine recordings are only available as downloads or as licensed on-demand CDRs commercially burned from the digital files. It is a market in flux, with physical items going out of print without warning and sometimes only a short time after release. The Internet, of course, offers a lively used market for those looking for treasures past, which I will name here as they merit it, but I will only reference legacy media like LPs, 78s, and audio tapes that have not been commercially digitized if they are of significance historically, and I will not consider performances posted to sites like YouTube or Vimeo.

General recommendations, prime and alternate, are given for most works, though I have deemed some works – actually, relatively few – of such minor interest that I have not given them one. Since it is my hope that this critical listing might be of interest to the experienced collector as well as to the new listener, I have added two other categories. First, there are *specialist recommendations* for anyone wanting to explore those minor works, as well as recordings of arrangements not made by the composer and recordings that are unusual in some way. Then there are *historic recommendations* for those willing to listen to early, usually pre-stereo, recordings, often with some sonic limitations, in order to hear first thoughts on these works. The former attempts to consider a body of recordings too easily and often overlooked, and the latter recognizes that the first recordings are often among the truest to the composer's stated expectations and frequently are enlivened by the thrill of new discovery.

Navigation: Click on a title in the Table of Contents to go to that section. Click on the [Go to Table of Contents] link at the bottom right of each content page to return.

Part One of this Critical Discography examines orchestral works, including symphonies, concertante works, music for plays and films, brass and wind band works, and chamber works. Part Two, on which I am currently working, will include keyboard compositions and works for voice, chorus, and the operas.

Ronald E. Grames

COLLECTIONS

In 2008, EMI released a 30-disc compendium of Vaughan Williams's best-known works: *The Collector's Edition*. Like others in its composer-themed series, the EMI release was a limited edition and is out of print. Warner, EMI's successor, released an essentially identical collection in 2022 under the title *The New Collector's Edition* to mark the composer's 150th anniversary. Both include a nice selection of music in fine performances from EMI's deep back catalogue, not least the beautifully shaped set of symphonies led by Vernon Handley, major choral pieces by David Willcocks and the Choir of King's College Cambridge and by Adrian Boult who also leads many orchestral works, plus operas, songs, and chamber works. The EMI box had two songs sung by Thomas Hampson that are not in the new. The new edition adds two viola/piano arrangements, two choral works including *Linden Lea*, *Bushes and Briars* sung by Janet Baker, and *Linden Lea* sung by Ian Bostridge. Either is an excellent starter for the new collector despite the regrettable lack of program notes.

Otherwise, for those looking for a single purchase to get started, the only thing close – though no less desirable – is the box set of all of Boult's recordings for EMI on 13 well-packed CDs. This includes his stereo symphony set from the 1960s and 70s, other orchestral works including a gripping *Job*, a moving *Dona Nobis Pacem*, his nonpareil *Serenade to Music*, the supernal recording of RVW's morality/opera *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and much more including recordings from the 1940s and 50s, among them his thrilling premiere recording of the Symphony No. 6. More recent reissues by Warner Classics of all Boult's recordings, along with much else, are available in comprehensive box sets of his monaural and stereo recordings. These include a disc of monaural Pye/Nixa recordings not previously available in official reissues. These sets are essential for Boult collectors, but a big investment for those only interested in the recordings of Vaughan Williams. Many of the Vaughan Williams recordings have not been remastered since the earlier Complete EMI Recordings set – or the original CD issues, for that matter – and not all of those that were redone are improved.

Recommendation: Vaughan Williams - The Collector's Edition/The New Collector's Edition (EMI/Warner – 30 CDs)

Recommendation: Adrian Boult: Vaughan Williams - The Complete EMI Recordings (EMI – 13 CDs)

Alternate: Adrian Boult: Complete Warner Recordings - The Stereo Recordings 1956 – 1978 (Warner – 79 CDs)

Adrian Boult: Complete Mono Recordings 1920-1957 on HMV, Pye Nixa & Parlophone (Warner – 36 CDs)

SYMPHONIES

Symphonies 1–9 Complete

Stephen Connock identified eight cycles of the nine Vaughan Williams symphonies in his last listing: Boult 1 (1950s Decca, all monaural except the stereo Eighth and Everest Ninth), Boult 2 (1960s/70s stereo EMI/Warner), Previn (RCA/Sony), Thomson (Chandos), Handley (EMI/CfP), Haitink (EMI/Warner), Andrew Davis (Teldec), and Slatkin (RCA/Sony). He did

not list the Bakels/Daniel on Naxos. Since then, several sets appear to have been deleted, though most can be obtained used or as a download. Thomson, Haitink, Davis, Slatkin, and Bakels/Daniel are available in box sets, all but the Thomson at budget pricing. The Thomson is available at mid-price. Meanwhile, the Hickox cycle, interrupted by the conductor's untimely death, is completed with a *Sinfonia antartica* and Ninth conducted by Andrew Davis. Chandos has reissued it as budget-priced boxed set in impressive surround (SACD) sound with radio interviews of the composer, wife Ursula, Barbirolli, and Boult to further sweeten the deal. Andrew Manze (Onyx) and Mark Elder (Hallé) have complete cycles now, and a surprising cycle of Leningrad live performances from 1988–89 was available for a while, led by Gennady Rozhdestvensky (Melodiya). He proved his mettle as a Vaughan Williams interpreter while leading the BBC Symphony. Another important cycle has been completed by Martyn Brabbins (Hyperion), variable in the levels of intensity, but including a magisterial reading of the 1920 version of *A London Symphony* and especially fine ones of the Third and Fifth. And now Antonio Pappano has embarked on a journey through the symphonies with his new band, the London Symphony. The early releases have impressed.

Every one of these cycles has strengths and weaknesses, much to be expected given the range of expression the nine symphonies encompass, and each one can give pleasure. Each has its advocates. Looking for one to recommend to the new listener – for who else would have just one? – proves a daunting task, despite some clear prioritizing of qualities sought: general faithfulness to the letter and spirit of the score, a clear sense of the composer's style, unfailing engagement with the music, appealing balance and shaping of lines, and good engineering. In the end, it is Boult's direct, spontaneous but never indulgent music making that continues to best represent the music. It is not coincidental that his recordings come closest in many qualities to the rare examples of the composer's own shaping of his scores on record. The earlier Decca recordings, made when the conductor was in his 60s and often with the composer present, are usually the more gripping, but while well-recorded for their time, the sound is inevitably dated. Pristine Classical has remastered the set from LPs in a subtly simulated stereo ambience which adds space around the sound but clouds detail a bit. They also are a bit bass heavy. The earlier cycle has also been released by Eloquence in a box devoted to Boult's recordings of British music. I still prefer the 2002 Decca remastering. The later cycle, however, recorded in that marvelous Indian summer when the conductor was nearing 80, is nearly as fine and in excellent true stereo sound. It is often noted that the fires burned a little lower in the later set. While seemingly true, this is really only an issue in the more bellicose Fourth and Sixth, and even here the implacable power of the conception is never in question. In compensation, some interpretations had grown even deeper in the intervening years, not least his transcendent *A Sea Symphony*. Note, though, that the earlier remasterings of these stereo recordings are preferable to the later Japanese Warner SACDs or Warner's complete stereo box set where the Japanese masters were used.

Others must be acknowledged. Previn was the previous compiler's preference, and while some of his bolder, brassy approach has not worn well over time for me, his readings can also be sensitive, though often at tempos well below those in the published scores. Still, his cycle is an impressive achievement in cinematic sound hardly faded with time. Handley finds grandeur and affecting poetry, and unlike some interpreters, he manages to make his points without overtaxing the composer's structures or ignoring his tempos. Thomson, something of a literalist, is not mysterial enough for those who prefer Handley, or even more so Previn, but he finds folkish vigor and drama without romanticizing the music and is offered in superbly rich sound.

Two other cycles will be better appreciated by collectors who are well versed in mainstream recordings. Haitink brings a probing mind and a non-English sensibility to this music, finding a profundity more Germanic and more measured than the composer might have countenanced, but often stirring nonetheless. Rozhdestvensky's cycle offers the equivalent of Shakespeare in a Russian accent. It is fascinating after a calamitous *A Sea Symphony*, but definitely a specialist selection.

There are highpoints in other cycles that will be considered in the individual listings below.

Recommendation: Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus, New Philharmonia Orchestra (EMI/Warner – 5 CDs, Download) or *Adrian Boult: Vaughan Williams - The Complete EMI Recordings* (EMI – 13 CDs)

Alternate: Bryden Thomson, London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus (Chandos – 5 CDs, Download)

Vernon Handley, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus – *with Job, English Folk Song Suite, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Flos Campi, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Oboe Concerto, Partita for Double String Orchestra, and Serenade to Music (choral version) (*EMI/Classics for Pleasure – 7 CDs) or *The Collector's Edition/The New Collector's Edition* (EMI/Warner – 30 CDs)

André Previn, London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus – *with Violin Concerto, Tuba Concerto, Three Portraits from 'The England of Elizabeth' (RCA – 6 CDs) or The Classic André Previn collection (Sony – 55 CDs)*

Historical: Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus (Decca/Belart/Eloquence – 5 CDs or Pristine – 5 CD-Rs, Download) or *with Partita for Double String Orchestra, Old King Cole, The Wasps - Aristophanic Suite, Job, and works by Arnold, Elgar, Walton, Butterworth, Bax, Holst, Searle* (Eloquence – 16 CDs)

Specialist: Bernard Haitink, London Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus – *with Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, The Lark Ascending, In the Fen Country, and On Wenlock Edge* (EMI/Warner – 7 CDs)

Gennady Rozhdestvensky, USSR Ministry of Culture Symphony Orchestra, USSR State Chamber Choir (Melodiya – 6 CDs)

A Sea Symphony (Symphony No. 1)

It is appropriate that this is the first individual work to be considered in this discography, as it was the work that announced most forcefully in 1910, at age 38, that the composer's long, self-imposed internship was ended and that he had truly found his own voice. Its germination had lasted a long six years, beginning in 1903, and completed only after he had returned from his brief studies with Ravel. Those who look at it critically must admit that it is not a perfect work, but it is a supremely confident one, despite the composer's usual post-premiere concerns. If it shows signs of its development from choral songs to symphonic utterance on a grand scale, this need not concern the listener who is riveted by its remarkable opening, thrilled by its poetic vision, and overwhelmed by its grandeur and spiritual power.

So, “a magnificent work” indeed, as Connock declares it in his list, and we have chosen the same performance for our prime recommendation: the 1968 stereo recording by Boult (EMI/Warner). The veteran conductor shapes the work with extraordinary affection and responsiveness and a clear sense of structure and the long line, always finding the character of the moment and clearly delighting in the deep spirituality to which Vaughan Williams responded in Whitman’s metaphorical sea voyage of the soul. The recording wears its 50 years lightly, especially in later releases (even if all use the same 1986 transfer), and though John Carol Case strikes some as too light and cultured a singer, he and Sheila Armstrong create some of the most haunting moments of this thrilling work’s distinguished recorded history. (The Japanese Warner SACD remastering and the one in the latest Warner Boult stereo box, from the same source, are inferior to the earlier EMI.) Some feel that the 1953 Decca recording is even better, with its greater intensity and John Cameron’s imposing delivery, but Isobel Baillie is not as secure as she might be, and the chorus is not infallible. Still, this stirring premiere recording, made with the composer present, is an essential historical alternative. Andrew Rose’s quasi-stereo transfer from LPs (Pristine Classical) is impressive if less sharply focused. However, if you have a sub-woofer, there is too much low bass.

Among a number of fine recordings available, a few deserve special notice as alternatives to the primary recommendation. Slatkin recorded the work for RCA (now Sony) in 1992, but it is his electrifying live recording from the 2001 Proms (BBC Music) that comes closest to challenging the Boult. Surging with the excitement of the event, never losing the shape of the whole, and breathtaking in the final movement’s noble launch into the infinite, it is one of those treasurable performances when all the stars align: superlative orchestra, three fine choruses, and an outstanding pair of soloists, recorded at a moderate distance to give a true perspective to the scale of work, and underpinned by a potent organ. It might well be the prime recommendation were it not a limited run disc produced for *BBC Music Magazine* in 2004. Used copies are available, and if one is found, grab it. One can hope some enterprising reissue label will eventually license it from the BBC.

Previn (RCA/Sony) is also impressive; wonderfully atmospheric at the end while often bringing the fine LSO brass to the fore elsewhere, this recording will be appreciated especially by those who enjoy some cinematic flavor and/or are special fans of his superb soloists. Hickox (Chandos) mellowed a bit after the fine if overly impetuous 1989 Virgin recording, and the clear 2006 SACD sound (despite being recorded live in the Barbican) and the collective artistry are to be preferred. Hickox shapes lines and contrasts sections more overtly than Boult, but if all is more obvious, it is still quite satisfying. So might be the imposing Haitink (EMI/Warner), in glorious sound, if it were not for the unconscionably slow tempos adopted in the final pages: almost half what the score calls for at times. Others may be convinced since the artists manage somehow to sustain it. I am not.

Lastly, collectors looking for a novelty will find it in Henry Ley’s transcription of the Largo Sostenuto movement (*On the Beach at Night, Alone*) played by David Briggs on the 1912 J. W. Walker organ of Sacred Heart Church, Wimbledon.

Recommendation: Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus, Sheila Armstrong, John Carol Case (EMI/Warner – CD, Download) or *with Symphonies 2–9* (EMI/Warner – 5 CDs, Download) or *Adrian Boult: Vaughan Williams - The Complete EMI Recordings* (EMI – 13 CDs)

Alternate: Leonard Slatkin, BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Philharmonia Chorus, Trinity College of Music Chamber Choir, Joan Rodgers, Simon Keenlyside (BBC Music – CD)

André Previn, London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Heather Harper, John Shirley-Quirk (RCA/Sony – CD, Download) or *with Symphonies 2–9, Violin Concerto, Tuba Concerto, Three Portraits from 'The England of Elizabeth'* (RCA – 6 CDs) or *The Classic André Previn collection (Sony – 55 CDs)*

Richard Hickox, London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Susan Gritton, Gerald Finley – *with The Wasps Overture* (Chandos – SACD, CD, Download) or *with Symphonies 2–9* (Chandos – 6 SACDs, Download)

Historical: Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus, Isobel Baillie, John Cameron (Belart/Eloquence – CD or Pristine– CD-R, Download – available in monaural or ambient – subtly simulated – stereo – but see text) or *with Symphonies 2–9* (Decca – 5CDs, Download) or *with Symphonies 2–9, Partita for Double String Orchestra, Old King Cole, The Wasps - Aristophanic Suite, Job, and works by Arnold, Elgar, Walton, Butterworth, Bax, Holst, Searle* (Eloquence – 16 CDs)

Specialist: David Briggs (organ) (arr. Ley – Largo Sostenuto movement only) – *with Two Organ Preludes Founded on Welsh Folk Songs, Prelude and Fugue in C minor, Three Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes, Passacaglia on BGC, A Wedding Tune for Ann, A Wedding Canon for Nancy, various transcriptions, Ley: Fantasia on Aberystwyth (*Albion – 2 CDs, Download)

A London Symphony (Symphony No. 2)

Vaughan Williams's second symphonic essay – like its predecessor, not initially given a number by its composer – is concerned again with impression and metaphor. The composer wanted it appreciated as absolute music, but the musical portraiture of pre-war London, with sounds and even sights so clearly suggested, make it impossible to ignore the pictorial aspect. Further, it is all suffused with a deep but never maudlin nostalgia, culminating in the quiet epilogue of the fourth movement inspired by the final chapter of H. G. Wells's novel, *Tono-Bungay*: "Out to the open we go, to windy freedom and trackless ways. Light after light goes down. England and the Kingdom, Britain and the Empire, the old prides and the old devotions, glide abeam, astern, sink down upon the horizon, pass–pass. The river passes– London passes, England passes..."

First performed in 1914, this score, lost in pre-war Germany and restored from parts, went through extensive revision after Vaughan Williams's return from war in France. Significant cuts, almost entirely from the second and fourth movements, were made before a first edition was published in 1920. While working on his fourth symphony in 1933, the composer made additional cuts to these movements before a definitive score was published in 1936. In all, 20 minutes of music was removed, and while it is clear that the work is structurally tauter in its current form, there are several passages that, when heard, make one regret their loss. Therefore, it is a matter of some joy that Vaughan Williams's widow, Ursula, allowed the recording of this 1913 version in 2001. This recording, led by Hickox (Chandos), makes a very different impression – darker and more introspective, though this is, in part, a result of

the conductor's approach – and tells us much about the work and the development of the composer's art and philosophy. It should be in the collection of every Vaughan Williams enthusiast.

There are recordings of the 1920 version from the 78s-period by Godfrey (Symposium or Pristine Classical) and Goossens (Biddulph or Pristine Classical). The acoustic recordings of Dan Godfrey, an early advocate of Vaughan Williams's music, are of more than just historic interest, the nearly whole score from 1925 much more so than the heavily cut recording of the first two movements from 1923. Perhaps not coincidentally, one cut in 1925, in the epilogue, taken to fit the recording onto 12 sides, later was also made by the composer in the revision of the score published in 1936. The Pristine transfer by Mark Obert-Thorn is quieter and more detailed, though the acoustic recording is still rather primitive, but the Lewis Foreman notes in the earlier Symposium are unusually informative. Eugene Goossens (Biddulph, Pristine Classical) next recorded the work, in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1941, using the older version in the orchestra's library. The composer disapproved of this recording, in a general dismissal of American recordings, in a 1955 letter to an admirer. I can see why he might object to some headlong tempos taken. Goossens is exciting, though, and finds atmosphere in the slower movements, even at the faster pace. In this he is more satisfying than Henry Wood in his more forthright, but still important, recording of the 1936 version (Dutton, Decca), made in the year of its publication. It is also swift at times, especially in comparison with the slower tempos to which we have become accustomed. The natural-sounding Decca transfer by Obert-Thorn is preferable to the Dutton despite (or perhaps because of) the somewhat higher background noise from less aggressive filtering. Happily, we can also hear (most of) what the composer imagined for the work in a restoration of a 1946 Proms performance with him leading the London Symphony Orchestra (SOMM). The recording is from the Leech collection of off-air-to-disc recordings in the British Library. The sound is surprisingly good, especially as restored by Lani Spahr, but there are small gaps every four-to-five minutes when the disc had to be changed. Taking these into account, the tempos are less forward-pressed than Wood's but still show a less sentimental approach than is now the norm. The gaps are regrettable, but despite this and the somewhat fallible condition of the orchestra at that time, the recording is treasurable.

The two modern recordings of the 1920 version by Yates (Dutton Epoch) and Brabbins (Hyperion) are well worth considering. Both make an excellent case for what some feel is the finer of the two published versions, and they do so in complementary ways. Brabbins, with tempos that are decidedly spacious, emphasizes nobility and atmosphere in a conception that impresses with its narrative sweep and insight. Yates, quicker except for a portentously measured Lento movement, exudes much the same energy and intensity as those earlier recordings. I like both, but if I had to choose just one, it would be the Yates.

Of course, the 1936 version is the one the composer wanted heard, and the majority of the recordings use that score. Two classic readings stand out from among a strong field. One is the early stereo recording of ardent Vaughan Williams interpreter John Barbirolli (EMI/Warner). The 1957 recording preserves a performance that is spontaneous, passionate, lyrical, and full of character. Barbirolli recorded the symphony again in 1967 (EMI/Warner), but what had earlier seemed instinctive here too often becomes overstated. The earlier recording is to be preferred. The other is a live recording from August 1971 (ICA Classics) just five months after EMI recorded the same in the studio. It has only survived in a monaural transcription but the BBC recording is vivid and detailed, though ambient noise can be intrusive at times, and the BBC Symphony seems on fire. It is a performance that shares the

long-view approach of Boult's two commercial recordings for Decca and EMI, combines their best qualities and offers a final movement of extraordinary intensity. It can't be a top recommendation because of the sound limitations, so it is a top specialist recommendation.

Boult (in the Decca or EMI/Warner), Previn (RCA/Sony), Sargent (1967 live – Chicago ReSound) and especially Handley (1993 EMI/CfP) offer fine recordings of this work, as well, but I wish to highlight two newer releases as alternates/additions to the Barbirolli and live Boult: the Manze (Onyx) and the Seaman (Harmonia Mundi). Manze's symphony cycle is not unfailingly distinguished, but *A London Symphony*, his initial release, shows his work at its considerable best: alert, full of engaging detail, perfectly paced, and stirring with a wonderfully shadowy epilogue. Seaman's release is a bit of a dark horse, a live recording made to commemorate the end of his tenure with the Rochester (NY) Philharmonic Orchestra. This should not be overlooked, for Seaman, a protégé of Adrian Boult, is, on the evidence of this and a recording of shorter orchestral works, a distinguished Vaughan Williams interpreter: more emphatic perhaps than his mentor in this music, but no less compelling or affecting. In general, the tauter Rochester reading is preferable to Seaman's earlier recording, also live, with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (ABC Classics), though some may appreciate the latter's ardent Lento movement.

Finally, for the collector who is familiar with the work, I recommend a recording of a transcription of the 1920 version made in 1924 for piano duet by Archibald Jacob. Some atmosphere is inevitably lost, notably at the beginning and end, as is orchestral color throughout, and this version lacks the special cachet of one created as part of the compositional process. The focus on the symphony's architecture and flow, however, are brilliantly realized by Lynn Arnold and Charles Matthews (Albion), causing one to admire the symphony anew, while the nobility and longing are in no way slighted, nor the high spirits of the Scherzo. In addition, one may hear Henry Ley's 1922 transcription of the symphony's slow movement, played with feeling by David Briggs (Albion) on the lovely 1912 Walker organ of Sacred Heart Church, Wimbledon or by Christopher Nickol (Priory) on the similarly fine 1923 Harrison & Harrison of Caird Hall, Dundee. Briggs's register changes are more subtle and tempos more introspective, but I must admit to preferring Nickol's more colorful and dramatic rendition of his revision to Ley's transcription, which takes the 1936 version of the orchestral score into account.

Recommendation (1913 version): Richard Hickox, London Symphony Orchestra – *with Butterworth: The Banks of Green Willow* (Chandos – SACD, CD, Download) or *with Symphonies 1, 3–9* (Chandos – 6 SACDs, Download)

Recommendation (1920 version): Martin Yates, Royal Scottish National Orchestra – *with Concerto for Two Pianos* (Dutton Epoch – CD, Download)

Recommendation (1936 version): John Barbirolli, Hallé Orchestra (1956 recording) – *with Symphony No. 8* (Barbirolli Society – CD) also *Barbirolli Complete Recordings* (Warner – 109 CDs)

Alternate: Martyn Brabbins, BBC Symphony Orchestra (1920 version) – *with Sound Sleep, Orpheus with his lute, and Variations for Brass Band* (Hyperion – CD, Download)

Andrew Manze, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (1936 version) – *with Symphony No. 8* (Onyx – CD, Download)

Christopher Seaman, Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra (1936 version) – *with Serenade to Music (original version)* (Harmonia Mundi – CD, Download)

Historical: Dan Godfrey, London Symphony Orchestra (1920 version) – *with 1923 acoustic recording of first movement (heavily cut) and third movement (in download only) and Ravel: Petite Suite, Dvořák: Slavonic Dances 1–4* (Pristine– CD-R, Download) or *with 1923 acoustic recording of first movement (heavily cut) and third movement* (Symposium – CD)

Eugene Goossens, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra (1920 version) – *with Walton: Violin Concerto, Benjamin: Overture to an Italian Comedy [Stock], Elgar: Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1 [Stock]* (Biddulph – CD) or *with Walton: Violin Concerto, Delius: The Walk to the Paradise Garden* (Pristine– CD-R, Download)

Ralph Vaughan Williams, London Symphony Orchestra (1936 version) – *with Symphony No. 5 (two), Dona Nobis Pacem* (SOMM – 2 CDs)

Henry Wood, Queen's Hall Orchestra (1936 version) – *with Fantasia on Greensleeves, Serenade to Music, The Wasps Overture* (Dutton – CD) or *with Fantasia on Greensleeves, The Wasps Overture, a Purcell/Wood suite and much else by others as part of the Decca Conductor's Gallery* (Decca – 21 CDs, Download)

Specialist: Adrian Boult, BBC Symphony Orchestra (1936 version) – *with Butterworth: A Shropshire Lad Rhapsody, Moeran: Sinfonietta* (ICA Classics – CD, Download)

Lynn Arnold and Charles Matthews (piano duet) (1920 version arr. A. Jacob) – *with Maconchy: Preludio, Fugato e Finale, Finzi: Eclogue* (Albion – CD, Download)

Christopher Nickol (organ) (arr. Ley/Nickol – Lento movement only) – *with Prelude and Fugue in C minor, Three Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes, Two Organ Preludes Founded on Welsh Folk Songs, Bridge: Complete Organ Works (*Priory – CD, Download)

David Briggs (organ) (arr. Ley – Lento movement only) – *with Two Organ Preludes Founded on Welsh Folk Songs, Prelude and Fugue in C minor, Three Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes, Passacaglia on BGC, A Wedding Tune for Ann, A Wedding Canon for Nancy, various transcriptions, Ley: Fantasia on Aberystwyth (*Albion – 2 CDs, Download)

A Pastoral Symphony (Symphony No. 3)

"It's not really Lambkins frisking at all," the composer pointed out to future wife Ursula in 1938, nor is it even evocative of English countryside. Rather, the innovative symphony was inspired by the French fields near Écoivres in 1916, when, as a middle-aged ambulance orderly who gathered the wounded and dead from the day's fighting, he looked out over a "Corot-like landscape in the sunset." The false peace is surreal, and it is the genius of this symphony that Vaughan Williams has so effectively captured both the sublimity and the horror of the experience.

The challenges to the conductor are many, for with but a few exceptions, like the important *presto* section in the third movement and a *lento* opening and closing to the fourth, the tempo of each movement is a subtly shifting *moderato*. Across the landscape of the serene, contemplative surface, and occasional life-affirming vivacity, stretch shadows which any successful performance must convey without denying the other. Pacing is crucial, as is color and lightness of touch. Boult conducted the premiere in 1922, convincing the doubt-filled composer of the merit of his creation. Boult's mastery of the work is obvious in the 1968 recording from the EMI/Warner stereo cycle, even more than in his earlier Decca reading or the live 1966 BBC recording. The EMI is a model of controlled urgency – *poco animato* and *piú mosso* are common instructions – balance, and deep understanding, and the nicely distanced Margaret Price is haunting in the melismatic solos of the last movement. Primary recommendation, but in the EMI mastering, not the later Japanese Warner transfer used in a limited edition SACD set and the Warner complete stereo box.

Norrington (Decca) is slower at times, with a reading that emphasizes the darker aspects of the work. Part of a symphony cycle abandoned after three releases, this performance belies the conductor's later reputation for a certain bloodless literalness. The fine solo soprano, Rosa Mannion, creates her keening solo from far offstage, and the ghostly bugler, conjured from the composer's battlefield memory, is recreated in the second movement using natural (valveless) trumpet in E♭ and French horn, as requested in the score.

Manze (Onyx) is even more careful that the special tuning of the partials in these solos is heard, but what sets his recording apart, aside from the subtle nuance of his performance, is in the use of a tenor for the fourth movement vocal solos. This score-sanctioned option creates a markedly different character in the framing lament, and though it is controversial, it should be heard.

Mark Elder's fine weighty *A Pastoral Symphony* (Hallé) was on an earlier version of this list, despite the too close recording of Sarah Fox. However, the wonderfully atmospheric recording by Martyn Brabbins has now displaced it. Brabbins chooses notably measured tempos – well below those in the score – while maintaining line and tension and reveling in the subtle, subdued dynamics. The excruciating beauty he discovers is justification enough.

Recommendation: Adrian Boult, New Philharmonia Orchestra, Margaret Price – *with A London Symphony* (EMI/Warner – CD, Download) or *with Symphonies 1–2, 4–9* (EMI/Warner – 5 CDs, Download) or *Adrian Boult: Vaughan Williams - The Complete EMI Recordings* (EMI – 13 CDs)

Alternate: Roger Norrington, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Rosa Mannion – *with Symphony No. 5* (Decca – CD, Download)

Martyn Brabbins, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Elizabeth Watts – *with Symphony No. 4, Saraband 'Helen'* (Hyperion – CD, Download)

Andrew Manze, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Andrew Staples – *with Symphony No. 4* (Onyx – CD, Download)

Symphony No. 4 in F minor

This is not a difficult choice. Vaughan Williams's most jarring and uncompromising symphony should be heard in its most jarring and uncompromising recording: that led by the composer in 1937. It is remarkable not only for its fearsome intensity, but for its lyric passion, as well. In the Naxos release, transferred and restored by Mark Obert-Thorn, his recording speaks across the decades with a necessarily dated sound but remarkable power. It is listed under historical recommendations, but this should be heard by all admirers, regardless of its age.

There are other commanding recordings by conducting giants Barbirolli (EMI/Warner or Barbirolli Society), Stokowski (Cala – though the composer warned against it in a 1955 letter), Mitropoulos (2 performances: Sony and Music & Arts), and Bernstein (Sony), each created in the image of its leader. But it is Mitropoulos – and more in the studio recording on Sony – who dependably finds both the ferocity *and* the bleakness and pain that are so unmistakable in the composer's own reading. And the 1956 New York Philharmonic is even more amazing than the Boult-trained BBC Symphony Orchestra which the composer conducts. It should be noted, though, that the composer preferred Boult's 1953 recording with the London Philharmonic and liked his own the best (Letter No. VWL3474).

But Boult did not, for me, consistently project the raw ferocity of the finest readings of the score in either of the commercial recordings he made, although neither is exactly tame. However, a 1938 broadcast of a performance he led with the newly formed NBC Symphony Orchestra has recently been resurrected from transcription discs by Pristine Classical in vivid sound for its age. This one has real teeth, with a grittily exciting Scherzo and a Finale of remarkable power and poignancy. As always Boult does full justice to the bleaker aspects of the score. One can occasionally sense the orchestra's struggle with the unfamiliar music, but this is an obvious historical release recommendation.

Taken at anything like the prescribed tempos, this is extraordinarily difficult music, but some orchestras play it with such apparent effortlessness so that the result can seem slick and emotionally superficial. Slatkin (RCA/Sony), recommended by my predecessor, strikes me as particularly hard-driven but emotionally cold. There are others that forgo some aggressiveness to offer a different vision of the work. The most successful of these are the Hickox (Chandos), at times almost darkly humorous, and the expansive and severe Haitink (EMI/Warner).

By far the best modern reading, and the one that finally convinced me to move the composer's recording to a historic recommendation from its primary one, is the altogether remarkable live recording by Antonio Pappano (LSO Live). Taken from a single 2019 concert and notable for both its remarkable tension and moments of breathtaking beauty, this is the closest one can come for now to the experience of the composer's own reading, and the sound is immeasurably better. Berglund (EMI/Warner) and Wigglesworth (LPO), neither household names, also deserve a spot on the medal stand. Finnish conductor Berglund is much better known as an interpreter of Sibelius's music, and he brings to the fore the Sibelian qualities in Vaughan Williams's score. His recording showcases a resplendent Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. Wigglesworth leads a comparably penetrating reading recorded live in 2013. The London Philharmonic Orchestra plays with laser-like precision and unflagging energy, which in the Scherzo recalls some of Shostakovich's more mordant writing.

Recommendation: Antonio Pappano, London Symphony Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 6* (LSO Live – CD, Download)

Alternate: Paavo Berglund, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 6, Oboe Concerto, plus The Wasps Overture, and Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis [Silvestri], Symphony No. 5 [Gibson]* (EMI/Warner – 2 CDs, Download) – also *Berglund Icon* collection (EMI/Warner – 13 CDs) or *Berglund Warner Edition* (EMI/Warner – 42 CDs)

Ryan Wigglesworth, London Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 8 [Jurowski]* (LPO – CD, Download)

Historical: Ralph Vaughan Williams, BBC Symphony Orchestra *with Holst: The Planets* (Naxos – CD, Download)

Dmitri Mitropoulos, New York Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Symphony No. 6 [Stokowski]* (Sony – CD, Download) also *in The British Music Collection* (Sony – 12 CDs) or *Mitropoulos Complete Recordings* (Sony – 69 CDs, Download)

Adrian Boult, NBC Symphony Orchestra – *with works by Beethoven, Busoni, Butterworth, Copland, Elgar, Holst, Walton* (Pristine– 2 CD-Rs, Download)

Symphony No. 5 in D major

This continues to be the favorite symphony of those who particularly enjoy the more comforting aspects of Vaughan Williams's art. Premiered in the midst of the Second World War, its quiet radiance – much of it is to be played at a *piano* or *mezzo-piano* dynamic – was received as balm for the myriad spiritual wounds of the times. Many of the themes developed in this symphony came from the composer's efforts to put John Bunyan's *A Pilgrim's Progress* on the stage. The tableaux opera/morality he was to complete in 1951, after many decades of work, had been temporarily abandoned in 1938 when he began work on the symphony. The spiritual journey, however, with its confrontation of evil and its radiant conclusion are, in the abstract, still very much a part of the symphony's roots.

The balm is applied with some characteristic restraint, and there are, as in *A Pastoral Symphony*, darker and sterner aspects of the work that need to be a part of the interpretive mix. As in the Fourth, the composer himself serves as an essential guide to the music. Vaughan Williams did not record the work commercially, but he did conduct its premiere in 1943 and led it again at a Proms concert in 1952 as part of his 80th birthday celebration. BBC broadcasts of these concerts were captured by technically savvy listeners in surprisingly good monaural sound, and the 1952 recording, with a small patch from the 1943 broadcast at the start of the *Romanza*, is the source of a 2007 SOMM release. What Vaughan Williams demonstrates, in a reading that emphasizes exigence in the music as much as ecstasy, is that, for the most part, he meant what he set down in his score even if some tempos are more measured than he wrote. The 1943 premiere is at times even slower, especially in the Scherzo – to its disadvantage – and there are gaps every four-to-five minutes when the discs onto which it was recorded had to be changed. Still, this is of such historic interest that the inclusion of this, with a re-sourced and clearer recording of the 1952 performance, on another SOMM release, is most welcome.

Boult in 1953 (Decca, Australian Eloquence) is mostly true to the text, as is Barbirolli, in his more Italianate way, in the 1944 recording premiere: another essential historic recommendation. The new transfer in the Barbirolli Complete Warner (read EMI) Recordings, with some surface noise, is much preferable to the over-filtered Dutton. However, a Boult performance from the 1975 Proms (ICA Classics) goes to the top of the list for those wanting to ponder how the Fifth may have originally been intended to go. Except for a Scherzo that starts out a bit below pace, Boult leads an inspired, if not always infallible, BBC Symphony Orchestra in a marvelously flowing, deeply felt reading that also comes closest to the tempos in the score. In fact, I recommend this recording, standing with the composer's own from 1952, to anyone not insistent on the latest sound.

Those looking for a modern equivalent to these will find it difficult, for after these earlier recordings – the 1975 Boult being a notable exception – conductors have tended to romanticize this symphony, notably by slowing the pace and softening the edges, especially of the magnificent *Romanza*. The composer takes 10:13 in that movement in 1952 – very movingly, it must be said – and even he is below his metronome marking. The 86-year-old Boult, in that final Proms performance, shaves a minute off of that and shows that this movement can be marvelously stirring when taken at the intended tempo. Hickox (Chandos), Brabbins (Hyperion), and Haitink (EMI/Warner), at 12:06, 12:16, and 13:29 respectively, sustain notably slower tempos through the sheer authority of their individual approaches, but lost to varying degree in each is the songfulness of what the composer wrote.

There are committed advocates for each of these recordings, and the 1963 Barbirolli (EMI/Warner) also has its particular champions. But Bryden Thomson (Chandos) is ardent and dramatic, emphasizing the noble and mystical without the indulgences to which the elder Barbirolli is occasionally prone. He is nearly as measured in his pacing as these others, and some may complain of lack of quiet ecstasy, yet if Thomson's poised but enraptured reading of the closing pages of the final movement cannot bring one to tears, little in music will. For those who particularly value the tranquility and rapture of the score, Handley's (EMI/CfP) poetic vision serves the symphony especially well. The somewhat distanced perspective of the former recording adds to the ethereal qualities of this oft-praised release. Brabbins's has similar qualities and superb, up to date sonics, as does Anthony Pappano (LSO Live), the sound remarkably good for being captured in the rather dry environs of Barbican Hall. Almost certainly both use the new edition by Peter Horton (2008) purposed to correct a number of errors. Having no access to the new score, I can only say the corrections must be relatively minor. Aside from the righting of the infamous timpani entrance issue in the *Romanza*, the differences I hear could more surely be attributed to interpretive decisions by the conductors. Brabbins' is a fine performance in the more expansive Romantic vein where Pappano seems less concerned with serenity than the darker undercurrents of the work. Both are alive to nuance, drama, and the work's deep spirituality. Not a prime recommendation, but worth seeking out, is the recording by Rozhdestvensky (IMP BBC Music Series) in an out-of-print live recording from 1980 that is especially effective at creating the patterns of tension and sublime release that characterize the composer's reading.

The composer often had transcriptions of his symphonies created for duo-piano so that he and friends might assess the work. One was made of the Fifth by student, protégé, and lifelong friend Michael Mullinar, and a recording of that manuscript, as amended by the composer, was made by the husband-wife team of Anthony Goldstone and Caroline Clemmow (Albion). Devotees will want it for the light it sheds on the structural concentration of the score and on its musical potency without its orchestral colors. Organ fanciers will no doubt delight in the

virtuoso arrangement of the entire symphony by David Briggs (Albion). He plays it on the mighty Father Willis organ of Truro Cathedral, and while some things are inevitably altered in the translation, one cannot but be impressed by the magnitude of the achievement.

Recommendation: Bryden Thomson, London Symphony Orchestra – *with The Lark Ascending* (Chandos – CD, Download) or *with Symphonies 1–4, 6–9* (Chandos – 5 CDs)

Alternate: Adrian Boult, BBC Symphony Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 6* (ICA Classics - CD)

Antonio Pappano, London Symphony Orchestra – with Symphony No. 9 (LSO Live – SACD, Download)

Martyn Brabbins, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra - *with Scenes from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress* (Hyperion – CD, Download)

Vernon Handley, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Flos Campi, Oboe Concerto* (EMI/Classics for Pleasure – CD) or *with Symphonies 1–4, 6–9, Job, English Folk Song Suite, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Flos Campi, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Partita for Double String Orchestra, and Serenade to Music (choral version)* (EMI/Classics for Pleasure – 7 CDs)

Historical: Ralph Vaughan Williams, London Philharmonic Orchestra (1943 and 1952 recording) *with Symphony No. 2, Dona Nobis Pacem* (SOMM – 2 CDs, download) or (1952 recording) *with Dona Nobis Pacem* (SOMM – CD, Download)

John Barbirolli, Hallé Orchestra *with Symphony No. 4 [Boult 1937]* (Dutton – CD, Download) also *Barbirolli Complete Recordings* (Warner – 109 CDs)

Specialist: Goldstone and Clemmow (duo-pianists) (arr. Mullinar) – *with transcriptions of The Running Set, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (Albion – CD, Download)

David Briggs (organ) (arr. Briggs) – *with transcriptions of Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, The Lark Ascending* (Albion – CD, Download)

Symphony No. 6 in E minor

Vaughan Williams denied, as he did with the Fourth, that his Symphony No. 6 was in any way a commentary on the times, in this case the traumas of the post-war period. Yet, some heard – and still hear – a portent of nuclear devastation in the stark final movement. The composer, though, suggested to Michael Kennedy a Shakespearean vision for the finale that intimates a more personal journey, (slightly mis-)quoting Prospero's observation "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded by a sleep." (Letter No. VWL32592)

Boult led the premiere performance in 1948, but it was Stokowski (Sony or Cala) who made the premiere recording in February of 1949, just two days before Boult (EMI/Warner or Dutton). Stokowski's performance is vivid – relentless and lyrical in turns – but the composer was clear in his dislike for most American recordings of his works in a 1955 letter to an

admirer. This first recording includes the original version of the Scherzo, as did Boult's in its original release. When Vaughan Williams revised the Scherzo in 1950, changing some instrumentation to address balance and adding a new brass theme that appears throughout, Boult immediately recorded it. This revised version has been included in all subsequent releases. For those curious, though, CD releases of this earlier Boult recording have also included the original as an appendix.

In all, Boult recorded the symphony in the studio three times, and there are two later live recordings. In that first one in 1949, his *moderato* second and final movements are already more measured than indicated. The other four are, overall, slower yet. Vaughan Williams was present for the slowest of these in 1953 (Decca, Australian Eloquence, Pristine Classical); he even made an appreciative speech, released with the recording, which singles out the performance of the finale as a "wonderful piece of endurance." Others have since followed that lead, but there is no denying the fine impression that Boult's more concentrated first recording makes. It is the historical recommendation. One should also hear Boult's final performance of this powerful work (IMP BBC Radio Classics/BBC Music Magazine/ICA Classics). The occasion – the Proms of 1972, the composer's centenary – clearly inspired all involved to a marked level of intensity. It has been reissued by ICA Classics, and it is good to have it available again, even if the fine transfer is not quite as vivid as its predecessors.

While there are notable readings by Davis (Teldec/Warner), Bakels (Naxos) and others, few modern recordings impress as much. Handley (EMI/CfP) is most consistent in its portrayal of menace and foreboding in the first three movements, and while the last movement is not the last word in hushed desolation – that would be Pappano (LSO Live) and Manze (Onyx) – its vague wistfulness is perhaps more in keeping with the composer's reference to *The Tempest*. Barbirolli, even more, seems to have taken that quote to heart, for in his recording of the work for his December 18, 1969 70th birthday concert (Barbirolli Society), he takes that movement at a near ideal tempo and, with his brilliantly sustained pianissimos, conjures not bleakness but the melancholy intangibility of the island's transitory inhabitants and of this life. Sadly, he is willful elsewhere regarding tempos, especially in the second movement, but this reading belongs in any collection of the work. Note: not so the mannered reading recorded live a few months later with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (Orfeo).

By far the most persuasive modern recording, however, and a clear primary recommendation, is one from a single performance by Antonio Pappano and the LSO (LSO Live). Grimly intent, bleak and superbly hushed and controlled in its Epilogue, brilliantly played and well recorded, this is a performance for the ages.

Lastly, Albion has produced an excellent recording of Michael Mullinar's two-piano reduction of the score of the Sixth Symphony with Alan Rowlands and Adrian Sims at the keyboards. Here, as in the Fifth, this trial-run score – unlike the Fifth, this one published – gives the experienced listener a more structural perspective of the work. More than that, the percussive quality of the pianos, and their crystalline purity at lower volume, actually provides a listening experience as gratifying in its different way as hearing the orchestrated score.

Recommendation: Antonio Pappano, London Symphony Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 4* (LSO Live – CD, Download)

Alternate: Vernon Handley, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 9, Fantasia on Greensleeves* (EMI/Classics for Pleasure – CD) or *with Symphonies 1–5, 7–9, Job, English Folk Song Suite, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Flos Campi, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Partita for Double String Orchestra, and Serenade to Music (choral version)* (EMI/Classics for Pleasure – 7 CDs)

Adrian Boult, BBC Symphony Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 3* (IMP BBC Radio Classics – CD) also *with Bridge: The Sea* (BBC Music Magazine – CD) or *with Symphony No. 5* (ICA Classics - CD)

John Barbirolli, Hallé Orchestra – *with works by Elgar, Beethoven* (Barbirolli Society – 2 CDs)

Historical: Adrian Boult, London Symphony Orchestra – *with original Scherzo, A Song of Thanksgiving, The Lark Ascending* (EMI/Warner – CD or Dutton – CD) or *Adrian Boult: Vaughan Williams - The Complete EMI Recordings* (EMI – 13 CDs) or *Adrian Boult: Complete Mono Recordings 1920-1957 on HMV, Pye Nixa & Parlophone* (Warner – 36 CDs)

Specialist: Alan Rowlands and Adrian Sims (duo-pianists) (arr. Michael Mullinar) – *with transcriptions of The Wasps Overture and works by Ireland* (Albion – CD, Download)

Sinfonia antartica (Symphony No. 7)

Charles Frend's 1948 film *Scott of the Antarctic* is a powerful, though episodic, tribute to the intrepidity of the British explorers, if not to their consistent good judgement or luck. Not an inconsiderable part of its success is the music by Vaughan Williams, one of his most inventive film scores in which the septuagenarian composer experiments with new textures and sonorities to create an icy impression of the frozen Antarctic. Pleased with the result, but perceiving even greater potential for the music, Vaughan Williams began work on a symphonic treatment soon after the film was released. It was premiered by John Barbirolli and the Hallé Orchestra in January of 1953.

The icy landscapes and formidable glaciers of Antarctica, the cavorting of sea creatures and penguins, and the noble purpose and heroic frailty of the adventurers are conjured with remarkable originality, if little thematic development, the five movements resembling more a concert suite than a formal symphonic utterance. Barbirolli, who took the work before the microphones five months after the premiere, glories in the illustrative power of the music, and his reading is predictably gripping even as it makes the work seem even more episodic than it need be. (His tempos, after the *Prelude*, are generally on the spot. Vaughan Williams reportedly loved it.) Boult's first recording, made in December of 1953, shares this vividness, but is more concerned with structure, more attentive to subtleties and dynamics, and is definitely more measured. The composer, who was present at the sessions, could hardly have complained of the contrasting view, so resplendently powerful is the result, and the playing is phenomenal.

Since then, there have been a number of noteworthy recordings including those by Haitink (EMI/Warner) and Andrew Manze (Onyx) – especially if one doesn't object to slower than marked pacing – but four releases stand out: Andrew Davis on Chandos, Bakels on Naxos, a

live Haitink recording on LPO, and Boult's second on EMI/Warner. The Davis Seventh, one of the two symphonies that Hickox left unrecorded at his untimely death, is particularly symphonic in character. It is, except for the deeply felt but measured Intermezzo, truer to the composer's tempos than most, and it is stunningly recorded, with details in orchestration revealed by conductor and engineer that are not usually heard, and bass drum and organ pedal notes that will thrill subwoofer owners. In Bakels, one finds an urgent approach reminiscent of early Barbirolli, with moments of uncommon intensity and touching warmth and nobility within an implacable iciness. The sound is also demonstration class. Only the faster pacing of the *Prelude* and start to the *Epilogue* – slighting the *non troppo allegro* admonition in the latter – may raise eyebrows, though it suggests the struggle against nature well. Haitink's LPO live performance immediately preceded the EMI sessions in November 1984, but the spontaneity and passion of that concert did not translate fully into the studio. The live BBC sound is not as refined as EMI's, though it is strikingly vivid. The slower tempos Haitink adopts for the first movement require extraordinary focus from the remarkable orchestra (those horns!), but the extra frisson offered by the live event makes for a gripping experience. Finally, Boult's second recording has, as a rule, been found wanting in comparison to his formidable first, the conjectured explanation normally being the conductor's age. That is not what I hear. The keen concentration of the admittedly deliberate *Landscape*, the still sharp characterization throughout, and the many explosive climaxes suggest a rethinking of the work after years of acquaintance rather than waning powers. Excepting that central movement, the tempos have increased to closer to those stipulated by the score, the often-subdued dynamics are more scrupulously observed, and details of the innovative scoring are even more deftly revealed (though occasionally there was help from the control room). The result at times takes on a dreamlike quality, while a shattering climax at the organ entrance and an unusually profound tone of regret in the last two movements mark this as special. (But avoid the too-bright remastering in the Japanese Warner SACD set and the Warner Complete Stereo box set.)

A note on the superscripts, short quotes for each movement that the composer had printed in the score from Shelley, Coleridge, Donne, the Psalms, and Scott's last journal entry: Vaughan Williams acquiesced to the inclusion of these in the first Boult recording, read by John Gielgud, though, per Michael Kennedy and others, they were never intended to be part of a performance. Three other recordings include them. Previn (RCA/Sony) and Bakels (Naxos) track them separately. Unaccountably, the Manze, like the first Boult, tracks them with each movement.

Recommendation: Kees Bakels, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Waynflete Singers, Lynda Russell, David Timson – *with Symphony No. 8* (Naxos – CD, Download) or *with Symphonies 1–9 [1,4 Daniel], Flos Campi [Daniel], The Wasps Overture* (Naxos – 6 CDs)

Alternate: Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus, Norma Burrowes – *with The Wasps – Aristophanic Suite* (EMI/Warner – CD, Download) or *with Symphonies 1–6, 8–9* (EMI/Warner – 5 CDs, Download) or *Adrian Boult: Vaughan Williams - The Complete EMI Recordings* (EMI – 13 CDs)

Andrew Davis, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir, Edvard Grieg Kor, Mari Eriksmoen – *with Four Last Songs, Piano Concerto* (Chandos – SACD, Download) or *with Symphonies 1–6, 8–9* (Chandos – 6 SACDs, Download)

Bernard Haitink, London Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus, Sheila Armstrong – *with Symphony No. 5* (LPO – CD, Download)

Historical: Adrian Boult, BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Margaret Ritchie, John Gielgud – *with Symphonies 1–6,8,9* (Decca – Download) or *with Symphonies 1–6,8,9, Partita for Double String Orchestra, Old King Cole, The Wasps - Aristophanic Suite, Job, and works by Arnold, Elgar, Walton, Butterworth, Bax, Holst, Searle* (Eloquence – 16 CDs) or *with Scott of the Antarctic excepts [Irving 1948], brief talks by Ernest Shackleton* (CD41 – CD)

John Barbirolli, Hallé Orchestra and Choir, Margaret Ritchie – *with Oboe Concerto, Tuba Concerto, The Wasps Overture, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Elgar: Introduction and Allegro, Serenade for Strings, Cockaigne Overture* (EMI/Warner – CD) or *Barbirolli Complete Recordings* (Warner – 109 CDs)

Symphony No. 8 in D minor

In contrast to Vaughan Williams's Antarctic mural, held together by the compelling narrative flow and the opening theme that seems to defy traditional development, the next symphony is more conventional in form, if decidedly less so in actual expressive content and instrumentation. Taking his cue from the previous symphony, he uses a much expanded percussion section – "all the 'phones and 'spiels known to the composer" plus three *Turandot*-inspired gongs – which is most in evidence in the virtuosic *Toccata*, the final movement. The *Scherzo alla marcia* movement, scored for winds alone, conjures memories of Antarctic penguins with hints of Hindemith, while the touchingly pensive *Cavatina* for strings makes reference to Bach's setting of "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" from his *St. Matthew Passion*, much beloved by Vaughan Williams. The symphony begins with a remarkable set of seven variations on a theme which is never revealed, but as the composer pointed out, it also manages to trace an outline of the standard sonata form.

The composer dedicated this symphony to "Glorious John" Barbirolli, who premiered it in Manchester in May of 1956 and then recorded it in June for EMI. A recording of the broadcast of the premiere also exists, as do four other live recordings from 1959 (New York), 1961 (Lugano), 1964 (Manchester), and 1967 (London). All feature the Hallé Orchestra, except the New York Philharmonic in 1959. This must be some sort of record for a conductor and a Vaughan Williams symphony, and it is clear evidence of Barbirolli's devotion to this work.

The 1956 premiere, recorded by the BBC (Barbirolli Society) brings out the playful and passionate aspects of the score, with a particularly screwball *Scherzo* which gets a discreet laugh from the audience at its conclusion. A freely phrased *Cavatina*, remarkable for the way that the Hallé strings respond to the conductor's rubato, is followed by a delightful *vivace* romp through the finale. Only a slightly distanced monaural sound must be balanced against the vivid performance. The 1956 EMI stereo recording, the classic account, is a bit less brilliant and spontaneous than the live occasion, but with the *Cavatina* acquiring a tender restraint that is quite affecting. The New York (West Hill Radio Archives), Manchester (SOMM) and Lugano (Ermitage) concert recordings also offer fine performances. Recordings are again monaural, though the Swiss one is particularly clear and the performance quite lively. The New York performance, on the occasion of Barbirolli's triumphant return, is notable for a darker, slower, more muscular approach that might be credited to the different orchestra if it were not seconded in the Hallé Proms performance in 1967 (BBC Legends).

Here though, as in some other late-career performances, Barbirolli can be overindulgent, underlining that which is already obvious.

For such a darker take on the work, one should explore Boult's recordings. The first (Decca, Pristine Classical, Eloquence) was also recorded in 1956, and in vibrant stereo sound. Though he does not slight either the wry humor of the work, or the magic, Boult finds a thread of noble regret and nostalgia that is quite touching. With his eye on the "big picture," one can more fully appreciate what a remarkable structure the first movement is. The 1969 EMI recording has similar virtues, with notable cogency and subtlety, but without quite the eagerness. Three years later, though, the then octogenarian conductor led the octogenarian composer's work for a centenary concert with remarkable energy. This was broadcast and the video – an altogether too rare opportunity to see Boult conduct – was released by EMI and ICA. The vital but unrefined sound aside, this may be the most satisfying of the three releases.

Finally, among a number of other fine recordings – many, like the excellent Slatkin (RCA/Sony) and Bakels (Naxos), are to be found in complete symphony sets – two stand out for recommendation. The Handley (EMI/CfP), clearheaded, genial, and full of character, embraces the lightness of the invention without needing to search for a darker core. It is absolutely charming. Jurowski (LPO) shows that emphasizing drama and tragic undertones, finding even more gravitas in the piece than Boult, suits as well this remarkable and too often overlooked symphony.

Devotees of Vaughan Williams should also search out two other interesting historic releases. Charles Munch's 1958 stereo broadcast (Pristine Classical, NOT Urania Arts) is distorted in climaxes, but the sound in Andrew Rose's remastering is full and vivid and the music-making is superb: full of dark humor, passion, and ebullience. The recording is the only version of the work by a non-British orchestra and conductor, and sound aside, it may be the finest recorded performance of all. Then there is Stokowski's 1964 Proms recording (BBC Legends), a wildly willful but fascinating take on the work that says as much about the old wizard as it does the composer.

Recommendation: John Barbirolli, Hallé Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 2* (EMI/Warner or Barbirolli Society – CD) or *Barbirolli Complete Recordings* (Warner – 109 CDs)

Alternate: Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Symphonies 1–7,9* (Decca – 9 CDs, Download) or *with Symphonies 1–7,9, Partita for Double String Orchestra, Old King Cole, The Wasps - Aristophanic Suite, Job, and works by Arnold, Elgar, Walton, Butterworth, Bax, Holst, Searle* (Eloquence – 16 CDs) or *with Rachmaninov: Symphony No. 3* (Decca – CD, Download)

Vernon Handley, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 2* (EMI/Classics for Pleasure – CD) or *with Symphonies 1–7,9, Job, English Folk Song Suite, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Flos Campi, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Partita for Double String Orchestra, and Serenade to Music (choral version)* (EMI/Classics for Pleasure – 7 CDs)

Vladimir Jurowski, London Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 4 [Wigglesworth]* (LPO – CD, Download)

Video: Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Job* (ICA – DVD) or *with Beethoven: Violin Concerto* (EMI – DVD)

Historical: John Barbirolli, Hallé Orchestra (premiere) – *with The Wasps Overture, Tuba Concerto, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Fantasia on Greensleeves* (Barbirolli Society – CD) or *Barbirolli Complete Recordings* (Warner – 109 CDs)

Charles Munch, Boston Symphony Orchestra – *with works by Ravel, D'Indy* (Pristine– CD-R, Download)

Specialist: Stokowski, BBC Symphony Orchestra – *with Shostakovich: Symphony No. 5* (BBC Legends – CD)

Symphony No. 9 in E minor

On August 26, 1958, the London Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor Adrian Boult gathered at Walthamstow Assembly Hall in London to make the first recording of Vaughan Williams's latest symphony (Everest/Decca). In the early hours of that very day, the composer quietly and unexpectedly died. He had intended to attend the recording session; it continued without him. Included with each release is a short spoken tribute by Boult, but even without it, it is not hard to imagine the effect this loss must have had on the sessions. In point of fact, this is a particularly bleak reading of the score, heavy with autumnal significance: a funereal tribute which is very moving indeed with playing that is clearly inspired by the occasion.

Strikingly different was the first performance in April of that year, led by Malcolm Sargent (SOMM or Pristine Classical), which while it is dark and elemental – in keeping with the grim and sinister references to Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in an abandoned program – is bursting with energy and even violence. Though an affirmative and perceptive review in *The Times* of London ties it rightly to the Fourth and Sixth, the critical response to the work at the time was occasionally perplexed and muted, and some tried to blame that on this performance. Roy Douglas, Vaughan Williams's amanuensis, was particularly displeased with Sargent's way with the music, though there was surely an element of personal pique over Sargent's boorish treatment of Vaughan Williams in this. There is no record that the composer himself was disappointed; in fact, his widow Ursula suggested the opposite. He was willing to consider Boult's subsequent recommendation for an expansion to the end of the final movement, which the conductor thought ended too suddenly, and he even suggested that in the meantime the final section could be played more slowly until they could discuss it at the recording session. As it happens, that discussion never took place. The ending and tempo indication stand.

There were matters of under-rehearsal, noticeable in the BBC recording at times, and mechanical problems with the flugelhorn that mar a solo. However, reports that the problems were caused by casualness on the conductor's part seem unfair, especially when one hears the coiled energy of the performance and how he reveals details that go unheard in other recordings. One example is the switch to muted horns, marked for extra emphasis, during the first appearance of the saxophone trio. Magical. (I do wish the harps had been better miked.) His tempos are flexible, but more respectful of the score than Stokowski's in the successful U.S. premiere (Cala). The beat matches the score most of the time but is at times pressed

forward. The degree of divergence, however, is far *less* than that of André Previn (RCA/Sony) or Mark Elder (Hallé), who take the finale, in particular, markedly *slower* than indicated. In any case, the tempos are consistent with Sargent's sinewy concept of the work, which is, among other things, unencumbered by any anticipation regarding the composer's mortality. For me it brings the music on the page to life. Therefore, I am taking the controversial action of including it in my list of recommended recordings, despite its flaws.

The primary recommendation, however, is the Thomson recording (Chandos), which is quite true to the letter of the score and a powerful reading with a touch of the transcendence at the end which many look for in this score. The Bakels recording (Naxos), which is in the Sargent mold – vigorous and forward looking, less dark perhaps, but more sardonic – is very well played and recorded and deserves recommendation, as well. So does the Handley recording (EMI/CfP) which is more like the Boult, but with less melancholy, and is an exemplar of this conductor's trademark lyricism and astute characterization. There are other fine recordings, including the Antonio Pappano (LSO Live) which makes the most powerful case so far for the funereal/mystical approach, but note that Manze's conception (Onyx) has taken this to unsupportable extremes and should not be considered representative of what Vaughan Williams intended.

Recommendation: Bryden Thomson, London Symphony Orchestra – *with Piano Concerto* (Chandos – CD, Download) or *with Symphonies 1–8* (Chandos – 5 CDs)

Alternate: Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Symphonies 1-8* (Decca – Download) or *with Symphonies 1–8, Partita for Double String Orchestra, Old King Cole, The Wasps - Aristophanic Suite, Job, and works by Arnold, Elgar, Walton, Butterworth, Bax, Holst, Searle* (Eloquence – 16 CDs) or *with Arnold: Symphony No. 3* (Everest – CD, Download)

Kees Bakels, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 5* (Naxos – CD, Download) or *with Symphonies 1–8 [1,4 Daniel], Flos Campi [Daniel], The Wasps Overture* (Naxos – 6 CDs)

Vernon Handley, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 6* (EMI/Classics for Pleasure – CD) or *with Symphonies 1–8, Job, English Folk Song Suite, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Flos Campi, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Partita for Double String Orchestra, and Serenade to Music (choral version)* (EMI/Classics for Pleasure – 7 CDs)

Antonio Pappano, London Symphony Orchestra – with Symphony No. 5 (LSO Live – SACD, Download)

Historical: Malcolm Sargent, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 6, The Wasps Overture* (SOMM – CD, Download) or *with Symphony No. 2 [Mitropoulos]* (Pristine– CD-R, Download – available in monaural or ambient – subtly simulated – stereo)

CONCERTOS AND ORCHESTRAL WORKS WITH INSTRUMENTAL SOLO

Piano Concerto in C major

This is an unjustly overlooked score, written between 1926 and 1931. Some have questioned whether it is a true concerto, and Vaughan Williams might have found more acceptance if he had named it *Homage to Bach-Busoni: Suite for Piano and Orchestra* or the like. But such concerns were not its only impediment to success with audiences and performers. Others include its uncharacteristic ferocity and Bartókian percussiveness, as well as the unfavorable balance between its many significant challenges and its soloistic rewards. Likely most significant, though, was the composer's miscalculation regarding the size of the sound that the dedicatee, Harriet Cohen, could produce. When it was first performed by Cohen in 1933 and during the years she had exclusive rights, it was apparent that in the battle between the large orchestra and the soloist, the pianist lost. Vaughan Williams was persuaded by Adrian Boult and others to produce a duo-piano version, which he did in collaboration with pianist Joseph Cooper in 1946. It is, for the most part, a straightforward arrangement, though the composer did change the ending, removing a quote from Bax's Third Symphony and giving it a radiantly quiet ending. The revision is now part of both the solo and duo-piano versions.

For many years since, this version for two pianos was the version heard, but more recently there has been a resurgence of interest in the original, which has emerged as more rewarding and better balanced than first believed. In fact, given the inevitable thickening of textures that resulted from the octave doubling and harmonic expansion of the piano part, and despite some extremely attractive duo-piano recordings, the original is now coming to be considered the version of choice. Avid collectors will, however, want both.

Solo-piano versions: Perhaps because the Vaughan Williams concerto is not standard repertoire, those who choose to perform it tend to be committed exponents. As a result, there is not a poor recording among the five. Howard Shelley is the soloist in two of the very best: the one conducted by Thomson (Chandos) the more propulsive and the one led by Handley (Lyrita) the more poetic in the serene Romanza. Thomson is recorded closer, with greater weight. Both are wild and brassy in the outer two movements, reminding one that this was a near predecessor of the ferocious Fourth Symphony. There is a later recording by Handley/Piers Lane (EMI/CfP) – a bit cooler than the first – and newer ones by Oundjian/Louis Lortie (Chandos) – less trenchant but with an exquisite Romanza – and Judd/Ashley Wass (Naxos) – powerful and ruminative – each with much to recommend it. However, Thomson/Shelley earns the palm.

Two-piano versions: The two-piano version has a more natural constituency: the piano duo looking for new repertoire. Boult conducted both version premieres, and whatever his doubts about it, he led his recording with duo Vronsky & Babin (EMI) with total commitment. Respectful of the composer's tempos and markings (*martellato* in the opening), it is propulsive and percussive in the opening movement, richly emotive (not just sentimental) in the Romanza, and full of character throughout the kaleidoscopic final movement, especially in the wildly unsettled waltz sequence. This favorite has been edged out – just – by a stunning newer recording by Douglas Boyd and Duo Tal & Groethuysen (Sony) with all of the older recording's virtues plus greater clarity and impact. The Yates with Leon McCawley and John Lenehan (Dutton Epoch) deserves special mention, as well, as a reading of power, lucidity,

and riveting characterization. A superb 1950 recording – the premiere, actually – by duo-pianists Arthur Whittemore and Jack Lowe (Albion) with Vladimir Golschmann conducting the Robin Hood Dell Orchestra of Philadelphia – the Philadelphia Orchestra in summer-festival guise – is an obvious historical recommendation, though there is a one-minute cut in the first movement. The sound is dated, but the artists impressively capture the Bartók-like qualities and Busoni-inspired finale, while the Romanza is exquisite.

Recommendation (original version): Bryden Thomson, London Symphony Orchestra, Howard Shelley – *with Symphony No. 9* (Chandos – CD, Download) or *with Concerto Grosso, Oboe Concerto, Violin Concerto, Tuba Concerto, Two Hymn-tune Preludes, The Lark Ascending, Partita for Double String Orchestra, Toward the Unknown Region* (Chandos – 2 CDs, Download)

Recommendation (two-piano version): Douglas Boyd, Musikkollegium Winterthur, Duo Tal & Groethuysen – *with Symphony No. 5* (Sony – CD, Download)

Alternates: James Judd, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Ashley Wass (original version) – *with The Wasps - Aristophanic Suite, English Folk Song Suite, The Running Set* (Naxos – CD, Download)

Vernon Handley, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Howard Shelley (original version) – *with Foulds: Dynamic Triptych* (Lyrita – CD)

Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Vitya Vronsky and Victor Babin (two-piano version) – *with Job* (EMI/Warner – CD, Download) or *Adrian Boult: Vaughan Williams - The Complete EMI Recordings* (EMI – 13 CDs) or *Adrian Boult: Complete Warner Recordings - The Stereo Recordings 1956 – 1978* (Warner – 79 CDs)

Martin Yates, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Leon McCawley and John Lenehan (two-piano version) – *with Symphony No. 2* (Dutton Epoch – CD, Download)

Historical: Vladimir Golschmann, Robin Hood Dell Orchestra of Philadelphia, Arthur Whittemore and Jack Lowe (two-piano version) – *with Flos Campi, Fantasia on the Old 104th Psalm Tune, Three Folk Songs* (Albion – CD, Download)

Violin Concerto in D minor (formerly Concerto Accademico)

Vaughan Williams's violin concerto, written between 1924 and 1925, has relatively little in common with the piano concerto which followed soon after it besides its Bach inspirations, which come, in this case, without the Busoni. Stylistically its neoclassicism contrasts markedly with the Romantic ferocity of the piano work, as does its sunnier temperament overall and folk-infused finale, using a jig tune from his opera *Hugh the Drover*. The central movement glows with rhapsodic echoes of *The Lark Ascending*. It is a sleeper of a work that deserves to be played and heard more often. Younger artists have been showing some interest of late, but in the striving of many to make something deeper out of it, a bit of the magic has been lost. One notable exception will be discussed below.

My esteemed predecessor favored the Boult/Menuhin (EMI/Warner) from 1952, a recording that was shelved after it was recorded and not released until 1987. The artists involved would

seem to make it self-recommending, but Menuhin can be rather cavalier about the composer's instructions, and the orchestra barely keeps up with the soloist in the finale. Boult seems disengaged in the central Adagio-Tranquillo. More attractive is the 1939 premiere recording of the original version. (Vaughan Williams made some minor revisions to the solo part in 1951, based in part on Menuhin's markings, and then rechristened it his Violin Concerto.) It was made by Canadian-born violinist Frederick Grinke with the Boyd Neel Orchestra (Dutton, Albion) of which he was principal. He is not well known today, but he was a superb technician, able to negotiate the challenges of the finale at a lilting presto. There is also a 1951 recording of the original by American violinist Louis Kaufman (Music & Arts). Kaufman observes all tempos but lacks the charm and warmth that Grinke and several others bring to it, seeming quite frenetic at times.

Most will want stereo, in any case, and the revised score, and for that one should turn to Michael Waldron and violinist Jack Liebeck (Orchid). They perform with agility and passion, managing for the first time in my experience to pair the composer's winged tempos in both outer movements with charm and the proper dancelike character. The central Adagio movement is taken at a daringly slow speed – an adagio, but on the most sustained side of that tempo – with wonderful concentration and passion and breathtaking pianissimos. With the additional virtues of the violinist's silvery tone, orchestral work of perfection, and luminous recording, this is the performance this concerto has been waiting for. There are other recordings of merit: Bradley Creswick (EMI/Warner) with Hickox offering a delightfully light touch, and the emotionally extrovert, boldly recorded James Buswell with Previn (RCA/Sony). There are, as well, the intriguing Nora Grumlikova/Peter Maag (Supraphon) with its touching adagio movement and an ebullient finale that seems more shadowed than others, the heartfelt Zina Schiff, with Dalia Atlas leading the Israel Philharmonic (Stradivari), which finds a stimulating non-British passion in the music, and Kenneth Sillito, whose Bach experience seems to amplify the Baroque connection, in the Thomson recording (Chandos). These may not be on my short list, but I wouldn't argue with anyone who favored one or another of them.

For the well-initiated, there is an enchanting recording of the concerto arranged for violin and piano by Constant Lambert in 1927 (Albion). While it is no substitute for the original – such an arrangement would have been done to increase the exposure of the work – it actually works quite well as a sonata, not least because violinist Matthew Trusler and pianist Iain Burnside are such fine exponents for the work, perfectly balancing neo-Classical restraint and folkish charm.

Recommendation: Michael Waldron, London Choral Sinfonia, Jack Liebeck – *with In Windsor Forest, arrangements of Land of Our Birth, Hymn-tune Prelude on Song 13 by Orlando Gibbons, Nothing is here for tears, Silent Noon, and Vaughan Williams's arrangements of J.S. Bach: Chorale Prelude BWV 654 'Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele' and Chorale Prelude BWV 680 'Wir glauben all an einen Gott'*

Alternate: Richard Hickox, Northern Sinfonia of England, Bradley Creswick – *with Oboe Concerto, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes (exc.), Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* (EMI – CD) or as above plus *with The Poisoned Kiss Overture, Old King Cole, Flos Campi, The Lark Ascending, 49th Parallel Prelude, Sea Songs, Serenade to Music, Five Mystical Songs, Prelude on an Old Carol Tune, The Running Set, Two Hymn-Tune Preludes* (EMI/Warner – 2 CDs, Download)

Bryden Thomson, London Symphony Orchestra, Kenneth Sillito – *with Symphony No. 4* (Chandos – CD, Download) or *with Concerto Grosso, Oboe Concerto, Tuba Concerto, Two Hymn-tune Preludes, The Lark Ascending, Piano Concerto, Partita for Double String Orchestra, Toward the Unknown Region* (Chandos – 2 CDs, Download)

André Previn, London Symphony Orchestra, James Buswell – *with Symphony No. 4* (RCA/Sony – CD, Download) or *with Symphonies 1–9, Tuba Concerto, Three Portraits from 'The England of Elizabeth'* (RCA – 6 CDs) or *The Classic André Previn collection (Sony – 55 CDs)*

Historical: Boyd Neel, Boyd Neel Orchestra, Frederick Grinke – *with Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, and works by Britten* (Dutton – CD) and *with The Lark Ascending, Eventide Hymn-Tune Prelude, Violin Sonata, Arthur Benjamin: Violin Sonatina* (Albion – CD, Download)

Clemens Dahinden, Winterthur String Orchestra, Louis Kaufman – *with concertos by Lars-Erik Larsson, Britten* (Music & Arts – CD, Download)

Specialist: Matthew Trusler (violin) and Iain Burnside (piano) (arr. Constant Lambert) – *with Songs of Travel and arrangements of Six Studies in English Folksong, Three Songs from The Pilgrim's Progress, The Lark Ascending* (Albion – CD, Download)

Oboe Concerto in A minor

Vaughan Williams composed his oboe concerto in 1944 for the celebrated English oboist Léon Goossens and dedicated it to him. It followed immediately after the rhapsodic Fifth Symphony, also written during World War II, and like it is a work of great serenity and richness of invention, with an added measure of bucolic charm evoking a vision of Arcadian Englishness. In fact, the concerto arose from music originally written for that symphony: a discarded sketch for the scherzo. As in other Vaughan Williams works, peacefulness is never unalloyed, however, and the readings often vary most in how moments of longing or nostalgia are handled: cadenzas, passages marked *cantabile* or *tranquillo*, etc. Part of the genius of the piece is the way that it responds well to almost any reasonable treatment by a soloist and orchestra which are equal to its considerable demands. The result is that there really are only a handful of recordings among the 28 that cannot be recommended.

An objective way of approaching recommendations would be to turn to the score, but that presents its own difficulties. Many enjoyable recordings, including ones my predecessor thought well of, are rather free with the score in tempo and dynamics, and sometimes even relative note values. More to the point, Vaughan Williams said of the recording that Evelyn Rothwell made with her husband John Barbirolli in 1955 (EMI/Barbirolli Society), "I cannot imagine anything better in the way of a performance." And yet, loving performance that it is, it is among the slowest on record, well below the composer's tempos in the Minuet and Musette and much of the Finale (Scherzo), and Rothwell still occasionally sounds stretched.

Goossens himself recorded the work, with conductor Walter Susskind (EMI), in 1952. It was not released, however, until 1963, five years after the composer's death. The dedicatee is more *rubato* than Rothwell and pecks off many of the staccato notes, and he errs on the side of haste in some sections of the finale. Still, there is great conviction and spirit, and Susskind

is a superb accompanist. Never commercially transferred from LP, it is too important a performance to ignore, and one hopes it will again be made commercially available to the public. Currently it can be downloaded from an internet blog dedicated to transfers of old recordings. Both it and the Rothwell are recommended for their historical significance, as well as for their very divergent visions of the work. The version with Mitchell Miller (Naxos), he of later television sing-along fame, can be downloaded, but it is passed over here because of the composer's stated dislike of his tone: "a horrible noise rather like cats on the roof." Janet Craxton's (Oboe Classics), recorded with Barbirolli in 1952, is a much livelier reading than the one with his wife three years later, almost too much so, but it comes from a sole surviving acetate so worn it can only be recommended to the very surface-noise tolerant.

Pace the composer's opinion of the only recording then readily available in the UK – made, it should be noted, by two of his closest friends and supporters – I find that I prefer closer adherence to the metronome markings in the score. It is possible to be too swift (Pamela Pecha on Carlton) or too literal (Lajos Lencsés on Capriccio), but several fine oboists find a nice balance of fidelity, spirit, and atmosphere: Jonathan Small/Handley (EMI/CfP), John Williams/Berglund (EMI/Warner), Celia Nicklin/Marriner (Decca, DG), and Emily Pailthorpe/Wallfisch (Champs Hill). Small is touching and rustic in turn and is much assisted by Handley's sensitively scaled accompaniment that dances and sings with him. Williams too, finds the full range of mood from joyous to melancholy, his tone slightly reedy and the music often shimmering with excitement or dewed with subtle nostalgia, and Berglund is an equally fine accompanist. If one prefers greater lingering over the more nostalgic implications of the score – but without slighting the livelier – the warmly poetic readings by Pailthorpe and Nicklin frolic engagingly and the tone of both is to die for. I give the slightest preference to Pailthorpe over Nicklin – the latter's discovery of some darker feelings in the final movement could push me over on another day – but Williams and Small are truer to the composer's *published* wishes than either. In another close call, Williams is my top choice.

For an indulgently pastoral reading, much loved by some because it emphasizes the nostalgic vein of the music, I offer the fascinating Nicholas Daniel recording (Harmonia Mundi) as a specialist alternative. It takes more liberties than I am comfortable condoning, but it is made feasible by the sheer skill and conviction of the oboist/conductor who has long been associated with this work.

Recommendation: Paavo Berglund, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, John Williams – *with Symphony No. 6, plus The Wasps Overture, and Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis [Silvestri] and Symphony No. 5 [Gibson]* (EMI/Warner – 2 CDs, Download) – also *Berglund Icon* collection (EMI/Warner – 13 CDs) or *Berglund Warner Edition* (EMI/Warner – 42 CDs)

Alternate: Vernon Handley, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Jonathan Small – *with Partita for Double String Orchestra, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, English Folk Song Suite, Fantasia on Greensleeves* (EMI/CfP – CD) or *with Symphonies 1–9, Job, English Folk Song Suite, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Flos Campi, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Partita for Double String Orchestra, and Serenade to Music (choral version)* (EMI/Classics for Pleasure – 7 CDs) or *The Collector's Edition/The New Collector's Edition* (EMI/Warner – 30 CDs)

Benjamin Wallfisch, English Chamber Orchestra, Emily Pailthorpe – *with Patterson: Phoenix Concerto, Howells: Oboe Sonata (arr. Wallfisch)* (Champs Hill – CD, Download)

Neville Marriner, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, Celia Nicklin – *with Fantasia on Greensleeves, English Folk Song Suite, Concerto Grosso, Romance for Harmonica, The Lark Ascending, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Partita for Double String Orchestra, In the Fen Country, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis [various conductors]* (Decca – 2 CDs, Download) or *with Symphony No.2 [Hughes]* (Decca/Classic FM – CD) or *with concertos by Marcello, Mozart, R. Strauss, and various oboe chamber works by Bach, Mozart, Ravel, Beethoven, Schumann, Britten, Poulenc, Stravinsky [various artists]* (Deutsche Grammophon – 2CDs, Download)

Historical: John Barbirolli, London Symphony Orchestra, Evelyn Rothwell – *with Sinfonia antartica, Tuba Concerto, The Wasps Overture, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, and works by Elgar* (EMI – CD) or *with concertos by R. Strauss, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Martinu, Mozart, Bush, plus works by Rubbra, Wordsworth* (Barbirolli Society – CD) or *Barbirolli Complete Recordings* (Warner – 109 CDs)

Walter Susskind, Philharmonia Orchestra, Léon Goossens – *with concertos by R. Strauss, Bach* (EMI – LP, Unofficial Download)

Specialist: John Barbirolli, Hallé Orchestra, Janet Craxton – *with works by Lennox Berkeley, Milhaud, Alan Richardson, Poulenc* (Oboe Classics – CD, Download)

Nicholas Daniel, Britten Sinfonia, Nicholas Daniel – *with works by MacMillan*, *Britten* (Harmonia Mundi – SACD, Download)

Bass Tuba Concerto in F minor

The composer's last completed concerto was written in 1954 for Philip Catelinet, the principal tubist of the London Symphony Orchestra, and was dedicated to the orchestra on its fiftieth anniversary. From the start, some critical response has been snobbish: reviewers dismissing it as an eccentricity of an aging composer or seeing it as unworthy of his efforts. Why he wrote for this "neglected instrument," as Michael Kennedy characterized it, is uncertain, though the challenge obviously appealed to him and Catelinet, with whom he also consulted on brass band works, encouraged it. It has turned out to be a boon to the basso of the brass section, its challenges encouraging ever greater virtuosity on the part of tubists and technical improvements in the instruments themselves. One can hear such progress in these recordings. Further, it has acted as a catalyst for others to write concertos for the instrument. Most important though, it is an endearing and captivating work, appealing to a much broader audience than just devotees of the tuba.

The first recording (EMI/Warner) was made with Catelinet and John Barbirolli the morning after the premiere. It is of obvious historic importance, not least because it appears that this is a first recording of any tubist playing any concerto written for the instrument. In truth though, respected as it is, there are more accomplished performances on disc in terms of sound and facility, not least by the two tubists who inherited the work from Catelinet: succeeding LSO principal tubists John Fletcher (RCA/Sony) and Patrick Harrild (Chandos).

Fletcher's from 1972 is a performance that has not been bettered by any of the famous tubists who have followed. He is wonderfully backed by conductor André Previn, whose love for the score is as clear as that of the soloist. What marvelous fun soloist and conductor have in the jovial first movement and how delightfully the Finale's waltz swings at the composer's sprightly tempo. The heartwarming Romanza is taken at more a *larghetto* than an *andante sostenuto*, but that seems a reasonable tempo for this lovely tune, giving it room to breathe.

Harrild is no less impressive. He is marginally more relaxed than Fletcher, with an easier top range, a similarly good-natured approach to the outer movements, and a lovely *cantabile* in the Romanza. I like especially the light touch he brings to the Falstaffian dance of the central tune of the Prelude. Thomson is not, however, as ingratiating a partner, and, oddly for this label, the orchestra is a bit recessed and not as vivid as in the RCA taping, which comes up especially well in its newest release.

Over a dozen other tubists have left recordings of this keystone work: other English artists following in the path of their LSO colleagues, as well as an international who's-who of low brass luminaries. Such is the nature of recording today that we have interesting combinations such as Norse virtuoso Øystein Baadsvik with an American conductor and an orchestra from Singapore (BIS) and French master Thomas Leleu with a Venezuelan ensemble (Fondamenta). These are fine performances, but some, like American legend Arnold Jacobs (DG), drive the music too hard, turning it into a mere virtuoso showpiece, while others like Romanian Siegfried Jung (Coviello) overindulge its potential for sentimentality. (He takes an untenable 15:04 compared to Fletcher's 12:37 and Harrild's 13:05.) In the end, there is one other performance with orchestra that commands recognition, by Scottish tuba virtuoso James Gourlay accompanied by Gavin Sutherland (Naxos). Gourlay is particularly imposing as an interpreter, using his virtuosity to illuminate the music's bluff humor and tenderness. One can easily overlook a few minor incidents of pitch instability. The disc of British tuba concertos offers other pieces likely to appeal to admirers of this work.

For wind band fanciers, Andrea Martin Hofmeir (Genuin) is accompanied by the excellent Saxon Wind Philharmonic instead of an orchestra. He tops the specialist listing for his laid-back but superbly virtuosic reading of the Denis Wick transcription. Brass band devotees will be pleased that Ross Knight (Albion), who studied with Patrick Harrild, has recorded the concerto with the Tredegar Town Band. It is a virtuoso performance of a fine arrangement by Phillip Littlemore with Knight particularly notable for his careful observance of the composer's dynamics, often rather subtle. The timbre of the soloist and that of the accompaniment is arguably too close – the original certainly provides greater contrast – but the recording is clear enough that this is, for the most part, not an issue. (See more on this groundbreaking CD in the brass band introduction.) Finally, David Childs (Chandos) has recorded the concerto, transcribed up to B♭ minor, on tenor tuba as part of a euphonium concerto disc. The composer approved of it, in concept, in response to an inquiry from Catelinet, and though the high lying lines may be less of a tightrope walk, the concerto still offers plenty of challenges. Childs meets them with apparent ease and good humor, and he even takes the Romanza at the prescribed *andante sostenuto*. And regarding the Romanza, enthusiasts may wish to check out Vaughan Williams's arrangement for cello and orchestra recorded by Julian Lloyd Webber and Neville Marriner (Philips/Decca).

Recommendation: André Previn, London Symphony Orchestra, John Fletcher – *with Symphony No. 3* (RCA/Sony – CD, Download) or *with Symphonies 1–9, Violin Concerto,*

Three Portraits from 'The England of Elizabeth' (RCA – 6 CDs) or *The Classic André Previn collection (Sony – 55 CDs)*

Alternate: Bryden Thomson, London Symphony Orchestra, Patrick Harrild – *with Symphony No. 6* (Chandos – CD, Download) or *with Concerto Grosso, Oboe Concerto, Violin Concerto, Two Hymn-tune Preludes, The Lark Ascending, Piano Concerto, Partita for Double String Orchestra, Toward the Unknown Region* (Chandos – 2 CDs, Download)

Gavin Sutherland, Royal Ballet Sinfonia, James Gourlay – *with tuba concertos by Gregson, Steptoe, and Golland* (Naxos – CD, Download)

Historical: John Barbirolli, London Symphony Orchestra, Philip Catelinet – *with Sinfonia antartica, Oboe Concerto, The Wasps Overture, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, and works by Elgar* (EMI – CD) or *with Symphony No. 8, The Wasps Overture, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Fantasia on Greensleeves* (Barbirolli Society – CD) or *Barbirolli Complete Recordings* (Warner – 109 CDs)

Specialist: Thomas Clamor, Saxon Wind Philharmonic, Andreas Martin Hofmeir (arr. Wick for military band) – *with wind band arrangements of works by Byrd, Handel, Purcell, Holst, Elgar* (Genuin – CD, Download)

Ian Porthouse, Tredegar Town Band, Ross Knight (arr. Littlemore for brass band) – *with Flourish for Band, Henry the Fifth, Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes, Variations for Brass Band and arrangements of English Folk Songs Suite, Sea Songs, The Truth from Above, Prelude on Rhosymedre, 49th Parallel Suite* (Albion – CD, Download)

Ben Gernon, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, David Childs (trans. Childs and Newton for tenor tuba) – *with euphonium concertos by Gregson, Mealor, Ball* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Neville Marriner, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, Julian Lloyd Webber (cello) (Romanza only) – *with works for or arranged for cello by Davies, Delius, Dyson, Elgar, Grainger, Holst, Ireland, Scott* (Philips/Decca – CD, Download)

The Lark Ascending – Romance for Violin and Orchestra

This is almost certainly Vaughan Williams's most popular work, and in some popular surveys it has been identified as the most well-liked work of classical music. Not surprisingly then, there are many more recordings to consider than is typical – I am re-listening to almost 60 in preparing this list – and some of these are also anthologized, often into non-specialist releases with names like *Music for Relaxation* or *Classic Dreams*. *The Lark Ascending*'s winning qualities include its superb craftsmanship, its gentle rapture, and its evocation of untroubled nature. Some, however, noting its first performance in 1920 – in the version with piano – would seemingly have it carry the weight of Vaughan Williams's grief over his experience in the First World War and to serve as an elegy for that lost generation of friends and students. It was, however, written in 1914, before that harrowing experience in the fields of Flanders. Others, as the anthologization suggests, simply look to the piece as soothing background with

pentatonic and model tonalities which, especially taken at a slower tempo, conjure up an otherworldly experience. The pages of the score, however, prescribe walking tempos in the main, a generally subdued dynamic but with important contrasts and climaxes, and cadenzas filled with 32nd- and 64th-note figurations which evoke birdsong when played at a flowing tempo. Given that, one must conclude that the composer envisioned a more carefree impression of nature rather than a longing remembrance of it.

Early recordings embrace such intent, with the four pre-stereo recordings averaging a lilting 13:18 in duration, close to the 13-minute official duration noted by Michael Kennedy in his catalogue of the composer's works. The very first recording, made by HMV by Isolde Menges and Malcolm Sargent in 1928 and skillfully transferred by Biddulph has great historic value, but it is a bit short on poetry and is not cleanly accompanied. Frederick Grinke's 1940 recording with Boyd Neel (Albion) – much admired by the composer – demonstrates that buoyant tempos and expressive solo playing are easily wed in this work. Adrian Boult's first recording in 1952 with Jean Pougnet (EMI/Warner) is undermined by the lack of truly soft playing, though Boult's contribution is otherwise as accomplished as expected. It should be noted that the capacity of 78s is not likely a factor in the tempos, as each of these recordings was fitted onto three sides, leaving a fourth that needed to be filled.

By far the swiftest of all of recordings, at just over 12 minutes, is Oscar Chausow's 1967 account with Maurice Abravanel (Vox/Menuetto). It is joyful, with an ecstatic dancelike quality, though the urgency after the first cadenza will almost certainly come as a shock and some of the playing is unremarkable. The tempos are as indicated, however. The classic recording of the same year, with Hugh Bean and Boult (EMI/Warner), at 14:41 seems leisurely in comparison. These two artists let the music unfold with such apparent artlessness, however, that it has inspired admiration and affection through the years. Other recordings up until about 1990, like Barry Griffiths with Berglund (EMI/Warner) – not Previn's drab Telarc account – and Tasmin Little in her first recording on Teldec with Andrew Davis – more persuasive than the indulgent rematch on Chandos – are similarly paced readings that capture the work's essence.

In the years since, however, readings have tended ever slower. At the extreme, Nigel Kennedy's 1997 release with Rattle (EMI/Warner) is willfully distended at 17:37, an approach that seems to say much more about the performer's ego than the work. Sadly, it seems to have become something of a model, especially as *The Lark* has attracted other celebrated soloists wishing to put their own stamp upon the popular piece. The average duration for recordings made during or after the year 2000 runs to 15-and-a-half minutes with several joining Kennedy at over 17. Of course, tempo is not everything, and some will like the rich coloration of, say, the Nicola Benedetti/Litton collaboration (Decca) even if, or perhaps because, it ruminates for almost 16 minutes. But if one is looking for a star turn, I suggest the exceptions like that first Little recording, or the poetic Sonoko Miriam Welde led by young Norwegian conductor Tabita Berglund (Lawo) – unusually sensitive to the composer's dynamics and tempo contrasts – or especially the Ehnes.

James Ehnes's recent recording (Onyx) is one of three to which I have narrowed the list for prime recommendation. His lyrical, deeply felt reading accompanies an eminent – but not preeminent – account of *A Sea Symphony* by Andrew Manze and can also be found on the conductor's subsequent release of orchestral works. It has a wide dynamic with an especially graceful realization of the work's quietest passages. The other, besides the Welde, is José-Luis Garcia's 1986 recording with Yehudi Menuhin (Arabesque). At a tempo within range of

the earliest recordings, it offers a modern-sound recording consistent with the earliest understanding of the work – while the composer was alive – played with quiet stylishness and rapturous climaxes. I would give preference to the Ehnes or Welde because of their currency, but the Garcia should be acquired if found.

For those wishing to explore further, there are recordings of Vaughan Williams's version for violin and piano, as well as versions for violin and organ, violin and harp, and for flute with both orchestra and wind ensemble. The version for violin and piano, in particular, should be heard. Of the seven recordings available, the standout is the technically perfect recording by Duncan Riddle and Mark Bebbington on Resonus: light as air, sunny and beguilingly unworldly. The recording by Siân Philipps and Per Rundberg also has all these qualities, and together they shape the perfect arch of the work, with perhaps the most effective *allegretto tranquillo (quasi andante)* section on record. Sadly, oddly omitted upper notes in parts of three double-stopped passages prevent it getting a top recommendation, but it is well worth hearing. The rhapsodic Jennifer Pike with Martin Roscoe (Chandos), coupled with a dramatic reading of the composer's Violin Sonata, must have a place on the list. The Society's own with Matthew Trusler and Iain Burnside (Albion) is very fine, as well.

The only recording with organ accompaniment was made by Rupert Marshall-Luck with David Briggs playing the Truro Cathedral's 1887 Father Willis organ (Albion). As noted in Andrew Green's excellent annotation, in the couple of decades after the piano version's publication, this combination was taken up by early advocates of the work. There is no evidence that Vaughan Williams disapproved. Marshall-Luck, unfailingly lovely of tone, is a bit pallid interpretively, and the organ is not as prominent as would be ideal, but one can certainly get a sense of the combination in this release. Students of the work's history will want to hear this. Valeria Clarke's arrangement for harp accompaniment (Albion) is new, so no history, but the combination emphasizes the inherent intimacy of the composition. When I saw it, I wasn't sure the arrangement was necessary, but it quickly won me over, and Hannah Roper with Clarke on harp are delightful.

Versions for flute are less essential, but for the curious, Katherine Bryan (Linn) playing her own arrangement offers the more impressive of the two fine recordings with orchestra. Even more of a curiosity is William Silvester's classy arrangement for wind ensemble. Mary Karen Clardy, University of North Texas professor of flute, is supported by the institution's excellent student ensemble (GIA). Ariane Brisson (Atma) overly romanticizes the work, especially in the cadenzas, but her arrangement for flute and piano involves only a few changes to avoid notes out of the flute's range, plus an octave transposition down at the end. She is technically faultless, as are all the flutists.

Finally, Paul Drayton has arranged *The Lark* for violin and mixed chorus, the chorus taking the string parts, mostly wordlessly, though some of George Meredith's poem is sung in the middle section. It has been nicely recorded by the Swedish Chamber Choir under the direction of Simon Phipps (Chandos), who commissioned it, but the most effective reading is by Michael Waldron and the London Choral Sinfonia (Orchid) with Elena Urioste the expressive – almost too much so in the cadenzas – and sweet-toned soloist. It almost convinces me that the arrangement was something needed. There is also a version of Drayton's arrangement added to the orchestral by conductor Barnaby Smith (VOCES8 Records) with soloist Jack Liebeck and the VOCES8 Foundation Orchestra and Choir. One must ask why, but it *is* very well done.

Recommendation: Andrew Manze, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, James Ehnes – *with A Sea Symphony* (Onyx – CD, Download) or *with Serenade to Music (orch. vers.), Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Fantasia on Greensleeves; English Folk Song Suite; Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (Onyx – CD, Download)

Alternate: Tabita Berglund, Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, Sonoko Miriam Welde – *with concertos by Bruch, Barber* (Lawo – CD, Download)

Yehudi Menuhin, English Chamber Orchestra, José-Luis Garcia – *with Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* (Arabesque – CD, Download)

Adrian Boult, New Philharmonia Orchestra, Hugh Bean – *with English Folk Song Suite, Fantasia on Greensleeves, In the Fen Country, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Serenade to Music* (EMI/Warner – CD, Download) or *Adrian Boult: Vaughan Williams - The Complete EMI Recordings* (EMI – 13 CDs) or *Adrian Boult: Complete Warner Recordings - The Stereo Recordings 1956 – 1978* (Warner – 79 CDs)

Andrew Davis, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Tasmin Little – *with Symphony No. 6, Fantasia on Greensleeves, The Wasps Overture* (Teldec Apex – CD, Download) or *with Symphonies 1–9, Fantasia on Greensleeves, The Wasps Overture* (Teldec – 6 CDs)

Historical: Boyd Neel, Boyd Neel Orchestra, Frederick Grinke – *with Concerto Accademico, Eventide Hymn-Tune Prelude, Violin Sonata, Arthur Benjamin: Violin Sonatina* (Albion – CD, Download)

Malcolm Sargent, unidentified orchestra, Isolde Menges – *with works by J.S. Bach, Handel, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Chopin, Wieniawski, Hubay, Falla, Stanford, Elgar* (Biddulph – 2 CDs, Download)

Specialist: Maurice Abravanel, Utah Symphony Orchestra, Oscar Chausow (with orchestra) – *from The Year 1914 in Classical Music* (Vox/Menuetto – Download)

Duncan Riddle (violin), Mark Bebbington (piano) *with Piano Quintet in C Minor, Romance for Viola and Piano, Fantasia on the Old 104th Psalm Tune* (Resonus – CD, Download)

Siân Philipps (violin), Per Rundgard (piano) – *with Romance for Violin and works by John Hawkins, Grace Williams, Paul Ladmirault, Egon Wellesz, Sally Beamish* (Claudio – CD, Blu-ray Audio, Download)

Jennifer Pike (violin), Martin Roscoe (piano) (original version) – *with Violin Sonata, Elgar: Violin Sonata* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Rupert Marshall-Luck (violin), David Briggs (organ) (arr. Briggs) – *with transcriptions of Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Symphony No. 5* (Albion – CD, Download)

Hannah Roper (violin), Valeria Clarke (harp) (arr. Clarke) – *with works by Holst, Hurlstone, Rebecca Clarke, Ethel Barns* (Albion – CD, Download)

Jac van Steen, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Katherine Bryan (arr. by Bryan for flute and orchestra) – *with works by Saint-Saëns, Shostakovich, Drdla, Paganini, Massenet, Kreisler, Sarasate* (Linn – CD, Download)

Eugene Corporon, University of North Texas Wind Symphony, Mary Karen Clardy (arr. by William Silvester for flute and wind ensemble) – *with English Folk Song Suite, Flourish for Wind Band, Two Movements from England's Pleasant Land, Toccata Marziale, Sea Songs, Symphony No. 8: Scherzo alla Marcia, and arrangements of Flourish for Glorious John, Rhosymedre, The Running Set, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Linden Lea, Sine Nomine, Variations for Brass Band* (GIA – 2 CDs, Download)

Ariane Brisson (flute), Olivier Hébert-Bouchard (piano) (arr. Brisson) – *with works by Ravel, Janáček, Debussy, Szymanowski* (Atma – CD, Download)

Michael Waldron, London Choral Sinfonia, Elena Urioste (arr. Drayton) – *with Five Mystical Songs, Lennox Berkeley: Variations on a Hymn by Gibbons, Warlock: Capriol Suite* (Orchid Classics – CD, Download)

Barnaby Smith, VOCES8 Foundation Orchestra and Choir, Jack Liebeck (arr. Drayton/Smith) – *with works by Britten, Rebecca Dale, Taylor Scott Davis, Whitacre* (VOCES8 Records – CD, Download)

Flos Campi for solo viola, small orchestra, and wordless chorus

The Latin "flos campi," literally "flower of the field," refers here to the Rose of Sharon, a Biblical symbol of great beauty and sensuality. Vaughan Williams took his title from, and was inspired by, the passionate love poetry that is the *Song of Solomon*. Completed in 1925, it is one of his few overt paeans to erotic love despite the title and Biblical source. This isn't *religious* ecstasy that is being evoked here. In fact, to forestall any misapprehensions about its nature, the composer wrote a program note in 1927, explaining that his work had nothing of "an atmosphere of 'buttercups and daisies'," nor did it have "an ecclesiastical basis."

Flos Campi is also Vaughan Williams's most Ravelian orchestral work, clearly influenced by the French composer's 1912 ballet *Daphnis et Chloé*, with parallels to that work's use of the wordless chorus as exotic coloration and a powerful medium for the work's sensual substance. The viola soloist takes the part of the love-sick protagonist, a role which might have been given to a singer by a less imaginative composer, or at least one less in love with the viola than Vaughan Williams was. Though this is no more a concerto than it is a suite – the six sections, each prefaced in the score with a quote from the *Song of Solomon*, form an unbroken whole – the solo viola part is virtuosic and carries much of the weight of the piece even while remaining firmly within the ensemble of 32 chamber players. The work's ingenuity is easy to miss, so assured is the writing, but adds to its pleasures once perceived.

Early response to the work was indeed mixed, reflecting a feeling in some that eroticism, Biblical or not, did not sit well with the composer's style. Even the composer's closest friend, Gustav Holst, apologetically admitted that he "couldn't get hold of *Flos* a bit and was therefore disappointed with it." Lionel Tertis, to whom the score is dedicated, did not record it. It wasn't until 1946 that *Flos Campi* was first put on disc by Adrian Boult and William Primrose (EMI/Warner). This recording features brilliant solo playing and abundant passion, conjuring an ardent Shulamite for Solomon rather than the languorous odalisques suggested by more deliberate accounts. Even Boult and Primrose do not take the *andante con moto*

second section at the composer's 104 bpm tempo, but they set a high standard for those that followed. (Boult did not record it again in stereo.) This standard is met, surprisingly, in a 1952 Cornell University-based recording by Robert Hull and Francis Tursi (Albion). In fact, despite a general dismissal of extant American recordings of his works in a 1955 letter to an admirer (*vaughanwilliams.uk/letter/vwl3911*), Vaughan Williams recommended this recording as the sole exception. Beautifully performed, if less overtly impassioned than its predecessor, it captures most successfully the neo-classical Ravel influence on the score and is closely observant of the composer's many instructions for choral sound.

In addition to these pioneering recordings, there are, among several fine accounts, two that best capture the letter and spirit of this exquisitely wrought score: Richard Hickox with Philip Dukes, viola (Chandos) and Martyn Brabbins with Lawrence Power (Hyperion). Brabbins's reading is keen and exotic and underscores the Ravel connection, with an alluring French finish to the textures and particular attention to the many articulation instructions for the choir, all enhanced by the superb engineering. Power is an especially seductive and rich-toned soloist, playing a viola nearly the size of the large one Tertis used in the premiere. Dukes is hardly less impressive, while Hickox's vivid account is notable in largely observing, as does the admirable Brabbins, the composer's careful pacing instructions. The dramatic arc of the work, with its rather explicit *fortississimo* climax, leads to a concluding section – with the melody that Kathleen Thomerson seems to have cribbed in part for her hymn tune *Houston* – glowing with contentment. Hickox's chorus is predictably excellent, and he too pays special attention to the many directions regarding choral sound. It is a close thing, but in the end, Brabbins's astute characterization and sensitivity and Power's ardor and warmth win the day, though either account should give much pleasure.

So, too, should a Czech recording that could easily be overlooked. It is a very fine reading, with a superlative chorus with basses that can actually sound the low Es and Ds, and a conductor whose point of reference is clearly the Ravel ballet. Sensuous and subtly colored, with transparent textures and a fine dramatic arc, the performance of Miloš Konvalinka with violist Lubomír Malý (Panton) is well worth seeking out by anyone looking for a non-British take on this exotic masterpiece. I have chosen it over better-known recordings such as Matthew Best with Nobuko Imai (Hyperion) or Vernon Handley with Christopher Balmer (EMI/CfP). These are undoubtedly beautiful, but unrealistically recessed choruses and too-measured tempos require that one appreciate them, heavenly as they may be, as something other than what the composer wrote.

Recommendation: Martyn Brabbins, BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales, Lawrence Power – *with Suite for Viola, McEwen: Viola Concerto* (Hyperion – CD, Download)

Alternate: Richard Hickox, Northern Sinfonia, The Sinfonia Chorus, Philip Dukes – *with Riders to the Sea, Household Music* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Miloš Konvalinka, Prague Symphony Orchestra, Prague Radio Chorus, Lubomír Malý – *with works by Hindemith, Forsyth* (Panton – CD, Download)

Historical: Adrian Boult, Philharmonia Orchestra, BBC Chorus, William Primrose – *with Symphony No. 6, Violin Concerto* (EMI/Warner – CD, Download) or *Adrian Boult: Vaughan Williams - The Complete EMI Recordings* (EMI – 13 CDs) or

Adrian Boult: Complete Mono Recordings 1920-1957 on HMV, Pye Nixa & Parlophone (Warner – 36 CDs)

Robert Hull, Concert Hall Chamber Orchestra, Cornell A Capella Choir, Francis Tursi – *with Concerto for Two Pianos, Fantasia on the Old 104th Psalm Tune, Three Folk Songs* (Albion – CD, Download)

Fantasia on Sussex Folk Tunes for cello and orchestra

Vaughan Williams wrote the *Fantasia on Sussex Folk Tunes* for cello and orchestra during the mid-to-late 1920s (the score claims an initial 1928 copyright date) for Pablo Casals, who performed it once, with John Barbirolli, in 1930. Though it was well received, soloist and composer had doubts, and it was eventually set aside for a later expansion or revision that never occurred. It was not heard again until Ursula Vaughan Williams approved a 1983 recording by Julian Lloyd Webber and Vernon Handley (RCA). Much acclaimed at the time, it has disappeared from the catalogue, but a 2014 publication of the score by the Oxford University Press has led to two new recordings: one by Austrian cellist Martin Rummel with Karl-Heinz Steffens (Capriccio) and another with Swiss-born cellist Nadège Rochat with Martin Yates (Dutton Epoch). Both appear in programs of relatively obscure Vaughan Williams scores. Rochat responds impressively to the idiom, playing with passion, affection, and great beauty of tone, and Yates is even better than Handley at forging a coherent whole out of the string of pearls that is this fantasia. If the Lloyd Webber can be found, it should be acquired as much for its disc mates as for the soloist's passionate advocacy, but while patrician Rummel is very fine, Rochat finally removes any lingering regrets at the first recording's absence.

There is also, for the specialist, a recording by Martin Outram, viola and Julian Rolton, piano (Albion). The piano reduction is the one John Lenehan prepared for publication with Lloyd Webber's editing of the cello part. The transcription is by the violist and is part of an excellent collection of works for viola and piano. Outram suggests that the higher tessitura of the viola could possibly address the 'slightly uncomfortable' use of the solo cello with which the composer was reportedly concerned. This allows the listener to assess that claim.

Recommendation: Martin Yates, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Nadège Rochat – *with Richard II Incidental Music, Suite de Ballet (arr. Steptoe), Songs of Travel (orch. vers.)* (Dutton Epoch – CD, Download)

Alternate: Vernon Handley, Philharmonia Orchestra, Julian Lloyd Webber – *with Delius: Cello Concerto, Holst: Invocation for Cello* (RCA – CD)

Karl-Heinz Steffens, Rheinland-Pfalz German State Philharmonic, Martin Rummel – *with The Poisoned Kiss Overture, Bucolic Suite, In the Fen Country, Three Portraits from 'The England of Elizabeth'* (Capriccio – CD, Download)

Specialist: Martin Outram (viola) and Julian Rolton (piano) (version by Lenehan/Outram) – *with Suite for Viola and Piano, Six Studies in English Folk Song, Fantasia on Greensleeves (arr. Forbes), Four Hymns* (Albion – CD, Download)

Fantasia for piano and orchestra

The Fantasia for piano and orchestra was written between 1896 and 1902 and revised twice in 1904, placing its inception during the period of studies at age 24 with Stanford at the Royal College of Music. Its completion came after his lessons in Berlin with Max Bruch. It is not only his first concertante work, but it was also, when started, his first work for orchestra, and in that sense, it is a remarkable document. It is German Romantic at its core but offers signs of his growing fascination with folk music, including a jig-like fugal treatment of one of the themes. Pianist Mark Bebbington has called it a "crucible of styles," and that is a good way to characterize the variety of impulses it embraces, some of which would become part of his mature voice. It is a fascinating look at the composer in the foothills of his eventual eminence, just a few years from producing undeniable masterpieces.

Unperformed and unpublished during the composer's lifetime, it was dated and saved as many early works were. It was placed in the British Museum by Ursula Vaughan Williams after his death with the word "withdrawn" written on it in her hand. The Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust authorized and helped fund the work's first recording by Bebbington and George Vass (SOMM) in 2011, after the pianist had sought it out at the urging of a music critic. The score was subsequently published, and in 2015 a chamber orchestra reading by Salvatore Di Vittorio and pianist Sina Kloke (Naxos) appeared. It is in many ways nicely done, but the smaller ensemble simply cannot provide the scale needed by the score's big, Romantic statements. Bebbington and Vass reveal more of the score's nobility and grandeur but leave a distinct impression of many influences incompletely integrated into one vision. The newest recording of the Fantasia, played by Andrew von Geyen and led by Vaughan Williams authority Martin Yates (Dutton), has changed my mind about it. Their insightful pacing, sensitive phrasing, and astute transitions create a much more cohesive effect. No doubt the mature composer would have tightened some, frankly, rambling passages, but the cumulative impact of this performance suggests that, uncharacteristic as it is in some ways, this virtuoso work is worthy of regular outings. The Bebbington recording remains an alternative choice, in part because he brought the work to the world's attention.

Recommendation: Martin Yates, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Andrew von Geyen – *with Flourish for Glorious John, The Steersman, The Future* (Dutton Epoch – SACD, Download)

Alternate: George Vass, Ulster Orchestra, Mark Bebbington – *with Matthias: Piano Concertos No. 1 and 2* (SOMM – CD, Download)

Suite for Viola and Small Orchestra

The Suite for Viola and Small Orchestra is yet another of a sizeable number of viola works written by English composers for the pioneering virtuoso Lionel Tertis. He premiered the piece in 1934 with Malcolm Sargent, playing it despite his reported disappointment that it was not a full-blown concerto. The work did not catch on, perhaps because its folk song roots and eight short movements struck audiences of the time as trifling. An arrangement by the composer for piano accompaniment was published in 1936, but it wasn't until 1963 that the orchestral version became available. The delay was a shame, as the suite is sheer delight, with charming melodies, wry humor – a Polka melancholique which is not really a polka nor particularly melancholy – gentle nostalgia, and many opportunities for soloist and orchestra to show off technique.

Tertis, sadly, recorded no Vaughan Williams, so there is no historic recording, as such. The first recording with orchestra was by Melvin Berger and John Snashall (Pye) in 1965, after Berger had been playing the version with piano since 1948. The recording was acclaimed when released, though the less-than-ideal engineering leaves Berger's viola sounding wiry. The lively and winning performance, however, is in many ways the best on record – certainly truest to the score – and it ought to be digitized and reissued. Since then, there have been six recordings with orchestra, plus another of just the first of the three groups into which the composer arranged the suite. Each gives pleasure. Three stand out: those by Lawrence Power with Martyn Brabbins (Hyperion), Roger Chase with Stephen Bell (Dutton Epoch), and Yizhak Schotten led by Kirk Trevor (Crystal). The Chase is out of print but still can be obtained used or streamed from Roger Chase's website www.rogerchase.com.

Power and Chase both offer affectionate accounts of the music and apparent ease in the many challenges. Both explore the full emotional range of the suite, with Power more inclined to the wistful and lyrical – his measured central Ballad is extraordinarily heartfelt – and Chase to the joyfully exuberant. Chase's cello-like tone, produced with the oversize Montagnana viola that Tertis played, is a special pleasure. I do wonder if Bell's ensemble, recorded well behind the soloist, has been limited to the 34-string maximum specified. Conversely, Yizhak Schotten is accompanied by what sounds to be less than 34 strings. The idiomatic performance is lithe and agreeable and the ensemble caught closely. The result has a delicious intimacy enhanced by the artists' attention to the composer's many markings of *piano* and softer throughout the work: even a *pppp* at one point. All three violists are virtuosos of the first order. Forced to choose, I lean toward Chase for the overall energy and warmth, but Power has the more natural balance between viola and orchestral soloists and an extraordinarily virtuosic Galop at the end. Schotten runs a close third to these two. A more recent recording by young virtuoso Timothy Ridout (Claves) is wonderfully played and often inspired, but it didn't quite warm the heart as the top three do.

There are, as well, several recordings of the composer's version for viola and piano: an arrangement more than a piano reduction, since Vaughan Williams added passages for the viola solo which are not played in the orchestral version. Of the five commercial recordings issued, two are on LP only. Of the remaining three, those by Christian Euler with Paul Rivinius (MDG) and Martin Outram with Julian Rolton (Albion), are most worth considering, though neither is as distinguished as the best orchestral versions. Euler is technically brilliant but satisfied to skate the surface. Outram digs deeper emotionally but lingers too long over the Ballad and takes the Galop at well below the prescribed 166 bpm. Still, I would opt for the more expressive.

For the adventurous, there are some arrangements to explore. Long-time Vaughan Williams friend and colleague Herbert Sumsion made organ arrangements in 1938 of Carol and Musette from the suite. They have been recorded to silver disc by Daniel Cook (Priory) and David Briggs (Albion). Both are very fine and can be chosen by a preference for meditative (Briggs) or *cantabile* (Cook). For something *completely* different, try Quintessence Saxophone Quintet's jazzy arrangement of Christmas Dance (CPO): straightforward at first, but then treated to some improvisational work before returning to the original. Fun and (mostly) respectful.

The composer's arrangement for bamboo pipe quartet and piano requires some additional background. Vaughan Williams composed five works for the English Pipers' Guild of which he was president from 1933 to 1949. Four of them were new compositions. This suite from

1939 adapts three movements – Carol, Musette, and Christmas Dance – of the existing concertante work to the capabilities of simple bamboo pipes. The solo part and accompaniment are assigned and reassigned among the five players so that no player needs to play notes outside the instrument's particular diatonic scale. Throughout, the flow of the work is perfectly maintained. Collectors looking for uncommon Vaughan Williams, charmingly done, will want to hear the premiere recording by the Flanders Recorder Duo, on handmade pipes, with Dutch Pipers' Guild pipers Rose Atkinson, Brigit de Klerk, and pianist Josje Lodder on the Guild's own label.

Recommendation: Stephen Bell, BBC Concert Orchestra, Roger Chase – *with works by Bax, Holland, Harvey* (Dutton Epoch – CD, Download)

Alternate: Martyn Brabbins, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Lawrence Power – *with Flos Campi, McEwen: Viola Concerto* (Hyperion – CD, Download)

Kirk Trevor, Slovak Radio Orchestra, Yizhak Schotten – *with works by J.S. Bach, W.F. Bach, Colgrass* (Crystal – CD, Download)

Martin Outram (viola) and Julian Rolton (piano) (arr. Vaughan Williams) – *with Fantasia on Sussex Folk Tunes (arr. Lenahan/Outram), Six Studies in English Folk Song, Fantasia on Greensleeves (arr. Forbes), Four Hymns* (Albion – CD, Download)

Specialist: David Briggs (organ) (arr. Sumsion – Carol and Musette only) – *with Two Organ Preludes Founded on Welsh Folk Songs, Prelude and Fugue in C minor, Three Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes, Passacaglia on BGC, A Wedding Tune for Ann, A Wedding Canon for Nancy, various transcriptions, Ley: Fantasia on Aberystwyth (*Albion – 2 CDs, Download)

Daniel Cook (organ) (arr. Sumsion – Carol and Musette only) – *from Complete Organ Works of Herbert Sumsion, Vol. 2* (Priory – CD)

Flanders Recorder Duo, Rose Atkinson, Brigit de Klerk (pipes), Josje Lodder (piano) (Carol, Musette, and Christmas Dance) – *with Suite for Two Pipes, Suite for [Four] Pipes, Canzona for Three Pipes, works by J.S. Bach (attributed), Telemann, Francesco Landini, Henk Badings, Stijn Kuppens, and Anonymous* (Dutch Pipers' Guild – CD)

Quintessence Saxophone Quintet (arr. Lettermann – Christmas Dance only) – *from Quintessence Goes Christmas* (CPO – CD)

Fantasia (quasi variazione) on the Old 104th Psalm Tune

Written in 1949, the *Fantasia on the Old 104th Psalm Tune* is one of Vaughan Williams's late-life self-challenges, a setting for solo piano accompanied by SATB chorus and orchestra of an 1812 paraphrase of Psalm 104 attributed to Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins. "Almost in the form of variations," as the parenthetical subtitle suggests, it is in character rather like the *Song of Thanksgiving*: a large-scale hymn of praise, grandiloquent in style, uplifting in tone, and meant to express post-war gratitude. The orchestral and choral parts are designed to enable amateur performance, while the virtuoso challenges are left to the piano soloist. There are provisions for performance by strings and organ or brass, strings, and organ, as well. Vaughan Williams was nothing if not practical. The work's sweeping

expressions of lofty religiosity may not be to everyone's taste, and there is no doubt that it is unusual in its construction: a solo vehicle, but not a concerto, with a chorus as part of the accompaniment. Nonetheless, it is worth exploring for its unique power and for the light it shines on the septuagenarian composer's ceaseless questing.

The first release came from the U.S. in 1954, a recording conducted by Robert Hull with pianist John Hunt and a Cornell University chorus, organ, and strings (Albion). This premiere recording from an unexpected source is little known but should be heard, as it is the superior performance of those available. The other recordings offer the full orchestral version: the Adrian Boult EMI release in 1970 with Peter Katin and the 2022 Hilary Davan Wetton version with Mark Bebbington on Resonus. Katin presents the music with flair, though he rushes the improvisatory opening and seems fussy in the powerful solo sections. The murkiness of previous reissues, though, has been addressed in Warner Classics' Boult Complete Stereo box set. Bebbington is a commanding advocate but becomes so ruminative in the solos he saps the work of needed energy. Hunt, a soloist with the Boyd Neel Orchestra in its 1933 premiere concert, is surer of the idiom and maintains the tension through the two solo variations. Hull's direction is more assured than Boult's or Wetton's. There is still a need for a definitive recording in modern sound, but for now, Boult/Katin or Wetton/Bebbington will have to serve for those demanding stereo. Those who do not should check out the formidable Hull/Hunt.

Recommendation: Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus, Peter Katin – *with Toward the Unknown Region, Dona Nobis Pacem, Magnificat, Partita for Double String Orchestra, Concerto Grosso, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Romance for Harmonica, The Lark Ascending [various conductors]* (EMI/Warner – 2 CDs, Download) or *Adrian Boult: Vaughan Williams - The Complete EMI Recordings* (EMI – 13 CDs) or *Adrian Boult: Complete Warner Recordings - The Stereo Recordings 1956 – 1978* (Warner – 79 CDs)

Alternate: Hilary Davan Wetton, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, City of London Choir, Mark Bebbington – *with Piano Quintet in C Minor, The Lark Ascending, Romance for Viola and Piano* (Resonus – CD, download)

Historical: Robert Hull, Rochester (NY) Chamber Orchestra, Cornell A Capella Choir, John Hall – *with Concerto for Two Pianos, Flos Campi, Three Folk Songs* (Albion – CD, Download)

Romance in D♭ for harmonica with strings and piano

There certainly must have been a few eyebrows raised when, in 1951, Vaughan Williams produced a work for harmonica virtuoso Larry Adler. Such surprise is certainly understandable, since the instrument is at best a novelty in classical circles. To the extent that it is more accepted now, much is owed to Adler and works like this *Romance*. It was not the first by a composer of note. Cyril Scott's *Serenade* (1936), Jean Berger's *Caribbean Concerto* (1941), and Darius Milhaud's *Suite anglaise* (1942) preceded it. But it was highly influential, for by the release of Adler's second recording of the *Romance* in 1969, 13 works had been written for him. Vaughan Williams was uncertain himself until he had heard Adler play. Once committed, though, the composer, guided by a list of the instrument's characteristics provided by the artist, wrote a work that both exploits the full capabilities of the instrument –

better than any other written for him, Adler declared – and is quintessential late-Vaughan Williams.

There have only been four recordings, two of them by the dedicatee: the first of these with Malcolm Sargent in 1952 (EMI/Warner) and the second with Morton Gould in 1968 (RCA). The latter has never been officially digitized for release. Adler's brilliant playing is a marvel to hear; what color and expression he conjures out of that "lowly" mouth organ. Unfortunately, his playing is so spotlighted in his recordings that it is about *all* that one hears, especially in the earlier release; the marvelous orchestration is nearly lost. To hear that, one must turn to a 1977 recording by another famous virtuoso, Tommy Reilly, accompanied by Neville Marriner (Decca and Chandos). Reilly is wonderfully expressive and technically dazzling, though less flamboyant than Adler, and he is recorded more believably by the Decca engineers. With the orchestra and piano better balanced with the harmonica, the haunting accompaniment can be played at a scale consistent with the diminutive voice of the solo instrument. The effect is magical.

A recording of the piano accompaniment Vaughan Williams produced for Adler is also available. Joe Sakimoto, as well-respected in Japan as the other two virtuosos are in the West, is accompanied by composer Haruki Mino, who is sensitive and supportive. If their performance is less captivating, it is because that subtle instrumental color is again missing. Devotees of the piece or instrument will still, no doubt, want to hear this, as it is artfully done.

Recommendation: Neville Marriner, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, Tommy Reilly – *with works by Tausky, Moody, Jacob* (Chandos – CD, Download) or *with The Poisoned Kiss Overture, Two Hymn-Tune Preludes, The Running Set, Flos Campi, Viola Suite, Sea Songs, The Wasps Overture, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Serenade to Music, House of Life (exc.), Six Studies in English Folk Song, Linden Lea (arr. Somervell) [various artists]* (Chandos – 2 CDs, Download) or *with Fantasia on Greensleeves, English Folk Song Suite, Oboe Concerto, Concerto Grosso, The Lark Ascending, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Partita for Double String Orchestra, In the Fen Country, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis [various conductors]* (Decca – 2CDs, Download) or *with The Wasps Overture, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, In the Fen Country, Variations for Orchestra, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, The Lark Ascending, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Concerto Grosso, English Folk Song Suite, various folk song arrangements* (Eloquence – 2 CDs, Download)

Historical: Malcolm Sargent, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Larry Adler – *with Toward the Unknown Region, Dona Nobis Pacem, Magnificat, Partita for Double String Orchestra, Concerto Grosso, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, The Lark Ascending [various conductors]* (EMI/Warner – 2 CDs, Download)

Specialist: Joe Sakimoto (harmonica) and Haruki Mino (piano) (arr. Vaughan Williams) – *with works by Milhaud, Spivakowsky, Jacob, Hovhaness, Moody, Mino* (Camarata – CD, Download)

David Matthews: Dark Pastoral for cello and orchestra

Vaughan Williams worked on a cello concerto intended for Pablo Casals during 1942 and 1943, and again during the last few years of his life. He never completed it, much to the

disappointment of those who know of its existence. Using the incomplete short score of the central slow movement of that concerto, composer David Matthews has created a work very much in the style of its composer. This cannot, however, be considered a work by Vaughan Williams. The movement appears to have been conceived in something like ABA format, but all Matthews had to work with was the first section, with some scoring ideas. The elder composer's writing only accounts for four minutes of the eleven-minute score, and the style is more that of the Vaughan Williams of some decades previous. Still, so lovely and poignant is the resulting piece that surely any devotee of the composer will want to hear it. The only recording, by Martin Yates with soloist Guy Johnston (Dutton Epoch), does it full honors.

Specialist Recommendation: Martin Yates, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Guy Johnston – *with Folk Songs of the Four Seasons Suite, Bucolic Suite, Serenade in A minor* (Dutton Epoch – CD, Download)

ORCHESTRAL WORKS

Job: A Masque for Dancing

This 45-minute ballet score – Vaughan Williams preferred *masque* though it lacked the speech and song of this form – must be counted among Vaughan Williams's greatest achievements. Completed in 1930 to a scenario by William Blake scholar Geoffrey Keynes, it takes its inspiration from Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*. It is a towering work for large orchestral forces – it had to be reduced by Constant Lambert for performances in a theater pit – full of color, rhythmic vitality, a kaleidoscope of mood and drama, and some of the composer's most arresting and exquisite inventions. That these inventions include music of pastoral simplicity, soaring majesty, and terrifying power is signal of both the composer's intense engagement with the project and the transition that was occurring in his musical thought. Here, surely, the stage is set for the vehemence of his piano concerto and the fiery anger of the Fourth Symphony which were to follow soon after.

The score was dedicated to Adrian Boult, who produced the first four recordings of the work. The premiere was with the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1946 (EMI or Dutton), and that recording, still white-hot with the inspiration of the new, is an obvious historical choice. It is in good sound, especially in the more natural 2013 EMI transfer: less digitally filtered than the Dutton, even if that means a bit more surface noise. Eight years later, Boult, recording with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, made another monaural recording, this time on Decca with fine *ffrr* engineering. The reading is again rhythmically alert and vital if a bit more majestic. It sounds good on Decca and especially Eloquence in box sets and in subtly simulated stereo on a Pristine Classical remastering from LP. The last is tonally impressive but sometimes accentuates the sonic limitations of the source. Everest recorded the same forces in 1958 in too vivid stereo that overstates the brass. This was Boult's last word until EMI refreshed their own offering with him and the London Symphony in 1970 as part of that conductor's Indian-summer series of recordings. The sound of this last is excellent; the performance similar to the first recording in pacing and expressive phrasing. If Boult's conducting at 81 is marginally less forceful, and occasionally less urgent, that is amply compensated for by his peerless authority and vision.

There are two other Boult recordings of note: the first a transcription of a 1946 broadcast with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the other taken live from a 1972 London Philharmonic concert commemorating the 100th birthday of the composer. The first, expertly restored by Lani Spahr for SOMM, is just as exciting as the BBC Symphony recording of two months later but played by a great orchestra at the peak of its powers. (In 1946, the BBC Symphony was somewhat weakened by wartime losses and poaching by newly formed orchestras.) Long known of, but until now unheard, this is a treasure. The later performance weds Boult's accumulated understanding of this work with the special atmosphere of the occasion, creating a particularly exciting and moving experience; Ursula Vaughan Williams declared it "the *Job* of a lifetime." It has been available on an unauthorized CD release by Intaglio, though this is now out of print and the audio is limited by the spotlighting common to audio taken for television broadcast. The performance is better heard in the authorized DVD release by ICA which also gives an all-too-rare opportunity to *see* Boult's masterful conducting.

Fine recordings have followed by Handley (his second on EMI, rather than his hurried live recording on Carlton), Hickox (EMI), and Andrew Davis (his first on Teldec, preferable to

his resplendently recorded but occasionally underinflected Chandos reading). Handley's expansive but perceptive and highly dramatic reading is an easy recommendation, as is the recent one by Andrew Manze (Onyx) in wonderful sound provided by Andrew Keener, Handley's producer 39 years previous. Manze, almost as measured as Handley, is at times wonderfully gentle in his portrayal, though vehemence is not shortchanged. Two other contrasting performances stand out: those by Barry Wordsworth (Collins/Alto) and David Lloyd-Jones (Naxos). Wordsworth, in an extraordinarily beautiful reading, demonstrates better than any other the continuing influence of Ravel on Vaughan Williams's composition. Lloyd-Jones leads a performance that reminds us, in its steady rhythmic precision, that this is, after all, music to be danced to. It suffers nothing in drama for this approach, and the clarity extends to a delineation of inner parts which is at times quite striking.

As for clarity and hearing inside the work, nothing serves better than the piano reduction produced for dance rehearsals at Vaughan Williams's request by Holst colleague Vally Lasker. Adeline Vaughan Williams declared the reduced score "marvelously like the real thing" in a letter to Holst, and Iain Burnside makes clear in his recording (Albion) why it was deemed important enough to be published in its own right, even before the full score was. Devotees will certainly want to hear it.

The Voice out of the Whirlwind, a motet for SATB choir with organ or orchestra, which was arranged from the Galliard of the Sons of the Morning, will be considered in Part II.

Recommendation: Adrian Boult, London Symphony Orchestra – *with Piano Concerto* (EMI/Warner – CD, Download) or *Adrian Boult: Vaughan Williams - The Complete EMI Recordings* (EMI – 13 CDs) or *Adrian Boult: Complete Warner Recordings - The Stereo Recordings 1956 – 1978* (Warner – 79 CDs)

Alternate: Vernon Handley, London Philharmonic Orchestra (EMI/Classics for Pleasure – CD) or *with Symphonies 1–9, English Folk Song Suite, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Flos Campi, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Partita for Double String Orchestra, and Serenade to Music (choral version)* (EMI/Classics for Pleasure – 7 CDs)

Barry Wordsworth, Philharmonia Orchestra – *with Holst: The Perfect Fool* (Collins – CD) also *with The Lark Ascending, Fantasia on Greensleeves [Clark]* (Alto – CD)

David Lloyd-Jones, English Northern Philharmonia – *with The Lark Ascending* (Naxos – CD, Download)

Andrew Manze, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Thelma Handy – *with Old King Cole, The Running Set* (Onyx – CD, Download)

Video: Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 8* (ICA – DVD)

Historical: Adrian Boult, BBC Symphony Orchestra on *Adrian Boult: Vaughan Williams - The Complete EMI Recordings* (EMI – 13 CDs, Download) or *Adrian Boult: Complete Mono Recordings 1920-1957 on HMV, Pye Nixa & Parlophone* (Warner – 36 CDs) or *with works by Bliss, Smyth* (Dutton – CD)

Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra (Belart – CD) or *with The Wasps – Aristophanic Suite* (Eloquence – CD) or *with The Wasps – Aristophanic Suite, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis [Collins], Fantasia on Greensleeves [Collins] on The Decca Sound: The Mono Years* (Decca – 53 CDs) or *with Symphonies 1–9, Partita for Double String Orchestra, Old King Cole, The Wasps - Aristophanic Suite, and works by Arnold, Elgar, Walton, Butterworth, Bax, Holst, Searle* (Eloquence – 16 CDs) or *with The Wasps – Aristophanic Suite, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Old King Cole, Fantasia on Greensleeves, English Folk Song Suite, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Partita for Double String Orchestra* (Pristine – 2 CD-Rs, Download)

Specialist: Iain Burnside (piano) (arr. Lasker) – *with The Lake in the Mountains, Hymn Tune Prelude on Song 13 by Gibbons, and works by Gurney* (Albion – CD, Download)

Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

At the time of this writing, 90-plus different performances of *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* have appeared commercially, the most of any orchestral composition in the canon. A resplendent work of extraordinary beauty and emotional depth, it was Vaughan Williams's breakout composition, along with *A Sea Symphony*, both premiered in 1910. (It was revised, including some judicious cutting, in 1913 and 1919.) With its haunting evocation of the music of the 16th-century royal chapel of Elizabeth I, for which Thomas Tallis composed, the *Fantasia* shows the composer in full embrace of the modality that Stanford had discouraged during his studies. While in form it resembles an Elizabethan fantasy, in its scoring for three distinct ensembles – full string orchestra, separate orchestra of nine players, and a string quartet – it conjures the baroque *concerto grosso*. In its sound, it reflects the clarity and tonal polish that the composer had recently acquired from his studies with Ravel. An undisputed masterpiece, the *Tallis Fantasia* enthralls with its sheer mastery of form and substance, and to some the work has taken on mystical status: a statement of the "faith of England," as Hubert Foss observed.

Conductors not otherwise associated with the composer, like Toscanini, Karajan, Monteux, Frühbeck de Burgos, and JoAnn Falleta, have recorded the work, which seems to invite a remarkable variety of approaches. From one US label, Columbia/Sony, we have Mitropoulos's kinetic 1958 New York Philharmonic recording, Ormandy's lush, intelligently paced 1963 take in Philadelphia, and Bernstein's ultra-expansive, majestically sustained 1976 reading back in New York. The last is not the slowest, though. That honor goes to a live 1957 recording from Reiner and the Chicago Symphony (CSO From the Archives) that takes a dark, roiling, passionate 19 minutes to come to rest. Ensemble sizes range from the Boyd Neel String Orchestra (Dutton, Pearl) with barely enough musicians to cover all the parts to the full string sections of symphony orchestras; approaches from the poised and unembroidered corporate vision of the conductor-less Orpheus Chamber Orchestra (DG) to the impassioned molding of Barbirolli (EMI/Warner). There is literally something for every taste.

Which is truest to the composer's intentions? The score with its clearly indicated tempos, dynamics, and phrasing suggests that Vaughan Williams envisioned drama as much as mysticism and a much quicker performance than is the norm. In fact, only a couple of the fastest readings come close to his quarter-note=96 marking for the *più animato* after letter O.

Even Adrian Boult's compelling 1940 recording (EMI/Warner, Dutton), the first of his six and as fine a reflection of the score as there is, falls a bit short of those tempos. The composer was not present for Boult's war-time session in Bristol, yet he was for the 1936 recording by Boyd Neel. Like the early Boult, that reading balances tension and otherworldliness, but with an approach considerably slower than scored and an ensemble smaller than Vaughan Williams conducted at the 1910 premiere in Gloucester Cathedral. Yet, he seems to have approved. Nor was Boult a consistent guide. His live recording from the 1972 Centenary Concert (BBC Music, BBC Radio Classics) is much like his 1940, and the 1953 Westminster/Nixa (Naxos, Pristine Classical, EMI/Warner) is only a bit less resolute, but his other three recordings take a much more expansive view.

In the end, I come back to two things: the score and the character of the Tallis theme Vaughan Williams explores in it. That theme comes from the third of nine hymn tunes the Tudor composer wrote for *Archbishop Parker's Psalter* (1567). In Phrygian mode – characterized by the *Psalter*: "The third doth rage: and roughly brayth" – it sets words beginning with, "Why fum'th in fight the Gentiles spite, in fury raging stout?" I have become convinced that the mode's traditional character and the psalm's conjuration of *spite*, *raging*, and rebellion against God is manifested in Vaughan Williams's *fortissimo* outbursts and repeated *tenuto* accents, not to mention the recurring *più animati* leading to the great climax of the work. If one suggests it more likely that the Addison words to which he set the tune in *The English Hymnal* are reflected, then "guilt and fear" and "inward horror" suit the argument as well.

All of which is to justify a preference for *passionate* and *dynamic* over the merely beautiful in these recommendations, even in the face of disparate opinion and example. In that context, the first Boult, nuanced *and* impassioned, is an easy historical recommendation. So is the Neel recording, for its association with the composer. Both are in good sound for their time, and Warner has freshened the transfer in the new Boult mono box set to eliminate the distortion in earlier ones. Among stereo recordings, a perennial favorite has been Barbirolli's incandescent 1962 account. His characteristic freeness of expression notwithstanding, Barbirolli is actually more observant than most of the composer's dynamics and explicit markings, even if tempos are slower than the letter of the score. He captures the spirit, reveals important inner details too many obscure, and builds to a mighty climax unlike any other. Here is drama *and* transcendence, still to be admired many decades and dozens of newer accounts later. Since the recording is currently available new only as a download or in a large-box collection, those tempted by three other Barbirolli recordings, from 1946, 1958, and 1963 (all Barbirolli Society and the last two live) should know that they are poor substitutes: fussy, over-the-top, and/or hampered by suboptimal sound and orchestra. Better to find a good used copy or explore the recent recording by John Wilson with a later incarnation of the virtuoso Sinfonia of London (Chandos). In fact, even if you have the classic Barbirolli, seek this one out as well, for it is just as brilliant and even more in line with the tempos and wide dynamics of the score. The sound of this SACD, richly recorded in a spacious church acoustic, is terrific. I must mention, also, a long-time favorite by Charles Groves (IMP, Alto), sounding both resolute and profoundly expressive with pacing reflective of the composer's proportions if not his exact tempos. Recorded in 1989 with weight and cathedral-like resonance, it has gotten less attention than it deserves.

For those seeking an exceptional recording that even more accurately reflects the composer's tempos and dynamics, the closest is the austerely beautiful 1958 Mitropoulos recording. Likely to sound breathless to those accustomed to readings of greater breadth – it is just under

13 minutes in duration, more than three minutes faster than the Barbirolli – it shows that depth of feeling and urgency need not be mutually exclusive. His 1945 recording with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra (Sony) is hardly less dramatic or intensely felt and has extraordinary solo playing. It is only a bit slower. Its monaural sound is, of course, dated but quite listenable in its latest incarnation. An even earlier live performance, 17 minutes long, comes from a 1943 concert with the New York Philharmonic (Music & Arts, SOMM). With its wild, highly Romantic fluctuations in tempo and arbitrary shaping, it reveals the conductor attempting to come to terms with a work he was soon to rethink and should be considered a curiosity.

Performances with chamber orchestras – and there are a number of them – typically sacrifice weightiness for a bit more intensity and clarity of texture. The conductorless Orpheus Chamber Orchestra (Deutsche Grammophon), working with 26 players, stresses the austerity and archaism of the score with an emphasis on expressive inner voices and subtle tension. It also boasts some of the most eloquent solo work this side of Iona Brown and Rodney Friend. Superb technically and a bit less ascetic, though no less committed, is Candida Thompson's live performance leading the 31-player Amsterdam Sinfonietta. The appeal of this may depend on interest in the powerful accompanying works by contemporary Baltic composers. For those looking for middle ground between full and chamber ensemble, Neville Marriner and the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields have recorded the work three times. The 1972 Decca is the most famous, but I prefer 1982 ASV and the 1993 Philips for their slightly greater urgency with no loss of atmosphere. The original ASV release and a Platinum label reissue suffer from digital glare, but the remastering in the Decca Argo box (a surprise inclusion) is better. The Philips, reissued on Australian Eloquence, is best.

Those wishing a video performance – the visually stunning Andrew Davis recording from Gloucester Cathedral is available on YouTube only – will find Simon Rattle (EuroArts) completely engaged with a composer he only recently has begun to champion. Little is made of spatial effects – the smaller ensemble is arrayed directly behind the main orchestra – but the Berlin Philharmonic is in top form.

For the adventurous, there have been a number of arrangements of the *Tallis Fantasia* for other ensembles and instruments. Two, for strings and woodwinds and for string octet, have no commercial recordings, but a shortened version for an ensemble of marimbas and vibraphones – it eliminates the central development – has been recorded by the University of Houston Percussion Ensemble (Albany). It is surprisingly attractive. More mainline, there are two recordings of the composer-approved 1947 arrangement for two pianos by Maurice Jacobson. Pianos add a percussive element that might seem inimical to the work, but in the right hands the effect is magical. I prefer the freer phrasing and broader dynamic of duo-pianists Goldstone and Clemmow (Albion), but Mark Bebbington and Rebeca Ormordia (SOMM) are very fine, as well. Organs may seem better suited to the sustained nature of the writing, though in practice they can add heaviness. David Briggs (Albion), at a lovely 1912 J. W. Walker organ, plays the Peter Beardsley transcription with the full measure of the majesty, flow, and subtlety of the work. Marco Lo Muscio, in his own arrangement, plays the huge Chichi organ of Rome's Cathedral of the Sacred Heart (Priory) and proves that Vaughan Williams's atmospheric masterpiece responds impressively to the different sound of the Italian organ. And finally, there is also an arrangement for choir on the order of Samuel Barber's *Agnus Dei* transformation of his *Adagio for Strings*. It was originally conceived by arranger Timothy Burke for virtual *a cappella* choir during the pandemic shutdown, with an extremely complex layering of voices possible in such an endeavor. Burke has rearranged it

for live choral performance with string octet accompaniment for a recording by William Vann, members of the Britten Sinfonia, and an augmented Choir of Clare College Cambridge (Albion). The concept has divided opinions, and I must admit to being a skeptic. It is, however, difficult to imagine it receiving more effective advocacy than it does in this lovingly shaped and sung recording.

Recommendation: John Wilson, Sinfonia of London, Allegri String Quartet – *with string works by Howells, Delius, Elgar* (Chandos – SACD, Download)

Alternate: John Barbirolli, Sinfonia of London, Allegri String Quartet – *with Fantasia on Greensleeves and works by Elgar* (EMI/Warner – CD, Download) also *Barbirolli Complete Recordings* (Warner – 109 CDs)

Dmitri Mitropoulos, New York Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 4, Symphony No. 6 [Stokowski]* (Sony – CD, Download) also *in The British Music Collection* (Sony – 12 CDs) or *Mitropoulos Complete Recordings* (Sony – 69 CDs, Download)

Charles Groves, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra – *with works by Elgar, Britten, Tippett* (IMP – CD also Alto - CD)

Neville Marriner, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields – *with The Wasps - Overture, In the Fen Country, Variations for Orchestra, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* (Philips – CD, Download) or *with same plus Romance for Harmonica, The Lark Ascending, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Concerto Grosso, English Folk Song Suite, various folk song arrangements* (Eloquence – 2 CDs, Download)

Orpheus Chamber Orchestra – *with Fantasia on Greensleeves and works by Elgar* (DG – CD, Download) also *with Fantasia on Greensleeves, Holst: The Planets [Levine]* (DG – CD, Download) or *Orpheus Chamber Orchestra Complete Recordings* (DG – 55 CDs)

Candida Thompson, Amsterdam Sinfonietta– *with works by Arvo Pärt, Veljo Tormis, Pēteris Vasks, Lepo Sumera* (Channel Classics – CD, Download)

Video: Simon Rattle, Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra – *with works by Dvořák, Beethoven* (EuroArts – DVD, Blu-ray)

Historical: Adrian Boult, BBC Symphony Orchestra on *Adrian Boult: Vaughan Williams - The Complete EMI Recordings* (EMI – 13 CDs) or *Adrian Boult: Complete Mono Recordings 1920-1957 on HMV, Pye Nixa & Parlophone* (Warner – 36 CDs) or *with works by Holst, Walton* (Beulah – CD) or *with works by Walton, Bliss, Butterworth, Elgar* (VAI – CD)

Boyd Neel, Boyd Neel String Orchestra – *with Violin Concerto, works by Britten* (Dutton – CD)

Specialist: Blake Wilkins, University of Houston Percussion Ensemble (arr. Wilkins) – *with works by Rob Smith, Donald Grantham, Blake Wilkins, Bruce Hamilton, Kevin Erickson* (Albany – CD, Download)

(Anthony) Goldstone and (Caroline) Clemmow (duo-piano) (arr. Jacobson) – *with Symphony No. 5 (arr. Mullinar), The Running Set (arr. Lasker and Bidder)* (Albion – CD, Download)

David Briggs (organ) (arr. Beardsley) – *with Two Organ Preludes Founded on Welsh Folk Songs, Prelude and Fugue in C minor, Three Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes, Passacaglia on BGC, A Wedding Tune for Ann, A Wedding Canon for Nancy, various transcriptions, Ley: Fantasia on Aberystwyth (*Albion – 2 CDs, Download)

Marco Lo Muscio (organ) (arr. Lo Muscio) – *with works by Langlais, Lo Muscio, Barber, Paolo Lazzeri, Keith Emerson, Keith Jarrett, Copland (*Priory – CD, Download)

William Vann, Britten Sinfonia, Choir of Clare College Cambridge – *with Pan's Anniversary, Margery Wentworth, Peace, Come Away, To Sleep! To Sleep!, Tallis: Why Fum'th in Sight* (Albion – CD, Download)

Charterhouse Suite

One of Vaughan Williams's first pieces after returning from service in World War I was a suite of dance tunes in English style for piano published in 1921, a work that will be considered in Part 2 under Piano Works. It pertains here because James Brown, the editor of the popular and expansive Polychordia String Library, proposed an arrangement of the six piano works for his library, which he accomplished in collaboration with the composer in 1923. The resulting work, named *Charterhouse Suite* in honor of the prestigious boarding school which Vaughan Williams attended, is very much in the manner of English light classical music: tuneful, at times wistful but never dark, and in the whole completely charming. Why it is so seldom recorded is a question that will likely occur to any reader who makes the effort to know it.

Of the tiny handful of recordings, two can be recommended: those of David Lloyd-Jones (Naxos) and Dalia Atlas (Stradivari). The former – on volume two of a six-release series called *English String Miniatures* – is notable for its lightness of touch and sure sense of idiom. The latter is marginally less well-played and not quite as jaunty, but the disc is dedicated to Vaughan Williams, with fine if not always immaculate performances. Lloyd-Jones fills his disc with delightful light classics both familiar and not so. It is my first choice.

Recommendation: David Lloyd-Jones, English Northern Philharmonia – *with works by Bridge, Elgar, Ireland, Delius, Warlock, Bush* (Naxos – CD, Download)

Alternate: Dalia Atlas, Israel Chamber Orchestra – *with The Lark Ascending, Violin Concerto, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (Stradivari – CD)

The Wasps: Overture and Aristophanic Suite

If there is a more delightful work of satiric cheekiness than Vaughan Williams's 1909 incidental music to Aristophanes's play, *The Wasps*, I do not know it. The whole of the incidental music written for a Cambridge University production has been recorded, as will be discussed in the Incidental Music section. The composer, however, recognizing the appeal of the music, reworked sections of the score into a suite of five movements for a slightly fuller

orchestra in 1912, led off by the brilliant overture. There are no insects in the story, despite the buzzing of the overture's opening measures, nor is there any attempt at a suggestion of ancient or Greek music. Instead, there are 25 minutes of quintessentially English high spirits, with some measure of gentle nostalgia and nobility, in one of the composer's most enjoyable scores. No need to ponder what it is all about.

The overture was the first of the suite recorded, by the composer in 1925, and it is still recorded alone more often than with the other movements. The composer's whirlwind account – the fastest on record – is particularly interesting, despite the limited fidelity of the acoustic recording. It might be argued that Vaughan Williams was pressing forward to fit the work (barely) onto two 78 sides, but note that the marked tempo is a bracing *allegro vivace*, and in the central section the downbeats are altered to create the impression of a significant slowing while the tempo actually remains unchanged. In his recording, Vaughan Williams relaxes slightly toward the end of the middle section, but otherwise paces exactly as his score indicates, making his recording a benchmark. The first release on CD by Pearl should be avoided, as it is pitched a semitone too high and runs faster yet. Dutton has pitched it correctly but has filtered the surface noise of the old shellac enough that the sound is dulled a bit. A 1935 recording by Henry Wood (Dutton, Decca) comes close to matching the composer's bracing approach, in better sound, and is also a prime historic recommendation, especially in the more recent Decca transfer by Obert-Thorn.

The score calls for wide dynamic contrasts from *ppp* to *ff*, something the older recordings simply could not accommodate. For that, one must turn to more modern recordings, foremost among them Constantin Silvestri's (EMI). His attention to the prevailing lightness of sonority, along with a briskness of execution that approaches the composer's, assures his reading is an absolute joy. William Boughton (Nimbus) is nearly as nimble, and he avoids one anomaly of Silvestri's reading: an exciting but remarkably giddy *presto* at the concluding *a tempo*. Others favor a more measured, expressive, even romantic approach to the glorious melody of the central section. Neville Marriner (Philips) pulls it off the best, treating the central section as something of a nocturne. He makes it convincing, even if it was not the composer's intention.

The usually reliable Adrian Boult's three ambles through the overture (Decca/Belart/Pristine Classical, EMI, Everest) – the first two excerpted from recordings of the entire suite – are full of loving detail but slight the composer's intended exuberance. His three full *Aristophanic Suites* (1953 Westminster/Naxos/Warner, 1953 Decca/Belart/Pristine Classical/Eloquence, and 1968 EMI/Warner) are a different matter. After the easygoing overtures, they are all playful and stylish, though oddly in the Decca, *et al.* The March Past of the Kitchen Utensils does not include the trio. The best of the pre-stereo recordings is the 1953 George Weldon (Dutton): lively, affectionate, full of character, and nicely recorded. Among stereo recordings, Boult's EMI version deserves recognition, not least for the outstanding reading of the Ballet and Final Tableau. In the end, though, the prize goes to Norman Del Mar's (EMI), a rambunctious, unbuttoned, even a tad unrefined reading which suits the piece perfectly.

For those wishing to listen farther afield, a number of arrangements of movements of the suite have been recorded. Wind band fanciers may wish to explore The Grenadier Guards' reading of the Overture and March Past of the Kitchen Utensils (Emblem) in a delightful arrangement by Rodney Bashford. For organ aficionados, Albion Records has issued, in separate releases, fine recordings of David Briggs's arrangements of the overture and *March Past of the Kitchen Utensils*, both brilliantly played by the arranger. The Society's label has

also issued Constant Lambert's arrangement of the overture for duo-pianos, played with skill and élan by Alan Rowlands and Adrian Sims.

Recommendation (Overture only): Constantin Silvestri, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra – *with Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Oboe Concerto [Berglund], Symphonies 4 & 6 [Berglund], Symphony No. 5 [Gibson]* (EMI/Warner – 2 CDs, Download) or *with Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, various works – Silvestri: Complete EMI Recordings* (EMI/Warner – 15 CDs)

Recommendation (Aristophanic Suite): Norman Del Mar, Bournemouth Sinfonietta – *with Concerto Grosso and works by Holst, Delius, Elgar* (EMI – CD) or *with Concerto Grosso and works by Holst, Delius, Warlock* (EMI – CD)

Alternate: William Boughton, English String Orchestra (Overture) – *with various works by Vaughan Williams for orchestra, string quartet, and chorus* (Nimbus – 4 CDs, Download)

Neville Marriner, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields – *with Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, In the Fen Country, Variations for Orchestra, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* (Philips – CD, Download) or *with same plus Romance for Harmonica, The Lark Ascending, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Concerto Grosso, English Folk Song Suite, various folk song arrangements* (Eloquence – 2 CDs, Download)

Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra (Suite) – *with Sinfonia antartica* (EMI/Warner – CD, Download) or *Adrian Boult: Vaughan Williams - The Complete EMI Recordings* (EMI – 13 CDs) or *Adrian Boult: Complete Warner Recordings - The Stereo Recordings 1956 – 1978* (Warner – 79 CDs)

Historical: Ralph Vaughan Williams, Aeolian Orchestra (Overture) – *with Old King Cole, A Flourish for the Coronation [Beecham], Serenade to Music [Wood], A Song of Thanksgiving [Boult], Scott of the Antarctic (exc.) [Irving]* (Dutton – CD)

Henry Wood, Queen's Hall Orchestra – *with Fantasia on Greensleeves, Serenade to Music, A London Symphony* (Dutton – CD) or *with Fantasia on Greensleeves, A London Symphony, a Purcell/Wood suite and much else by others as part of the Decca Conductors' Gallery* (Decca – 21 CDs, Download)

George Weldon, London Symphony Orchestra (Suite) – *with Holst: St. Paul's Suite, A Somerset Rhapsody, Marching Song, The Perfect Fool, Bax: Tintagel* (Dutton – CD)

Specialist: Philip E. Hills, Band of the Grenadier Guards (Overture and March Past of the Kitchen Utensils – arr. Bashford) – *with Flourish for Wind Band, Toccata Marziale, English Folk Song Suite, Sea Songs, Fantasia on Greensleeves, The Old 100th, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, 49th Parallel Prelude, Prelude on Rhosymedre, Linden Lea, Flourish for Three Trumpets, Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes for Band* (Emblem – CD, Download)

David Briggs (organ) (Overture – arr. Briggs) – *with Two Organ Preludes Founded on Welsh Folk Songs, Prelude and Fugue in C minor, Three Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes, Passacaglia on BGC, A Wedding Tune for*

*Ann, A Wedding Canon for Nancy, various transcriptions, Ley: Fantasia on Aberystwyth (*Albion – 2 CDs, Download)

David Briggs (organ) (March Past of the Kitchen Utensils – arr. Briggs) – *with Flourish for Three Trumpets, Serenade to Music, She's Like a Swallow, The Winter's Gone and Past, I will give my Love an Apple, Four Cambridge Flourishes, For All the Saints, Suite for Four Hands, Variations on Aberystwyth, Pezzo Ostinato, Five Mystical Songs-The Call, Two Herefordshire Carols, Dives and Lazarus (choral), God be with You Till We Meet Again (*Albion – CD, Download)

Alan Rowlands and Adrian Sims (duo-piano) (Overture – arr. Lambert) – *with Symphony No. 6* (arr. Mullinar) *and works by Ireland (*Albion – CD, Download)

Old King Cole – Ballet

Vaughan Williams only wrote one work that he designated a ballet, though he wrote several works for the dance, most notably *Job*. *Old King Cole*, written for the 1923 Trinity College, Cambridge, British Music Festival, never rises to the level of that later work, but it never aims to. It is based on folk music, conceived to accompany folk dancers, written to be performed outdoors for a particular event and space, and it takes its subject from a nursery rhyme. Yet, though it is not a major score, songs that the composer had collected are treated with finesse, the violinist is provided with some lively and lovely solos, and it is a great deal of fun. The story centers on an evening's entertainment arranged by the eponymous monarch to honor his daughter. The pipe, bowl, and fiddlers three are all a focus of the choreography, with stick dances and Morris jigs, plus a tender turn by the second fiddler that wins the heart of the daughter, even if the more boisterous offering of the third fiddler wins the king's prize.

Surprisingly, the work has only received four outings on disc, the first by the composer in 1925 at the time of its publication. Made just two years after the premiere, this is an important document, and just as the swift tempo of his *Overture from The Wasps* – recorded in the same session – can be justified by the score, so can his pacing in *Old King Cole*. Running an orchestra-challenging 16:24 in the correctly timed Dutton transfer, much of it sounds headlong compared to modern recordings, but it has heart and shows that he meant the tempos in his score. (Only the concluding General Dance is taken a bit above the scored pace.) The Dutton is, sadly, somewhat dulled by surface-noise filtering. The clearer but noisier Pearl is transferred sharp and is therefore too fast. A monaural recording by Adrian Boult recorded by Westminster in 1953 runs two-and-one-half minutes longer but still stays in range of the marked tempos. Boult leads with spirit and great affection, and the solos are delightfully taken by London Philharmonic principal Joseph Shadwick. The sound is a bit edgy in some transfers; the best CD release is the Eloquence (also on Belart, Alto, and Pristine Classical) and of the downloads offered by Naxos and Pristine, the best – of Naxos' two – is the one misidentified as being with the *Royal* Philharmonic.

That leaves two modern stereo versions: one by Richard Hickox on EMI and the most recent by Andrew Manze on Onyx. The Hickox recording includes the wordless chorus not heard on other versions: a distinct advantage in my book which adds a touch of fantasy. Hickox's slower tempos – three minutes longer yet than Boult's 19 minutes – allow for a deeply expressive reading, while a lightness of touch mitigates most of any loss of vivacity. Manze's reading falls exactly between Boult and Hickox. He trades some brilliance for an attractive sweetness in the Pipe Dance and romanticizes the second fiddler's solos (these are lovely),

which accounts for much of the timing difference. Other sections are upbeat and delightful, though the General Dance could have been livelier. Conclusion: I want both Manze and Hickox, but then, I want all four recordings of this undeservedly neglected delight.

Recommendation (with chorus): Richard Hickox, Northern Sinfonia of England, Sinfonia Chorus, Bradley Creswick – *with The Poisoned Kiss Overture, Flos Campi, The Lark Ascending, 49th Parallel Prelude, Sea Songs* (EMI – CD) or above plus *with Serenade to Music, Five Mystical Songs, Prelude on an Old Carol Tune, The Running Set, Two Hymn-Tune Preludes, Oboe Concerto, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes (exc.), Violin Concerto, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* (EMI/Warner – 2 CDs, Download)

Recommendation (without chorus): Andrew Manze, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Eva Thorarinsdottir – *with Job, The Running Set* (Onyx – CD, Download)

Historical: Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra (misidentified as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra by Naxos) – *with works by Butterworth, Bax, Holst, Elgar* (Belart/Alto – CD) or *with The Wasps – Aristophanic Suite* (Naxos – Download) or *with Symphonies 1–9, Partita for Double String Orchestra, The Wasps - Aristophanic Suite, Job, and works by Arnold, Elgar, Walton, Butterworth, Bax, Holst, Searle* (Eloquence – 16 CDs) or *with The Wasps – Aristophanic Suite, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Job, Fantasia on Greensleeves, English Folk Song Suite, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Partita for Double String Orchestra* (Pristine – 2 CD-Rs, Download)

Specialist: Ralph Vaughan Williams, Aeolian Orchestra – *with The Wasps Overture, A Flourish for the Coronation [Beecham], Serenade to Music [Wood], A Song of Thanksgiving [Boult], Scott of the Antarctic (exc.) [Irving]* (Dutton – CD)

The Running Set

Here is another dance work, based, according to the composer's notes, on a British folk-dance form which was "only performed in the remoter parts of the United States" by the early 20th century. When famed song collector Cecil Sharp documented the dance in Virginia, there was no specific music for it, so in 1933, when Vaughan Williams was asked to arrange a setting for the English Folk Dance Society, he used four tunes that Sharp had associated with it for its reintroduction to the United Kingdom: Barrack Hill, The Blackthorn Stick, Irish Reel, and Cock o' the North. It appears as a single short movement at a lively *presto* tempo.

The festival premiere took place in 1934, but the score was not published until 1952. The first recording was made by George Hurst (Chandos) more than 20 years later, and four more recordings have followed. All are quite good, but the two by Richard Hickox (EMI and Chandos), and those by James Judd (Naxos) and Andrew Manze (Onyx) observe repeats not taken by Hurst. Manze's characterful dash is the best of the lot, with the whirlwind first Hickox and the charming Judd as fine alternates, but in truth, if you have the single-disc Hickox *Pastoral Symphony* on Chandos there really is no need to seek another *Running Set*.

Or rather, there isn't unless you are a fancier of wind bands, in which case you may wish to check out a recording of the excellent William Sylvester arrangement of *The Running Set*. I prefer Sylvester's own spirited recording with his College of New Jersey Wind Ensemble

(Mark Records) to Eugene Corporon's (GIA) arguably better played but less animated version. Those taken with the work should also hear Goldstone & Clemmow play Vally Lasker and Helen Bidder's duo-piano arrangement (Albion) likely made for rehearsal but later taken up by duo-pianists. It is a delightful tour-de-force, and the pianos suit it well.

Recommendation: Andrew Manze, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Job, Old King Cole* (Onyx – CD, Download)

Alternate: Richard Hickox, Northern Sinfonia of England – *with The Poisoned Kiss Overture, Old King Cole, Flos Campi, The Lark Ascending, 49th Parallel Prelude, Sea Songs, Serenade to Music, Five Mystical Songs, Prelude on an Old Carol Tune, Two Hymn-Tune Preludes, Oboe Concerto, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes (exc.), Violin Concerto, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* (EMI/Warner – 2 CDs, Download)

James Judd, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – *with The Wasps – Aristophanic Suite, Piano Concerto. English Folk Song Suite (arr. Jacob)* (Naxos – CD, Download)

Specialist: William H. Sylvester, College of New Jersey Wind Ensemble (arr. Sylvester) – *with works by Arnold, Benjamin, Doppler, Gibilaro, Maurice, Reed, Vivaldi* (Dutton – CD)

(Anthony) Goldstone and (Caroline) Clemmow (duo-piano) (arr. Lasker and Bidder) – *with Symphony No. 5 (arr. Mullinar), Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis (arr. Jacobson)* (Albion – CD, Download)

Two Hymn-Tune Preludes

The premiere recording of either of these lovely preludes, written to be performed by a small orchestra at the Three Choirs Festival in 1936, was of the first, W.H. Monk's *Eventide*, made in 1940 by the Boyd Neel Orchestra (Albion). *Eventide* will be familiar as the tune usually used for the hymn *Abide with Me*. The second prelude, an arrangement of J.B. Dykes's *Dominus regit me*, had to wait until 1975 to be recorded with its companion by George Hurst (Chandos). Though beautifully played, Hurst's *Eventide* seems excessively dreamy compared to Neel's gently flowing *lento*, while Bryden Thomson (Chandos) belabors the *andante con moto* of *Dominus regit me*. Happily, Richard Hickox (EMI/Warner) finds the perfect pace for both, blending contemplativeness with delicacy and a pleasing *cantabile*.

Organist, conductor, and the composer's friend Herbert Sumsion arranged these two preludes for performance on organ just two years after their premiere. Daniel Cooke has recorded them as part of his complete survey of Sumsion's organ works (Priory) where they appear in the second volume. Organ fanciers will want to check out these winged but winning performances.

Recommendation: Richard Hickox, Northern Sinfonia of England – *with The Poisoned Kiss Overture, Old King Cole, Flos Campi, The Lark Ascending, 49th Parallel Prelude, Sea Songs, Serenade to Music, Five Mystical Songs, Prelude on an Old Carol Tune, The Running Set, Oboe Concerto, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes*

(exc.), Violin Concerto, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus (EMI/Warner – 2 CDs, Download)

Historical: Boyd Neel, Boyd Neel Orchestra – *with Concerto Accademico, The Lark Ascending, Violin Sonata, Arthur Benjamin: Violin Sonatina* (Albion – CD, Download)

Specialist: Daniel Cook (organ) (arr. Sumsion) – *from Complete Organ Works of Herbert Sumsion, Vol. 2* (Priory – CD)

Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus

Most readers will know that Vaughan Williams was an enthusiastic collector of folk songs, along with friend Gustav Holst, pioneering folk-song revivalist Cecil Sharp, and others. One that impressed him especially was Dives and Lazarus, a song he said seemed as "something which I have known all my life, only I didn't know it!" He and others collected several versions of it over the years. It was this that inspired *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus*, in which he presents the melody in a subdued but richly harmonized theme statement, and then offers "reminiscences" of variants of the tune collected by him and others in treatments for strings and harp(s).

Written to be performed at the 1939 World's Fair in New York, it had its premiere in Carnegie Hall conducted by Adrian Boult, who also led its British premiere. Oddly enough, he never recorded the work. John Barbirolli, who in 1939 was the music director of the New York Philharmonic, kept the piece in the orchestra's repertoire and then brought it with him to The Hallé. It fell to him to make the first recording in 1953 with his Manchester orchestra (EMI/Barbirolli Society), a predictably moving and personal reading which is observant of Vaughan Williams's range of dynamics – from *pp* to *fff* – and explicit articulations, if less so of his tempos. It is in every way superior to the travesty visited upon it by Stokowski (Guild) a year later. He is willful and showy and completely out of sympathy with its substance.

Twenty-one recordings have been released since these. Many of them have fine qualities to recommend them, but strangely none can be said to faithfully present the score in all things. One might admire the deep commitment and lovely playing in Bryden Thomson's recording (Chandos), but not a tempo matches the composer's explicit markings. Vernon Handley (EMI) also lovingly shapes the music, though the distinctive attributes of the performance are as often the conductor's as the composer's, including a massive unmarked *allargando* beginning with the cello solo in variant five. (Though Handley is not alone in this.) The classic David Willcocks (EMI/Warner) is remembered fondly by many, though it is more *legato* and dynamically moderate than ideal. In the end, Mark Elder (Hallé) most compellingly represents the composer's conception, in a reading which marries fidelity to a distinctive vision. Yet, it must be noted that David Lloyd-Jones (Naxos) is almost alone in his observation of the composer's *piano* dynamic – most conductors emphasize the *sonore* instruction – and slightly *détaché* style of the opening section, and he comes closer than most to the composer's range of tempo instructions and transitions. His is a reading – gentle, unflashy, and often exquisite – that has grown in my estimation over repeated hearings, and it comes with a number of uncommon disc mates.

Anyone curious as to how well this quintessential string work might translate to wind ensemble can explore the Stephen Gregson arrangement led by Eugene Corporon (GIA). Spoiler: the answer is *surprisingly well*, especially for anyone who admires the composer's works for band. The string writing would seem, of course, a more natural fit for organ, as is demonstrated by David Briggs on the magnificent Father Willis organ of Truro Cathedral (Albion). In the process, he transforms the work into something of a meditation, but organ fanciers will, I daresay, find it appealing despite the significantly more measured and subdued approach.

Recommendation: Mark Elder, Hallé Orchestra – *with Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Pastoral Symphony, The Wasps Overture* (Hallé – CD, Download)

Alternate: David Lloyd-Jones, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Toward the Unknown Region, Willow-wood, The Voice out of the Whirlwind, The Sons of Light* (Naxos – CD, Download)

Historical: John Barbirolli, Hallé Orchestra – *with Oboe Concerto, Tuba Concerto, Sinfonia antartica, The Wasps Overture, Fantasia on Greensleeves, and works by Elgar* (EMI – 2 CDs) also *with Symphony No. 8, The Wasps Overture, Tuba Concerto, Fantasia on Greensleeves* (Barbirolli Society – CD) or *Barbirolli Complete Recordings* (Warner – 109 CDs)

Specialist: Eugene Corporon, North Texas Wind Symphony (arr. Gregson) – *with English Folk Song Suite, Flourish for Wind Band, Two Movements from England's Pleasant Land, Toccata Marziale, Sea Songs, Symphony No. 8: Scherzo alla Marcia, and arrangements of Flourish for Glorious John, Rhosymedre, The Running Set, The Lark Ascending, Linden Lea, Sine Nomine, Variations for Brass Band* (GIA – 2 CDs, Download)

David Briggs (organ) (arr. Briggs) – *with transcriptions of The Lark Ascending, Symphony No. 5* (Albion – CD, Download)

Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1

When the backstory of this work was little known, one might have wondered at its designation as number one when there was no apparent number two. We now know that Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1 was originally intended as the first part of a three-movement *A Norfolk Symphony*. The last two movements were written and conducted by Vaughan Williams prior to World War I, but these were eventually withdrawn. The first was premiered by Henry Wood in 1906. It was revised in 1914, fitted with a quiet ending to reflect the opening – more appropriate to a stand-alone piece – and reworked to reflect, in its Impressionistic evocation of the Fenlands, what Vaughan Williams had learned during his 1908 sojourn to Paris. Retained were his use – both haunting and lively – of folk songs from the region and a bit of the flavor of Delius.

The first recording came in 1953. Adrian Boult led the recording for a series of LPs of lesser-known works issued by Westminster/Nixa (Naxos,Pristine Classical,EMI/Warner). He may not have the most beguiling of viola soloists, and his tempo in the central march is more *allegretto* than the requested *allegro vivace*, but overall, it is a nice reading which tends to the languid. His second recording, from 1968 (EMI/Warner) is much the same, though a bit

tauter, better played and in stereo. Generally, the preferred readings are the ones closest to Vaughan Williams's tempos, where there is plenty of atmosphere *and* a lively quickstep march as contrast. Leonard Slatkin (RCA/Sony), Norman Del Mar (EMI), and Paul Daniel (Naxos) offer just that. Of the three, Daniel, with an opening and closing marginally more evocative of the misty Fens, a particularly sprightly march, and the freshest sound, takes the palm.

More measured performances can be attractive when as well-sustained and beautifully shaped as they are by Martin Yates (Dutton Epoch) or Richard Hickox (Chandos). Hickox's reading, in particular, is strongly dramatic, with a wonderfully improvisatory viola solo and a march with plenty of contrasting snap, even if it is rather slower than the composer's tempo.

Those who wish to hear the 1973 Robert O'Brien arrangement for wind ensemble will find a recording directed by Philip E. Hills (Emblem). The transcription itself is not bad but beginning with the saxophone stand-in for the viola solo one must endure some dubious intonation. The final chord is particularly discomforting. This can only be a provisional recommendation until, if ever, a better recording comes along.

Recommendation: Paul Daniel, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 4, Flos Campi* (Naxos – CD, Download) or *with Symphonies 1–9 [2,3,5–9 Bakels], Flos Campi, The Wasps Overture [Bakels]* (Naxos – 6 CDs)

Alternate: Leonard Slatkin, Philharmonia Orchestra – *with A London Symphony, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (RCA – CD) or *with Symphonies 1–9, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Sea Songs, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Flourish for Glorious John* (RCA/Sony – 6 CDs)

Richard Hickox, London Symphony Orchestra – *with A Pastoral Symphony, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 2, The Running Set* (Chandos – SACD, CD, Download)

Norman Del Mar, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra – *with Toward the Unknown Region, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, In Windsor Forest* (EMI – CD)

Historical: Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra (originally identified as the London Philharmonic Promenade Orchestra for contractual reasons; misidentified by Naxos as the *Royal* Philharmonic) – with *English Folk Song Suite, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (Naxos – Download) or *with The Wasps – Aristophanic Suite, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Job, Old King Cole, Fantasia on Greensleeves, English Folk Song Suite, Partita for Double String Orchestra* (Pristine – 2 CD-Rs, Download) or *Adrian Boult: Complete Mono Recordings 1920-1957 on HMV, Pye Nixa & Parlophone* (Warner – 36 CDs)

Specialist: (see note) Philip E. Hills, Band of the Grenadier Guards (arr. O'Brien) – *with Flourish for Wind Band, Toccata Marziale, English Folk Song Suite, Sea Songs, Fantasia on Greensleeves, The Wasps Overture and March Past of the Kitchen Utensils, The Old 100th, 49th Parallel Prelude, Prelude on Rhosymedre, Linden Lea, Flourish for Three Trumpets, Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes for Band* (Emblem – CD, Download)

Norfolk Rhapsody No. 2

The second and third movements of a planned *A Norfolk Symphony* were withdrawn after performances in 1912. The manuscript of the second movement languished among the composer's papers until it was discovered following his death. The slow movement and scherzo of the symphony fused into one, it was found with the final two pages missing. These were recomposed in 2001 by Stephen Hogger, using a detailed analytical program note by W.A. Morgan for the 1907 performance.

Since then, this work has been recorded twice: by Richard Hickox (Chandos) and Martin Yates (Dutton Epoch). It may not be as polished nor as cohesive as the first folk-song rhapsody was – or became after its revision – but it is lovely and evocative. Both readings do justice to it, but the Yates comes closest to the tempos described in the contemporaneous analysis and smooths a couple of transitions that seem ungainly in the Hickox. Band devotees might want to check out Anthony O'Toole's transcription for symphonic wind band (GIA), though the close recording compromises its charm.

Recommendation: Martin Yates, Royal Scottish National Orchestra – *with The Blue Bird – Incidental Music, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Variations for Orchestra, Music for an EFDS Masque, Christmas Overture, Matthews: Norfolk March* (Dutton Epoch – SACD, Download)

Alternate: Richard Hickox, London Symphony Orchestra – *with A Pastoral Symphony, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, The Running Set* (Chandos – SACD, CD, Download)

David Matthews: Norfolk March

The final movement of the proposed *A Norfolk Symphony* was discarded by the composer in an unusual act of irrevocable self-censorship, but its ghost lingers on in David Matthews's 2016 *Norfolk March*. It was reimagined by Matthews, much as the lost pages of the second rhapsody were by Hogger, from the detailed W.A. Morgan program note. In this case, however, the re-composition is of a whole cloth, and while Matthews creates a reasonable facsimile of Vaughan Williams's early style in much of the work, he concludes with a purposeful departure from the original, taking the upbeat martial theme into a much darker, and consciously more Ivesian, reflection on the cataclysmic war that so soon followed this composition.

Norfolk March was commissioned by the Society and Chairman Simon Coombs, to whom it is dedicated. Those hoping for a Vaughan Williams 'reproduction' may be disappointed, but it is a solid enough work, performed here with obvious conviction. This is in no way a Vaughan Williams composition. Nonetheless, devotees of the *Norfolk Rhapsodies*, and of Matthews's earlier *Dark Pastoral*, reconstructed from the slow movement of the unfinished cello concerto, may want to explore this recording.

Specialist Recommendation: Martin Yates, Royal Scottish National Orchestra – *with The Blue Bird – Incidental Music, Norfolk Rhapsodies Nos. 1 and 2, Variations for Orchestra, Music for an EFDS Masque, Christmas Overture* (Dutton Epoch – SACD, Download)

In the Fen Country (Symphonic Impression)

Written in 1904, this is the earliest orchestral work which Vaughan Williams allowed to remain in his active catalogue, and it is one that he recommended in the following decades to conductors, including Adrian Boult, looking for works of his to program. It was first performed by Thomas Beecham in 1909, and he revisited it at least twice, but it was not published until 60 years later. It is easy to appreciate its appeal to Beecham. Even after several revisions, the last a reworking of the orchestration in 1935, this highly evocative work shows a strong affinity to the music of Delius and Richard Strauss.

Alas, Beecham never recorded it, and aside from a private disc made in the late 1930s – we know of it because the composer inquired about it in a letter – its first recording was by Boult in 1968. Sadly, the great conductor's objectivity is not ideally suited to this transitional composition, with one foot in the late-Romantic school. Others have followed with greater success. My distinguished predecessor favored Haitink's recording (EMI/Warner), which is certainly most beautifully shaped. It will please those who admire a string-dominated approach. For me Marriner (Philips/Decca/Eloquence) is even finer: leaner, with more emphasis on the characterful wind writing, and occasionally more impulsive. It seems a bit closer to the folk roots of the music, so it is my recommendation. Also well worth hearing, in a recording of Vaughan Williams rarities, is German clarinetist-turned-conductor Karl-Heinz Steffens in a similarly revealing, if more expansive, performance that underscores the connection to Strauss, especially in the writing for French horn.

Recommendation: Neville Marriner, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields – *with The Wasps Overture, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Variations for Orchestra, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* (Philips – CD, Download) or *with same plus Romance for Harmonica, The Lark Ascending, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Concerto Grosso, English Folk Song Suite, various folk song arrangements* (Eloquence – 2 CDs, Download)

Alternate: Bernard Haitink, London Philharmonc Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 6, On Wenlock Edge* (EMI/Warner – CD, Download) or *with Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, On Wenlock Edge, The Lark Ascending* (EMI/Warner – CD, Download) or *with Symphonies 1–9, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, On Wenlock Edge, The Lark Ascending* (EMI/Warner – 7CDs)

Karl-Heinz Steffens, Rheinland-Pfalz German State Philharmonic – *with The Poisoned Kiss Overture, Fantasia on Sussex Folk Tunes, Bucolic Suite, Three Portraits from 'The England of Elizabeth'* (Capriccio – CD, Download)

Fantasia on Greensleeves

This is another of the composer's most popular scores, currently with over 60 recordings in the original version for strings, harp (or piano), and optional flute (1 or 2) – harp and both flutes are usually used – and there are well over a dozen more recordings in various arrangements. It is not a major work, being an arrangement itself of the composer's setting of the tune in his 1928 opera *Sir John in Love*, but it is an immediately appealing one. It was commissioned by Oxford University Press from composer Ralph Greaves, who appears to have been involved in preparation of the choral parts of the opera for publication. There is

otherwise little readily available information regarding Greaves besides his dates (1889–1966) and a few titles of compositions. It was Vaughan Williams who suggested the folk tune Lovely Joan, also used in the opera, for the central section of the work, and he approved the arrangement in 1934 with only a couple of modifications. The composer led the first performance later that same year.

The first recording was made just a year-and-a-half later by Henry Wood (Dutton, Decca). Its historic value is undeniable, and it avoids the sentimentality that has afflicted some subsequent recorded performances. Wood takes the Greensleeves theme, marked *lento moderato* with a parenthetic "2 slow beats" at what is indeed a moderate *lento* in two, but it sounds impatient. The piece is better served by Barbirolli's 1948 recording (Barbirolli Society), the first of his three that have been transferred to digital media. It is paced at a somewhat slower *lento* tempo. The central *allegretto* is more an *andante*, but he phrases deftly and never overloads this gentle piece with excess emotional baggage.

His later recordings, from 1954 (EMI/Barbirolli Society) and 1962 (EMI/Warner), are similarly shaped. The latter, in stereo, with the first Sinfonia of London, is part of one of the great classic releases and has never been out of print. In a field of performances that often sound much alike, its distinctive character and iconic status assures a place on the list of preferred recordings. Menuhin's (Arabesque) cultured and loving performance – so careful of the subtle dynamics – also deserves that recognition. So does that of the London Chamber Orchestra, led from the concertmaster's desk by Christopher Warren-Green (Virgin/Erato) with spirit, grace, and lightness, and with the contrast afforded by a truly *allegretto* Lovely Joan. In the end, though, it is the conductorless Orpheus Chamber Orchestra (DG) which gives the most pleasure with its gossamer *cantabile piano* throughout the main theme and the buoyant articulation of the Lovely Joan tune. At the risk of causing a scandal, I place it at the top of my list.

There are a few recordings using strings only, in which the solos and central duet are played by violins. The swift and shapely reading by John Farrar (Carlton) makes an excellent case for this alternative. As for the many arrangements of this work: Vaughan Williams explicitly approved of arranging this work in a letter to Alan Frank of the OUP and there are a number of variations on disc or download. Among the finest of these: Lydia Mordkovitch (IMP/Carlton) in an arrangement for violin and piano by Michael Mullinar, violinist Jacques Israelievitch (Fleur de Son) in the same arrangement, and violist James Ehnes (Onyx) in a version for viola and piano by Watson Forbes with some of the most beautiful viola playing it has been my pleasure to hear. Doris Lederer (Centaur) is hardly less impressive in her recording of an unidentified arrangement for viola and harp, as is Suzanne Shulman (Naxos) in an unusually winged and graceful reading of the arrangement for flute and harp by Jennifer Grady. An unexpected arrangement for recorder and piano, played by David Munrow and George Malcolm brings smiles. Farther afield, arrangements for piano four-hands by Hubert J. Foss, performed by Mark Bebbington and Rebeca Omordia (SOMM) and for piano trio by Watson Forbes, as adapted and played by the Eaken Piano Trio (Naxos), change the character of the piece, but are musically quite satisfying. An arrangement by trumpeter Rolf Smedvig for trumpet and organ works well too, as he and Michael Murray (Telarc) demonstrate. There is a charming guitar duo version arranged and played by Anne-Kathrin Gerbeth and Bernhard Dolch (Duo Guitartes) on EM Records. The 1936 solo piano version, recorded by Carmen Stefanescu (Prospero) would be similarly pleasing if the production and performance were less overblown. There have been two arrangements for wind band by Phillip Hills (Emblem) and Merlin Patterson (GIA). Neither is very effective. Perhaps it is simply not a good idea.

Note: a 1947 arrangement for organ by E. Stanley Roper, which does not include the central Lovely Joan section, will be covered under organ music.

Recommendation: Orpheus Chamber Orchestra – *with Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Elgar: Introduction and Allegro, Serenade for Strings, Elegy* (DG – CD) also *with Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Holst: The Planets [Levine]* (DG – CD, Download)

Alternate: John Barbirolli, Sinfonia of London – *with Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Elgar: Introduction and Allegro, Serenade for Strings, Elegy* (EMI/Warner – CD, Download) or *with Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, The Wasps Overture, The Lark Ascending, Flos Campi, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, On Wenlock Edge, Silent Noon, Songs of Travel, Serenade to Music [various conductors and singers]* (EMI/Warner – 2 CDs, Download) or *Barbirolli Complete Recordings* (Warner – 109 CDs)

Yehudi Menuhin, English Chamber Orchestra – *with Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, The Lark Ascending, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* (Arabesque – CD, Download)

Christopher Warren-Green, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra – *with The Lark Ascending, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, and works by Elgar* (Virgin/Erato – CD, Download) or *with same plus Serenades by Tchaikovsky, Dvořák, Suk* (Virgin/Erato – 2 CDs, Download)

John Farrar, English Sinfonia, Janice Graham (strings only) – *with Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Partita for Double String Orchestra, and works by Ireland* (Carlton – CD)

Historical: John Barbirolli, Hallé Orchestra – *with Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, and works by Bax, Ireland, Elgar, Byrd, Anonymous, Farnaby, Bull, Purcell, Barbirolli* (Barbirolli Society – 2 CDs) or *Barbirolli Complete Recordings* (Warner – 109 CDs)

Specialist: Lydia Mordkovitch (violin) and Julian Milford (piano) (arr. Mullinar) – *with Six Studies in English Folk Song, The Lark Ascending, Sonata for Violin and Piano, Two Pieces for Violin and Piano* (IMP/Carlton – CD, Download)

Jacques Israelievitch (violin) and Stephanie Sebastian (piano) (arr. Mullinar) – *with works by Copland, Samuel Gardner, Foss, Claude Pascal, Ravel, Jacques Castérède, Claude Champagne, Srul Irving Glick, Bartók, Blair Fairchild, Schubert, Rimsky-Korsakov, Gluck, Prokofiev, Kreisler, Maria Theresia von Paradis, Franz Ries, J.S. Bach, Antonio Bazzini, Pärt* (Fleur de Son – CD)

James Ehnes (viola) and Eduard Laurel (piano) (arr. Forbes) – *with works by Antonio Bazzini, Falla, Elgar, Scott, Dinicu, Ravel, Wieniawski, Sibelius, Moritz Moszkowski, Elgar, Kreisler, Tchaikovsky, Benjamin, Félicien David, Bruch, Berlioz* (Onyx – CD/DVD, Download)

Doris Lederer (viola) and Jude Mollenhauer (harp) (arr. unknown) – *with Romance for Violin and Piano, Six Studies in English Folk Song, A Winter's Willow, and works by Bax, Bridge, Britten, Grainger* (Centaur – CD, Download)

Suzanne Shulman (flute) and Goodman (harp) (arr. Grady) – *with works by Paul Reade, François Couperin, Chausson, Alphonse Hasselmans, Rota, Alwyn, Arthur Woodall, Elgar, John Marson* (Naxos – CD, Download)

Mark Bebbington and Rebeca Omordia (piano four-hands) (arr. Foss) – *with The Lake in the Mountains, Introduction and Fugue for Two Pianos, Choral and Choral Prelude on Bach's "Ach bleib' bei uns", Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis (arr. Jacobson/VW), Hymn Tune Prelude on Song 13 by Gibbons, A Little Piano Book, Suite of Six Short Pieces for Pianoforte* (SOMM – CD, Download)

Michael Murray (organ) and Rolf Smedvig (trumpet) (arr. Smedvig) – *with arrangements of works by Charpentier, Purcell, Mouret, Paradis, Handel, J.S. Bach, Schubert, J. Clarke, Saint-Luc, Martini, Hovhaness, Mendelssohn* (Telarc – CD, Download)

Duo Guitartes (Anne-Kathrin Gerbeth and Bernhard Dolch – guitar duo) (arr. Gerbeth and Dolch) – *with works by Purcell, Peter Philips, Dowland, John Johnson, Joseph Phibbs, Maxwell Davies, Dodgson* (EM Records – CD, Download)

David Munrow (recorder) and George Malcolm (piano) – *with Suite for Pipes and works by Anonymous, Dowland, William Williams, Purcell, Paisible/Finger, Warlock, Rubbra, Clive Richardson* (Erato/Warner – CD)

Eaken Piano Trio (arr. Grady/Eaken Piano Trio) – *with Christmas/holiday music by Anderson, Pietro Alessandro Yon, Mel Tormé, Grainger, Scott Robinson, Felix Bernard, Ray Evans, Ralph Blane, Benjamin Russell Hanby, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Truman Bullard, J.S. Bach, Adam, Humperdinck, Berlin* (Naxos – CD, Download)

Concerto Grosso

On November 18, 1950, Vaughan Williams sat down with over 400 music students assembled at the Royal Albert Hall for the first performance of his Concerto Grosso commissioned by the Rural Music Schools Association to celebrate the association's 21st anniversary. Adrian Boult conducted, and the composer sat with the second violins "to see how they are getting on." One of three works for large-scale amateur events composed in the early 1950s, it was created to further the composer's deep commitment to fostering a musical society. Designed, in consultation with several educators, for students of widely varying abilities, it was scored for an ensemble divided by skill level. Advanced students are placed in a smaller *concertino* group while the *tutti* group is made up of intermediate players capable of third position and simple double-stopping. An *ad lib* novice group, given parts playable on open strings alone, completes the ensemble. Doubtless this was a memorable experience for these students, for the composer provided a major five-movement work in the guise of an occasional piece, full of appealing melodic invention and technical challenges commensurate with their skills. There is no recording available of that event, but contemporary notices suggest that it served its purpose admirably at that time and in subsequent such outings.

But Vaughan Williams almost certainly had his eye on more accomplished performances of the Concerto Grosso in the future, for without the novice group parts it is a suitable piece for a professional string orchestra. In fact, there have been seven recordings by professionals.

The best of those is by Marriner and the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields on Decca and Decca Eloquence. Marriner breathes air into the textures and rhythmic intricacies and shapes the appealing melodies with affection. Boult (EMI/Warner) leads the London Philharmonic in another, but its massiveness suggests he was reliving the earlier performance two decades on. Despite fine playing, it fails to bring the work to life. Thomson's with the London Symphony (Chandos) is also expansive, but less massive, and it has a Sarabande that is poignantly shaped and at tempo. It is offered as a weightier alternative to the Marriner, for those who might wish that.

Recommendation: Neville Marriner, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields – *with The Wasps Overture, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, In the Fen Country, Variations for Orchestra, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Romance for Harmonica, The Lark Ascending, Fantasia on Greensleeves, English Folk Song Suite, various folk song arrangements* (Eloquence – 2 CDs, Download) or *with Fantasia on Greensleeves, English Folk Song Suite, Oboe Concerto, Romance for Harmonica, The Lark Ascending, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Partita for Double String Orchestra, In the Fen Country, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis [various conductors]* (Decca – 2 CDs, Download)

Alternate: Bryden Thomson, London Symphony Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 2* (Chandos – CD, Download) or *with Oboe Concerto, Violin Concerto, Tuba Concerto, Two Hymn-tune Preludes, The Lark Ascending, Piano Concerto, Partita for Double String Orchestra, Toward the Unknown Region* (Chandos – 2 CDs, Download)

Partita for Double String Orchestra

Vaughan Williams's 1948 Partita for Double String Orchestra, from its beginnings in 1938 as a work for double string trio, has puzzled listeners and led to surprisingly disparate assessments of its nature and importance. Here is mine. With its two separate string ensembles and use of soloists, the work superficially suggests the *Tallis Fantasia*, but in style and effect it is nothing like that uplifting work. It is, indeed, a dance suite, but one where the anticipated rhythmic vivacity is contradicted by harmonic disquiet that insists on a darker purpose. There are sections of huge vitality and of jazzy inconsequence – but here rather melancholy and nostalgic – which give way to passages that seem to recall pain, express contained rage, or, at the end, struggle for a state of grace that is never achieved. This is a Vaughan Williams quite unlike the popular image of folk song collector and sound painter of English arcadia. Yes, there was always a bleaker side of the art of this man whose eyes seemed most often focused on the noble and transcendent. This is most notable in, though hardly exclusive to, the fourth and sixth symphonies, which, through the years, commentators have claimed were inspired by events leading to the Second World War and its aftermath. The composer always maintained that war was not their subject and that he had found their darkness within. If that is so, he seems to be exploring those inner shadows with special candor in this work, and with more than typical wryness.

There have been seven recordings so far, mostly by Vaughan Williams devotees who saw the Partita's worth despite its uncharacteristic voice. The first was by Adrian Boult (Decca), recorded in stereo in 1956. It is a performance of remarkable strength and intensity, but Boult's surprisingly labored opening movement – a heavy *adagio* compared to the composer's *andante* – takes it out of consideration. He corrected this in 1975 in his recording

for EMI, revealing the extra layer of paradox in this movement: an uneasy *tranquillo* to go with a sinister *scherzo* and other ironies. He also slowed the third movement homage to Henry Hall so that what may be vague allusions to the famed band leader's upbeat signature tune *Here's To the Next Time* come at the wistful tempo specified. The London Philharmonic strings, as they did 19 years before, play for Boult with all the requisite virtuosity and feeling, but it is Boult's full realization of the emotional complexity of this work that makes this second recording special.

Two subsequent recordings also capture the edgy undertow of the work with distinction: the Handley (EMI/CfP) and the Thomson (Chandos). Handley particularly succeeds in the agitated fourth movement, maintaining more closely than anyone else the composer's racing *allegro* (crochet/quarter-note=144), but also carefully observing the often-uneasy *pianissimos* throughout and creating a satisfying whole of the several allusions to contemporaneous works, notably the hope-filled Fifth Symphony and stark Sixth. He does not, as Thomson does, try to find peace at the end – the terseness of those final pages suggests there cannot be peace this time – but Thomson can be forgiven that departure for the particular force with which he projects the fury of the score elsewhere. And the London Symphony strings are glorious. Boult may get a top recommendation, but I cannot imagine anyone being disappointed – with the proper expectation established – in any of these three recordings.

Recommendation: Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Toward the Unknown Region, Dona Nobis Pacem, Fantasia on the Old 104th Psalm Tune, Magnificat, Concerto Grosso, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Romance for Harmonica, The Lark Ascending [various conductors]* (EMI/Warner – 2 CDs, Download) or *Adrian Boult: Vaughan Williams - The Complete EMI Recordings* (EMI – 13 CDs) or *Adrian Boult: Complete Warner Recordings - The Stereo Recordings 1956 – 1978* (Warner – 79 CDs)

Alternate: Vernon Handley, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 7, Serenade to Music* (EMI/Classic for Pleasure – CD, Download) or *with Oboe Concerto, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, English Folk Songs Suite, Fantasia on Greensleeves* (EMI Eminence – CD) or *with Symphonies 1–9, Job, English Folk Song Suite, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Flos Campi, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Serenade to Music (choral version)* (EMI/Classics for Pleasure – 7 CDs)

Bryden Thomson, London Symphony Orchestra – *with Symphony No. 8, Two Hymn-tune Preludes* (Chandos – CD, Download) or *with Concerto Grosso, Oboe Concerto, Violin Concerto, Tuba Concerto, Two Hymn-tune Preludes, The Lark Ascending, Piano Concerto, Toward the Unknown Region* (Chandos – 2 CDs, Download)

Four Impressions for Orchestra: In the New Forest – Burley Heath and The Solent

In the New Forest was a proposed suite of four orchestral tone poems which the 30-year-old Vaughan Williams began composing in 1902. He only undertook these two movements.

Burley Heath evokes the Hampshire heathland and village of its name in a folk-tune infused essay that shows the effect of his studies four years earlier with Max Bruch, though the use of the folk material reminds one more of Brahms or Dvořák. His own collecting of folk songs

was to begin a year later and may account for the abandonment of the suite. The score is incomplete and was finished and edited by James Francis Brown in 2013 for its premiere recording.

The Solent is, on one level, an impression of the strait between the Isle of Wight and the southern coast of Hampshire, but Vaughan Williams prefaces the score with a quotation from a poem by the blind Victorian poet Philip Marston. It was written to his sister – his amanuensis and essential companion – in the wake of the loss of first their mother and then his fiancée. Five years after its publication, the sister died, too. The story and the verse's reference to "sorrow in the deep sea's voice" seems to have resonated with the composer's receptive nature, for the evocation of the Solent's usually tranquil waters seems stirred by the tragedies of the poet's short life. This is but the first of the composer's works which would associate the sea and nature with the unfathomable fortunes of men, but this highly assured tone poem anticipates later pieces in other ways. The opening melody for solo clarinet is an apparent prototype for the setting of the words "And on its limitless heaving breath, the ships" in *A Sea Symphony*, which he began about this time. Variants on it also appear in the second movement of the Ninth Symphony and accompany images of Tintern Abbey in the 1957 film *The England of Elizabeth*. And the hushed, divided-string writing that follows this theme clearly foreshadows the lustrous textures of the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*.

There is only one recording of *Burley Heath*, the splendid premiere by Paul Daniel (Albion). Daniel's recording of the seminal sea impression on the same CD is equally fine, but Rumon Gamba's (Chandos) is even more impressively shaped, with greater attention to the composer's wide-ranging dynamics and an even finer handling of transitions and building of the climax. Either can be recommended. The strongest encouragement must be for admirers of this composer to get to know these exceptional early works, especially *The Solent*. The composer may not have been satisfied, seeing goals beyond them, but it is hard now, in retrospect, to share in his disappointment.

Recommendation (Burley Heath): Paul Daniel, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – *with The Solent, Harnham Down, Songs of Travel (sel.), Four Hymns, Mayor of Casterbridge – Incidental Music, Prelude on an Old Carol Tune* (Albion – CD, Download)

Recommendation (The Solent): Rumon Gamba – BBC National Orchestra of Wales – *with works by Austin, Alwyn, Bantock, Gurney, Gardiner* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Alternate: Paul Daniel, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (The Solent) – *with Burley Heath, Harnham Down, Songs of Travel (sel.), Four Hymns, Mayor of Casterbridge – Incidental Music, Prelude on an Old Carol Tune* (Albion – CD, Download)

Harnham Down

After abandoning *In the New Forest* in 1903, two further impressions for orchestra were composed by Vaughan Williams between 1904 and 1907. Of the two, only *Harnham Down* still exists. *Harnham Down* conjures a summer's reverie in the fields of the Wiltshire countryside, as suggested by "the bleating sheep" and the "distant cries of the reapers" of the Matthew Arnold verse from *The Scholar Gypsy* that prefaces the score. The composer

revisited this poem some four decades later, using a much larger portion of it in the narration for *An Oxford Elegy* with its even deeper nostalgic yearning for lost arcadia.

Aside from the pleasure this early symphonic poem affords, it gives a remarkable snapshot of the composer's skills at that point, just three years before the breakthrough *A Sea Symphony* and *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. Its tone and even devices are obviously much influenced by Wagner, particularly *Tristan und Isolde*. One cannot help noting, though, how polished a composer he already was at this point, as well as how much he progressed, with some help from Maurice Ravel, in those few intervening years. In fact, Stephen Connock proposes in his notes to the Albion release, that the sojourn to Paris in part resulted from dissatisfaction with this work.

There are two recordings, both of which serve the piece well. Rumon Gamba (Chandos) emphasizes – perhaps exaggerates – the dreamy qualities of the score with slower than sanctioned tempos, so perhaps pride of place should be given to Paul Daniel's (Albion) premiere recording, still full of atmosphere, but revealing a bit more tension and disquiet.

Recommendation: Paul Daniel, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Burley Heath, The Solent, Songs of Travel (sel.), Four Hymns, Mayor of Casterbridge – Incidental Music, Prelude on an Old Carol Tune* (Albion – CD, Download)

Alternate: Rumon Gamba – BBC National Orchestra of Wales – *with works by Foulds, Fogg, Goossens, Dorothy Howell, Cowen, Hadley, Bliss* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Serenade in A minor

The 1898 Serenade in A minor was Vaughan Williams's first orchestral work, completed after his lessons with Max Bruch in Berlin and as he was finishing his doctorate. It is an auspicious start, though still very much in the German Romantic style he learned from Parry and Stanford. It likely was written to please Stanford, who was ever unhappy with his experiments in modal tonality, but though it is quite conventional in this sense, Stanford never programmed it. It was performed twice in the next decade before the composer withdrew it in 1908.

Originally conceived as a four-movement suite, Vaughan Williams composed a fifth movement, a lovely Romance, as a possible replacement for the third: Intermezzo and Trio. In a performance in 1986 – its first since 1908 – the Romance was simply added prior to the lively Finale. The only recording of the work to date, led by Martin Yates (Dutton Epoch), follows this five-movement precedent. The Romance, a significant foreshadowing of the glorious movements of that title that were to follow, is undoubtedly the finest thing about this serenade, though there is much to enjoy throughout, not least the Prelude with its clear shadings of Mendelssohn and Schumann. This is an altogether pleasant memento of the Vaughan Williams that his formal education had formed, before he found his own voice with the help of folk songs and Ravel. It is well worth knowing.

Recommendation: Martin Yates, Royal Scottish National Orchestra – *with Folk Songs of the Four Seasons Suite, Bucolic Suite, Matthews: Dark Pastoral* (Dutton Epoch – CD, Download)

Bucolic Suite

The *Bucolic Suite* was completed in late 1900, revised slightly in 1901, and performed between 1902 and 1907 before being withdrawn. Aptly rustic in tone, in its many lively moments it shows the clear influence of Dvořák's folk dance settings. Elsewhere, one can hear Vaughan Williams striving to make the Teutonic influences work for him, and with some success. One cannot help but think that, in an alternative universe where he had not collected folk song or entertained visions of an English national music, he would still have been a successful, if less pivotal, musical figure. One would not readily identify this suite as a work of the Vaughan Williams of later fame, but it is a thoroughly enjoyable experience in its own right.

Martin Yates (Dutton Epoch) leads with a light hand and consistently spirited pacing in his premiere recording, emphasizing the score's bucolic charms. Karl-Heinz Steffens (Capriccio), with his German orchestra and slightly more expansive pacing, brings out the Schumann in the work. Much as I enjoy the Steffens, especially for his delightful performance of the cheeky Intermezzo, Yates gets my top slot, though either of the two recordings will serve as a worthy introduction to this accomplished and high-spirited work.

Recommendation: Martin Yates, Royal Scottish National Orchestra – *with Folk Songs of the Four Seasons Suite, Serenade in A minor, Matthews: Dark Pastoral* (Dutton Epoch – CD, Download)

Alternate: Karl-Heinz Steffens, Rheinland-Pfalz German State Philharmonic, Martin Rummel – *with The Poisoned Kiss Overture, Fantasia on Sussex Folk Tunes, In the Fen Country, Three Portraits from 'The England of Elizabeth'* (Capriccio – CD, Download)

Heroic Elegy and Triumphal Epilogue

Vaughan Williams called this his "trombone piece," and a prominent trio of trombones are used at the opening to somber and noble effect. Composed between 1900 and 1901, *Heroic Elegy* was performed under Stanford's direction later that year. Its martial tone led some contemporaries to suppose it to be a tribute to the dead of the ongoing Second Boer War. It garnered praise from reviewers who, as one noted, admired its "admirable musical illustration of manly sorrow." A quote from *The Song of Solomon* on its title page, "Terrible as an army with banners," gives weight to the idea that the work was inspired by the war, but the composer's wife Adeline, in a letter to Vaughan Williams's cousin Ralph Wedgwood, discouraged such a belief. A positive critical consensus regarding his technical achievement ("a really valuable addition to modern English music") did not prevent his revising the work in 1902. He conducted both parts in Leeds in 1905 – *Triumphal Epilogue* was completed in late 1901 – and Stanford conducted the *Elegy* again in 1906. Soon thereafter the score vanished, not to reappear until 1966 when it was found in the U.S. It is now in a library at Yale University.

Heroic Elegy and Triumphal Epilogue has not aged well for everyone. Vaughan Williams's devoted assistant in later years, Roy Douglas, in an unpublished letter to Michael Kennedy in 1971, was scathing in his criticism, deeming the themes "trite and wholly uncharacteristic" and the work as a whole "feeble stuff" which would have embarrassed the mature composer. Yet, when it was finally recorded by John Wilson (Dutton Epoch) in 2009, in a release of

forgotten British orchestral works, critical response to the piece in Wilson's honeyed reading was largely positive. No one would pretend that this is a work of the fully formed composer, given its staid earnestness and occasional lapses into bombast, but the orchestral use in general is skillful and some atmospheric passages – the most Wagnerian aspect of a piece where the German master looms large – are quite effective. It is therefore recommended, but with that criticism offered as a caveat.

Recommendation: John Wilson, BBC Concert Orchestra – *with works by Alwyn, Bowen, and Parry* (Dutton Epoch – CD, Download)

Music for an EFDS Masque

As he found time, Vaughan Williams liked to compose music for the various historic pageants and masques that were popular in the years between the two world wars. This composite title actually consists of two works that were not conceived together. The composer orchestrated the first part, *A Folk Dance Medley*, in 1934. It was performed for an English Folk Dance Society program at the Royal Albert Hall, but though 1935 and 1937 have been proposed, the date is not sure. The medley offers a profusion of folk tunes in quick succession: *Go List for a Sailor*, *Bobbing Jo*, *[Lady]* in the Dark*, *Sweet Kate*, *Bonnets so Blue*, *Leapfrog*, *Sounds of Love*, *Lads a'Bunchun*, and *Mr Isaacs' Maggot*. An additional tune has not so far been identified, and the first word of one tune name, indicated with an asterisk, is obscured by the composer's writing.

In 1940, Vaughan Williams created a quick march, along the lines of *Sea Songs*, from three folk tunes: *The Blue-eyed Stranger*, *On Board a '98*, and *Tom the Barber*. He offered this *March Suite Founded on English Folk Tunes* in short score with orchestration notes, along with the earlier medley and *The Running Set*, for a program by the BBC Military Band. These were transcribed by the band's arranger, Gerrard Williams, and broadcast with commentary by the composer that year. Neither his nor Richard E. Strange's later arrangement for concert band have been recorded commercially. The music has remained largely unheard until Martin Yates edited the orchestral medley and orchestrated the march for a recording with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (Dutton Epoch). Both works exude the charm and appeal of the earlier *English Folk Song Suite* and are well worth getting to know in this fine reading.

Recommendation: Martin Yates, Royal Scottish National Orchestra (ed./orch. Yates) – *with The Blue Bird – Incidental Music, Norfolk Rhapsodies Nos. 1 and 2, Variations for Orchestra, Christmas Overture, Matthews: Norfolk March* (Dutton Epoch – SACD, Download)

Prelude on an Old Carol Tune

This is a 'fantasia,' as Vaughan Williams has called it, 'founded' on the incidental music for the 1951 BBC radio dramatization of Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Completed in 1952 for the BBC West of England Light Orchestra, it uses one of his favorite carol tunes, *On Christmas Night the Joy-Bells Ring* – not to be confused with *The Sussex Carol* – as it appears in the Casterbridge movement of the 'suite' the composer earlier created for the same ensemble. The handling of the melody sounds identical through the first three of that movement's four iterations, after which Vaughan Williams treats the tune to free fragmentation and development before ending with a final jubilant restatement.

Despite its relative obscurity, this late-period nugget has been recorded three times, most recently by Paul Daniel in the company of the premiere recording of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* suite. (The suite will be considered in the Incidental Music section.) His is the most characterful rendering of the work, though Hickox (EMI/Warner) is lively and expressive and will certainly give pleasure, as well.

Recommendation: Paul Daniel, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Burley Heath, The Solent, Harnham Down, Songs of Travel (sel.), Four Hymns, Mayor of Casterbridge – Incidental Music* (Albion – CD, Download)

Alternate: Richard Hickox, Northern Sinfonia of England – *with The Poisoned Kiss Overture, Old King Cole, Flos Campi, The Lark Ascending, 49th Parallel Prelude, Sea Songs, Serenade to Music, Five Mystical Songs, The Running Set, Two Hymn-Tune Preludes, Oboe Concerto, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes (exc.), Violin Concerto, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* (EMI/Warner – 2 CDs, Download)

Flourish for Glorious John

Speaking of nuggets, this one is less than two minutes long or a bit over three if you take a repeat. It was written in 1957 to honor John Barbirolli on the opening of the 100th season of the Hallé Orchestra – an all-Vaughan Williams concert – and the occasion of the composer's 85th birthday. *Glorious John* was Vaughan Williams's affectionate nickname for Barbirolli, a recognition of their friendship and the conductor's heartfelt advocacy of many of his works. The *Flourish* is not a grand piece on a large scale. It is a small but lovingly wrought gift, written in the midst of work on the Ninth Symphony, full of reminders of the previous symphony which Barbirolli had premiered, including a passage for the bells and "'spiels" if not the "'phones."

There was not a commercial release of it until 1991 when Leonard Slatkin (RCA/Sony) added it to his recording of those last two symphonies. Sadly, it is too fast to achieve the *maestoso* requested. It has been thoroughly displaced by the Martin Yates / BBC Symphony Orchestra recording on Dutton Epoch. It is paced perfectly, played beautifully, and it includes a repeat of the sections for brass and strings before the percussion makes its appearance.

There are three recordings of a version for wind ensemble by John Boyd, the best of which is the one led by the arranger himself (Elf). Thomas Leslie (Mark) turns it into a stately processional: oddly effective if, at almost half-tempo, decidedly not what was intended. A better bet, if an alternative is sought, is the dependably fine recording by Eugene Corporon (GIA). A brass band arrangement by Graham Lloyd awaits an effective recording.

Recommendation: Martin Yates, BBC Symphony Orchestra – *with Fantasia for piano and orchestra, The Steersman, The Future* (Dutton Epoch – CD, Download)

Specialist: John P. Boyd, Philharmonia à Vent (wind ensemble) (arr. Boyd) – *with works by Jacob, Holst, Woolfenden, Mackerras, Sparke* (Elf – CD)

Eugene Corporon, University of North Texas Wind Symphony (arr. Boyd) *with English Folk Song Suite, Flourish for Wind Band, Two Movements from England's Pleasant Land, Toccata Marziale, Sea Songs, Symphony No. 8:*

Scherzo alla Marcia, and arrangements of Rhosymedre, The Running Set, The Lark Ascending, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Linden Lea, Sine Nomine, Variations for Brass Band (GIA – 2 CDs, Download)

INCIDENTAL MUSIC FOR STAGED AND RADIO PLAYS

Incidental music was a focus for Vaughan Williams early in his career – between 1909 and 1913 – when he produced a number of scores for the staging of significant plays and was explored again nearer the end of his life when his contribution was sought to several radio dramatizations of classic literary works. Many of these are obscure works, but there are important exceptions.

Music for Staged Productions

Music for The Pilgrim's Progress

John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* was a lifelong source of inspiration for Vaughan Williams, possibly from the time that he received a copy of the book as a young boy. *The Pilgrim's Progress: A Morality* of 1951 was his ultimate statement on Bunyan's allegory, but his determination to give it musical voice found its first expression in this incidental music for a tableaux dramatization by Evelyn Ouless performed at Reigate Priory in December 1906 and again in London for two benefit concerts in 1907. The hymn tune York, which was to play a central part in his subsequent musical settings of this work, forms the basis of the prelude and epilogue, and between these are a total of twelve cues, including folk dances, an unaccompanied folk song and another for male vocal quartet, the hymn Monk's Gate and music for the confrontation with Apollyon based on its tune, and settings of verses from the 91st Psalm and of the 23rd Psalm. There is, as well, the germinal version of the pilgrim's entry into heaven that would be further developed in the 1921/22 *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*, the 1943 radio drama, and the opera/morality. In all there is almost a half-hour of music.

The manuscript was placed in the British Library after the composer's death and the score was not published until 2014. It was recorded, four years later, by Martyn Brabbins (Hyperion), who does the emergent work the honor of treating it like a masterpiece. The BBC Symphony and Chorus are predictably superb, as are the quartet of gentlemen from the BBC Singers and the three soloists. There has been some grumbling about the use of a folk singer – the very accomplished Emily Portman – for the unaccompanied *Flower Girl's Song*. Why not rather mezzo Kitty Whately, who sings *The Angel's Song* exquisitely? What did Vaughan Williams intend? It's not clear, but it is hard to imagine, given his love of folk singing, that he would have been a complainer.

Recommendation: Martyn Brabbins, BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, BBC Singers Quartet, Emily Portman, Kitty Whately, Marcus Farnsworth – *with Symphony No. 5* (Hyperion – CD, Download)

The Wasps – Incidental Music

Admirers of Vaughan Williams will almost certainly know his Overture to *The Wasps* and may even know of the 1912 *Aristophanic Suite* in five movements (discussed above in the Orchestral section) from which it comes. Fewer will know of the source for the suite: incidental music for a production of the Aristophanes play commissioned for the Cambridge Greek Play of 1909, one of a series of such productions presented on a triennial basis in the original Greek. The play is a pointed satire on the corrupt court system the demagogic

Athenian leader Cleon used to help maintain the support of his retired soldiers. But the incidental music has little to do with ancient Greek politics. Rather, it is suffused with English folk songs and frolics and jaunty military marches, seasoned with Czech dances and French impressionism. (Though, only one actual folk song is used in the work; the rest are original themes.) The generally light-hearted music, cast for small orchestra with male chorus and soloists, is in keeping with the broad, occasionally salty, humor, but Vaughan Williams does not shortchange the nostalgic, noble, and reflective passages of the play, either, and he even stashes a few musical quotes in the score by the likes of Mendelssohn, Debussy, Offenbach, Lehár, and Parry for those who like such intellectual games.

Much of Vaughan Williams's contribution to the 1909 production consists of melodramas or choral settings of the text which needs their context to make their full effect, raising the question of how to present it on disc. There would seem little potential market for a recreation of the original production in Greek, and the English translation in the 1909 vocal score is bowdlerized for the sensibilities of the audiences of the time. The BBC broadcast the complete incidental music in 1972 with an abridgement of the play in English that attempted to capture the spirit of the Cambridge production. Created for the Vaughan Williams Centenary, it was the first known performance since 1909. It has not been commercially released. It wasn't until 2005 that a recording of a different approach was made. Led by Mark Elder (Hallé), it uses a performing version by David Pountney, produced again for the BBC, which condenses the play into 18 minutes of monologue for a skilled character actor, which this recording has in Henry Goodman. He creates protagonist, antagonist, priest, and cook with distinctive voices and accents. The vocal soloists' parts are assigned to the gifted baritone Richard Suart, billed as chorus leader, himself an able comedian. Twelve men from the Hallé Chorus play the eponymous Wasps with apparent relish, if perhaps a bit too much polish for the cadre of crusty old soldiers.

Pountney's translation maintains the cheeky tone of the original, tuned to the greater tolerances of present-day audiences, and emulates the play's topicality with some contemporary references. It is all very clever, with nary a nod to Cleon, so those not up on Attican history need not be discomforted, though Aristophanes's story is not so clearly told. Not everyone will appreciate the updating or the accents, I suspect, preferring the music numbers alone, regardless of the lost context. If so, text, at least that without music, can be programmed out easily enough. That leaves almost 90 minutes of witty and atmospheric Vaughan Williams – he on the cusp of greatness – presented with (bawdy) humor and skill.

Recommendation: Mark Elder, Hallé Orchestra and Male Chorus, Henry Goodman, Richard Suart (Hallé – 2CDs, Download)

Incidental Music to Greek Plays by Euripides

In October of 1911, Vaughan Williams met with famed dancer Isadora Duncan, at the suggestion of Gilbert Murray, Greek scholar and translator of classic Greek plays into English performing versions. Duncan and her actor/producer brother Augustin wished to stage three of Murray's translations of Euripides. At their meeting she demonstrated her non-balletic dance style and asked the composer to set a chorus from *The Bacchae* for her to dance to. In the end, he set several scenes and choruses from all three plays: *The Bacchae*, *Electra*, and *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Sadly, because of conflicting goals of translator, dancer, and producer – Augustin didn't particularly want music – nothing ever came of the project. There is evidence of at least one concert performance in 1912 of some of these pieces, and Vaughan

Williams arranged one chorus, *Where is the home for me?*, into a vocal duet published in 1922. Otherwise, the composer's distinctive and evocative music, of which there certainly would have been more if the project had come to fruition, went unused.

Conductor Alan Tongue retrieved the manuscripts from the British Library, and after restoring two missing pages from the *Electra* score from parts, orchestrating *Iphigenia in Tauris* from a short score with occasional instrumentation notes, and editing the music for all three, he recorded them (Albion). Listening to these recordings is like a window into the composer's workshop as he struggled to meet the conflicting expectations of his collaborators. In the two scenes from *Electra*, the composer molds the solo line into something resembling arioso with spoken text interspersed. Here and in the powerful but frequently unembroidered choral writing, the presentation of the words is the main focus. The two choruses from *The Bacchae*, for mezzo-soprano soloist and women's chorus, are lyrical "choral ballets" as wife Ursula described them: highly danceable, but not so text friendly. In *Iphigenia in Tauris*, the writing again becomes text-driven and free, almost chant-like in its attention to the meter of the verse, and occasionally taking on a familiar folkish quality. Tongue's orchestration for the last play, with its prominent use of harp and flute, has an especially appealing antique quality. How Duncan and her company might have danced to it, however, is an open question. This is the most extensive set of the settings, five in number, with cues for their insertion into the play in anticipation of a planned performance in Liverpool. Alas, that was never to be.

We now, however, have these fine performances by Tongue and his outstanding performers. Foremost among the pleasures of the recording is the superb work of mezzo-soprano Heather Lowe, whose assumption of the major solos is most impressive indeed. Given this and the distinctiveness of the music, unheard for over a century, every admirer of Vaughan Williams should want to hear this recording.

Recommendation: Alan Tongue, Britten Sinfonia, Joyful Company of Singers, Heather Lowe (Albion – CD, Download)

Incidental Music to Plays by Shakespeare

The abortive Euripides project was far from the last of Vaughan Williams's work for the theater. In fact, he produced music for six productions of Shakespeare and for two private productions of plays by Maurice Maeterlinck, plus Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple*, all between 1912 and 1913. The Shakespeare and Shaw were written for F. R. Benson's autumn 1912 and spring 1913 seasons at Stratford-upon-Avon and included music for *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Richard II*, *Henry IV Part II*, *Richard III*, *Henry V* and *Much Ado about Nothing*. There is, as well, undated incidental music for *Twelfth Night* which, as biographer Eric Saylor has determined, was composed in 1939 and eventually used in a 1947 production at The Playhouse, Kidderminster. Contemporary responses suggest that the Stratford music, produced under time pressure, was not always well suited to staged production, occasionally being too loud for actors to be heard over or too long for practicality. Benson used it for only that one season. Still, that which we can hear – original compositions and folk music arrangements both – is often engaging.

The most extensive release of a score from the 1913 season is taken from a 2013 centenary concert by Andrew Henderson and the King Edward VI School, Stratford-upon-Avon (Albion). This includes 16 cues from *Henry V*, restored from archived parts, interspersed with

short scenes of the play. There are also four of the 32 cues written for *Richard II*. The playing of the student musicians is, however, more enthusiastic than polished, so this must be a specialist recommendation.

Another release by Albion offers a much more professionally played and produced sampling of highlights from most of these scores. Music educator and RVW Society trustee Malcolm Riley edited several of these, including an excerpt from the score for *Richard III* and a *Henry IV Suite* consisting of seven cues from *Henry IV Part II*. The *Stratford Suite*, arranged by Nathaniel Lew, offers twenty cues from four of the Stratford productions: *Henry IV Part II*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Richard II*, and *Richard III*, plus the 1939 *Twelfth Night*. These consist primarily of arranged folk music and period tunes, but also some original music by the composer. Finally, there is a reconstruction of the overture to the *Henry V* music by musicologist David Owen Norris using an incomplete set of orchestra parts he recently discovered in the Shakespeare Memorial Library. The score is lost, so rather than guess at other parts, the existing ones for strings with flute, oboe, and horn were used with the addition of cues in the parts for cornet and percussion. An earlier attempt at reconstruction by Martin Yates (Dutton Epoch) is based on the considerably revised 1933 version of the work for brass band, so this is the first opportunity to hear the work in the form, if not the instrumentation, originally conceived. All the pieces are led quite persuasively by James Ross with the fine freelance Kent Sinfonia. The *ad hoc* Albion Singers joins in on one choral track.

Beyond this, four excerpts from the *Richard II* music appear on a 2013 Royal Shakespeare Company recording, though these are arranged for string accompaniment. And there is one cue – just a little over a minute in length – from *Henry IV Part II* on a disc of music for Shakespeare plays by various composers, played by English Serenata (Meridian). It is nicely done and available as a separate download for those not interested in the rest of the program.

(The music for the abandoned radio production of *Richard II*, written for the BBC in 1944 and significantly different, is considered in the section following: Music for Radio. Comments on the Yates *Henry V Overture* arrangement are found under Music for Brass Band.)

Recommendation: James Ross, Kent Sinfonia, Albion Singers – *with The Willow Song, Orpheus and His Lute, Dirge for Fidele (arr. Riley), Two Shakespeare Sketches from The England of Elizabeth* (Albion – CD, Download)

Specialist: Andrew Henderson, King Edward VI School, Stratford-upon-Avon, Orchestra and Chorus (Henry V and Richard II excerpts) – *with work by Anonymous* (Albion – CD, Download)

Bruce O'Neil, Royal Shakespeare Company String Orchestra, Charlotte Ashley, Helena Raeburn, Anna Bolton (sopranos), Michael Keelan (violin), Bruce O'Neil (organ) (Richard II excerpts) – *with incidental music by Paul Englishby* (RSC – CD)

David Ponsford, English Serenata (Henry IV, Part 2 excerpt) – *with works by Dibdin, Johnston, Arne, Leveridge, Mathias, Blake, Woolfenden, Leppard, Sams, Walker, Warren, Sullivan, Sekacz, Bennett, Bridgewater, Berkeley, Gardner, Wilson, Hess, Bernard* (Meridian – CD, Download)

The Death of Tintagiles – Incidental Music

The incidental music for Maeterlinck's symbolist marionette play *The Death of Tintagiles* was written for a private performance in London in 1913. The story of the young innocents contending against implacable fate in the form of a jealous adult queen must have struck a responsive chord in Vaughan Williams, for he wrote music of remarkable poignance and haunting darkness. Unfortunately, even with its theme of filial devotion, the grim play was not the ideal dinner-party fare, and the evening was a failure. The composer's enthusiasm for writing incidental music seems to have cooled at that point and was not to return until decades later. The music went into a drawer.

The score, consisting of almost 15 minutes of orchestral music – a prelude and six cues – was edited by Roy Douglas and received its first public performance in a 1975 BBC radio production of the play. It has so far had only one commercial recording, led by Richard Hickox (Chandos). Happily, the music, almost Sibelian in its concision, responds well to the conductor's characteristically unhurried but potent dramatic style, and the resulting performance is full of atmosphere and foreboding. Perceptive listeners will recognize techniques the composer would more fully use in later and more familiar works.

Recommendation: Richard Hickox, London Symphony Orchestra *with A Cotswold Romance* (Chandos – CD, Download)

The Blue Bird – Incidental Music

One victim of Vaughan Williams's disheartening experience at the dinner party of "the millionaire in Park Lane" may well be this uncompleted music for a production of another Maeterlinck play, *The Blue Bird*. The project was dropped in 1913, with only a manuscript short score including occasional cues to the play and minimal indications of orchestration. The music, running a little over 15 minutes, covers one continuous scene at the end of Act I of the Belgian playwright's most popular play. It consists of a series of dances which are all light and enchantment – especially compared to the music for *The Death of Tintagiles* – and which, in conductor Martin Yates's orchestration, suit the fairy tale goings-on perfectly. One familiar only with the composer's later works might have difficulty identifying the composer, as the influence of Russian composers seems prominent at first. However, by the fourth dance, The Dance of the Loafs, the use of modal folk-like melodies and certain distinctive gestures make its creator clear.

Yates's recording (Dutton Epoch) is as delightful as his orchestration – based conjecturally on the instrumentation used for *The Wasps*, plus a tuba for some low brass notes indicated in the score – with production and orchestral execution that are top-notch. One is thankful for the resurrection, while wishing that there were more of this wonderful score to enjoy. Mated on disc to a variety of under-recorded and equally satisfying works from throughout the composer's career, this is an easy recommendation for any of his admirers.

Recommendation: Martin Yates, Royal Scottish National Orchestra – *with Norfolk Rhapsodies No. 1 and 2, Variations for Orchestra, Music for an EFDS Masque, Christmas Overture, Matthews: Norfolk March* (Dutton Epoch – SACD, Download)

Music for Radio

The Pilgrim's Progress – Incidental Music

On September 5, 1943, the BBC broadcast a dramatization of Bunyan's book, adapted for radio by Edward Sackville-West and illuminated by a Vaughan Williams score composed in 1942. That score takes a prominent place amongst the composer's several works inspired by the famed allegory. These works include 1906 incidental music for Reigate Priory; the 1922 opera scena *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*; the 1940 motet on Mr. Valiant-for-Truth's speech; the 1951 'Morality,' as he called his tableaux opera; as well as the Symphony No. 5, which uses themes from the opera. Recordings of each are addressed elsewhere in this survey.

The incidental music is something special, though, and while the opera *The Pilgrim's Progress* may be the achieved pinnacle of this lifetime of exploration, this is arguably the most perfect realization of Vaughan Williams's desire to bring that famous work to dramatic life. The familiar hymn tune York (*Pray that Jerusalem may have*) establishes a noble tone from the beginning, while Tallis's Phrygian-mode tune, so moving in the composer's fantasia, works its magic here as well, as quotations from that work underline Pilgrim's quest for salvation. Use of these themes, and others, provides immediate emotional connection, and the amazing conclusion where Pilgrim approaches and crosses over to the Celestial City – in music much like that in the 1922 scena and 1951 opera – is among the composer's most inspired creations. It is the culmination of an extensive and virtuoso score of deep emotional intensity which, once heard, seems almost inextricable from the story itself.

One can hear that score in an excellent transfer of the 1943 broadcast on the Albion label. The only flaw is a very small section missing in the Vanity Fair introduction. John Gielgud is simply marvelous in the role of Christian, dignified and vulnerable. The rest of the company is excellent – the BBC obviously spared no expense on the large cast – and Boult and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, decamped to Bedford, play with absolute conviction.

Gielgud led another cast with Charles Groves and the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra in a BBC broadcast of the radio drama in 1977, and though that has not been released commercially, a suite of excerpts, without text, were briefly available on Carlton's BBC Radio Classics. It is well worth seeking out.

For those who want the music with much less of Edward Sackville-West's dialogue, Christopher Palmer – of EMI production fame – adapted the 1942 play for three speakers, treble solo, chorus, and orchestra. He titled the work *A Bunyan Sequence* to differentiate it from the radio play and for it, in his telling, he "stripped [Bunyan's] text down to its bare bones" for narrative continuity, while retaining almost all of the music. Vanity Fair had to be reworked, and some transitional music is lost, but Palmer assured that all was authentic Vaughan Williams. Gielgud is again Christian, though at 86 his portrayal is rather faded if still treasurable. Richard Pasco grandly takes all the remaining parts except the Ministering Angel, and Matthew Best (Hyperion) and forces bring the music to life with skill, sensitivity, and a fine sense of drama.

Recommendation (Radio Play): Adrian Boult, BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, John Gielgud and a cast of singers and actors – *with Bantock: The Pilgrim's Progress: Two Choruses* (Albion – 2 CDs, Download)

Recommendation (Suite): Charles Groves, BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra and Singers, Delyth Jones, Elsa Kendal, Robin Leggate – *with Job [Handley]* (BBC Radio Classics – CD)

Recommendation (A Bunyan Sequence): Matthew Best, City of London Sinfonia, Corydon Singers, John Gielgud, Richard Pasco, Ursula Howells, Aidan Oliver (Hyperion – CD, Download)

Incidental Music for Richard II

This incidental music for Shakespeare's play was written in 1944 on commission from the BBC Drama Department for a planned production which, perhaps because of the state of the war in the autumn of that year, was abandoned. Originally conceived as about a quarter-hour in length, the 34 cues for a total of 15 scenes eventually ran to almost a half-hour of previously unheard music. Much of it consists of short flourishes and fanfares, or atmospheric passages to play under the spoken text, but there are longer cues as well, some of them of prime late-period melodic content. In fact, the composer thought enough of the score that he had a contract negotiated that assured he could reuse the material for other projects if he chose to, though apparently he never did.

The manuscript was placed in the British Library with many of Vaughan Williams's unpublished scores. American musicologist Nathaniel Lew edited it for publication and the ever-enterprising Martin Yates has recorded all the cues for Dutton Epoch in the order of the play. Shorter cues are grouped into continuous segments, a clever idea which often illustrates how effectively Vaughan Williams shades similar material to different effects. There is no missing the fact that much of it was designed to be secondary to the text – the composer apparently having learned his lesson after the criticisms of his efforts for the 1912/13 F.R. Benson productions (see above) – but the whole is a satisfying experience. Still, it is one best enjoyed by someone already familiar with the composer's more substantial film scores of that period. It is therefore a specialist recommendation, though one that is on a highly desirable disc with relatively unknown fare.

For the general admirer of the composer wishing to hear the more distilled substance of this score, Lew has arranged more than half of the music into his 17-minute *Richard II Concert Fantasy* (Albion). He reorders the composer's music into a stirring concert piece, transposing and reorchestrating passages as necessary to tie it together. He makes no pretense that this is what the composer might have done with the music, and there is still the occasional feel of a film score without the visuals, but there is no denying the atmospheric beauty and power of the result. Though not up to the standard of Yates's Scottish orchestra, the freelance professionals of the Kent Sinfonia acquit themselves well, and James Ross leads with a fine sense of drama and color. One might miss the fanfares of the full score, and a few lovely cues that did not make the cut, but this is the primary recommendation for this music, especially since the release includes many other selections from the Stratford scores.

Recommendation: James Ross, Kent Sinfonia – *with incidental music for Richard III (excerpt), Henry IV Part II (excerpts), Henry V Overture (arr. Norris/Riley), Stratford Suite (cues from Henry IV Part II, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Richard II, Richard III, Twelfth Night – arr. Lew), plus The Willow Song, Orpheus and His Lute, Dirge for Fidele (arr. Riley), Two Shakespeare Sketches from The England of Elizabeth* (Albion – CD, Download)

Specialist: Martin Yates, Royal Scottish National Orchestra – *with Fantasia on Sussex Folk Tunes, Suite de Ballet (arr. Steptoe), Songs of Travel (orch. vers.)* (Dutton Epoch – SACD, Download)

Incidental Music for The Mayor of Casterbridge

Prominent among the authors whose works Vaughan Williams cherished is Thomas Hardy, and while, surprisingly, the composer set little of his poetry, his novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was a formative inspiration for the Ninth Symphony. Prior to this, in 1951, Vaughan Williams wrote incidental music for a ten-week BBC radio serialization of an earlier novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. This has come down to us in the form of a three-movement 'suite,' never published. The first movement, titled Casterbridge, will be familiar to anyone who has heard *Prelude on an Old Carol Tune* (see above), as the composer's treatment of the carol *On Christmas Night the Joy-Bells Ring* is identical in the first three settings of the tune (of four in the radio score) in both works. An Intermezzo, characterizing two sympathetic female characters, is a gentle variation on the carol tune, while the final section, titled Weyhill Fair, contains five separate cues from the beginning of the score, all background music.

There is currently only one recording of the incidental music, led with conviction by Paul Daniel (Albion). It is on a release that includes the finest of the recordings of *Prelude on an Old Carol Tune*, as well as, quite helpfully, a rendition of the folk song, *Weyhill Fair Song*, used by Vaughan Williams in the Weyhill Fair scene. The incidental music is a specialist recommendation – the 1952 Prelude being the definitive form of this music – but it is part of an important release of more substantial works.

Specialist Recommendation: Paul Daniel, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – *with Burley Heath, The Solent, Harnham Down, Songs of Travel (sel.), Four Hymns, Prelude on an Old Carol Tune* (Albion – CD, Download)

FILM MUSIC

Vaughan Williams started writing music for films in the early years of the Second World War, as indeed did a number of prominent British composers, many at the invitation of conductor Muir Mathieson, then director of music for the Ministry of Information. At first the 68-year-old composer agreed out of a conviction that he should be useful to the war effort in those threatened times. In this he was brilliantly successful, as the music in these wartime films has the very qualities needed to express the spirit of the English men and women who faced the threat from Nazi Germany, and it served to bolster the public's morale as much as did the films themselves.

Vaughan Williams found, however, that beyond the patriotic value of the work, he enjoyed both the collaboration and the discipline that composing for film imposed, so that by the time he wrote music for his last film, the year before he died, he had contributed to eleven scores. All of these have had some part(s) recorded, including, thanks to some reconstruction work, the one score believed completely lost, *The Stricken Peninsula*. Music from nine of these films appears on three CDs from Rumon Gamba's remarkable Chandos Movies series. These collectively are a blanket recommendation, though other releases of merit are discussed below.

49th Parallel (1941)

Vaughan Williams's start in composing for film was the result of a comment to Arthur Benjamin that he would like to "have a shot" at doing so. Learning of this, Mathieson approached the composer to work on a propaganda film designed, in part, to convince the United States to enter the war. (The title for the American release was *The Invaders*.) The story concerns the progress through Canada of a stranded Nazi U-boat crew who are attempting to escape into the neutral U.S. by crossing the boundary between: that is, the 49th Parallel. Their encounters with various inhabitants, including indigenous persons, Hutterite German immigrants, and Canadians of various types, several of whom they murder, underlines their bigotry, cruelty, and threat to mankind.

The noble, openhearted Prelude is the best-known part of the score, and it has been recorded several times, most notably by Hickox (EMI/Warner) and Andrew Penny (Marco Polo/Naxos): both preferable to Bernard Hermann's drawn-out, over-baked Decca Phase-4 recording. There is, however, appealing music throughout the score. A nine-part suite was prepared for a 1946 British film festival in Prague, but it has disappeared except perhaps in the recordings by Mathieson of the Prelude (Dutton Vocalion/Albion) and Epilogue (Pearl/Albion). Mathieson, who conducted the music for the soundtrack, uses a version of the Prelude which is slightly longer than the Roy Douglas-edited version published in 1960. Recorded in 1949 and 1946 respectively, these are obvious historical recommendations. The Albion release is the only way to get both together, though the transfer is dim. (The Dutton transfer of the Prelude alone is more vivid.)

A suite of 16 sections prepared by Stephen Hogger for Gamba's recording presents the full diversity of music that Vaughan Williams worked into his score: themes majestic and pastoral to represent the landscapes; adapted French-Canadian, German, and indigenous folk music for the people of Canada; a robust waltz and edgy, sinister music for the Nazi submariners. It is an impressive musical canvas, and Gamba presents it brilliantly. However,

now Martin Yates has, as he did with the later *Scott of the Antarctic*, gone back to the manuscripts and resurrected all of the music the composer wrote for the film, some 80 minutes of it. It is quite satisfying as stand alone, with only a very occasional sequence in which one might wish for a visual focus, and Yates presents it with conviction.

There are, as well, (at least) two wind ensemble arrangements of the Prelude: one for British military band by Bram Wiggins and the other for standard concert band by Jari Villanueva. There is also an engaging suite of excerpts for brass band, beginning with the Prologue and ending with music from the Prelude/Epilogue devised by Paul Hindmarsh and arranged by Phillip Littlemore for an all-brass release on Albion. A recording of each is included under specialist recommendations.

Of the works derived from the score – the lovely *The Lake in the Mountains*, arranged by the composer for piano; *The New Commonwealth*, an adaptation of the Prelude for chorus with words by Harold Child and later for organ; and the string quartet movement which utilizes the Nazi theme – more will be said in the appropriate sections.

Recommendation (Full Score): Martin Yates, BBC Concert Orchestra, Jessica Millson (singer) (Dutton Epoch – CD)

Recommendation (Extended Suite): Rumon Gamba, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, Emily Gray (sop) (Vol. 2) – *with suites from The Dim Little Island, The England of Elizabeth* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Recommendation (Prelude): Richard Hickox, Northern Sinfonia of England – *with The Poisoned Kiss Overture, Old King Cole, Flos Campi, The Lark Ascending, Sea Songs* (EMI – CD) or above plus *with Serenade to Music, Five Mystical Songs, Prelude on an Old Carol Tune, The Running Set, Two Hymn-Tune Preludes, Oboe Concerto, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes (exc.), Violin Concerto, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* (EMI/Warner – 2 CDs, Download)

Alternate: Andrew Penny, RTÉ Concert Orchestra (Prelude) – *with The Story of a Flemish Farm, Coastal Command Suite, Three Portraits from 'The England of Elizabeth'* (Marco Polo/Naxos – CD, Download)

Historical: Muir Mathieson, London Symphony Orchestra (Prelude and Epilogue) – *with music by Alwyn, Bliss, Boughton, Delius, Falla, Holst, Clifton Parker, Walton* (Albion – CD, Download)

Specialist: Philip E. Hills, Band of the Grenadier Guards (Prelude) (arr. Bram Wiggins) – *with Flourish for Wind Band, Toccata Marziale, English Folk Song Suite, Sea Songs, Fantasia on Greensleeves, The Wasps Overture and March Past of the Kitchen Utensils*, *The Old 100th, Norfolk Rhapsody No.1, Prelude on Rhosymedre, Linden Lea, Flourish for Three Trumpets, Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes for Band* (Emblem – CD, Download)

Philip C. Chevallard, United States Air Force Band of the Rockies (Prelude) (arr. Jari Villanueva) – with *Flourish for Wind Band, Toccata Marziale and works by Addinsell, Barber, Robert Russell Bennett, Dello Joio, Gould, Sousa, Joseph T. Spaniola* (Altissimo! – CD, Download)

Ian Porthouse, Tredegar Town Band (Suite) – *with Henry the Fifth Overture, Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes, Variations for Brass Band and arrangements of Flourish for Wind Band, English Folk Song Suite, Sea Songs, The Truth from Above, Prelude on Rhosymedre, Tuba Concerto* (Albion – CD, Download)

Coastal Command (1942)

Vaughan Williams's special affinity for film scoring was confirmed by his music for the wartime documentary, *Coastal Command*. The composer's preferred method of composing for film is clear here, with long themes that enhance a scene in its entirety rather than cues that respond to every visual prompt. In fact, he found this assignment particularly agreeable, since, though he was willing to make changes to accommodate the length of scenes, the director and recording engineer realized that in his music they had "something great, something, indeed, finer and more alive than any music we had ever had before." When changes were made, it was in the visual materials. The music was, the recording engineer modestly continued, "in fact, the picture."

Written while the composer was also at work on his Symphony No. 5, there are intimations of that uplifting work as well as elements of more vehement works that had preceded it. It is at turns atmospheric, agitated, tense, and expansively heroic. Above all, one hears the pride that Vaughan Williams clearly felt for the unsung heroes of this oft-neglected RAF seaplane patrol, and really for all who were defending the nation. This is made clearest in the noble theme he writes for the Dawn Patrol section – reminiscent of passages from *Job* – subtitled Quiet Determination.

A suite of seven movements was made by Muir Mathieson concurrently to the release of the film, and he authoritatively led performances of two movements – Prelude and Dawn Patrol (using the original title, The Sunderland Goes in Close) – for the BBC in 1943 (Pearl). The latter, usually taken more expansively to emphasize the nobility of the melody, retains that quality at the swifter tempo of this historically significant recording. Mathieson's suite was edited by Christopher Palmer in 1990 for a recording led by Kenneth Alwyn (Silva) in which he adds an eighth movement: the fierce U-Boat Alert. Palmer's edition was used in subsequent recordings by Penny (Marco Polo/Naxos) and Gamba (Chandos). Both are excellent, but Alwyn – not to be confused with composer William Alwyn, who also conducted – and the Philharmonia Orchestra bring extra energy, vividness, and perfection of balance to the reading. The clarity of the Hebrides movement's icy effects, a foreshadowing of *Scott of the Antarctic*, is especially notable, as is the grandeur of Dawn Patrol. This is first choice if it can be located, with Penny in this case just edging out Gamba for alternate.

Given the subject matter, it is no surprise that there has been a recording by the Central Band of the Royal Air Force, in an effective arrangement by conductor H. B. Hingley (CfP/Premiere). Band fanciers take note.

Recommendation (Suite): Kenneth Alwyn, Philharmonia Orchestra – *with works by Easdale, Bliss, Gerard Schurmann* (Silva – CD)

Alternate: Andrew Penny, RTÉ Concert Orchestra (Suite) – *with 49th Parallel Prelude, The Story of a Flemish Farm, Three Portraits from 'The England of Elizabeth'* (Marco Polo/Naxos – CD, Download)

Historical: Muir Mathieson, London Symphony Orchestra (Prelude and Dawn Patrol) – *with Symphony No. 6, excerpts and suites from Scott of the Antarctic, 49th Parallel, The Story of a Flemish Farm, The Loves of Joanna Godden* (Pearl – CD)

Specialist: H. B. Hingley, Central Band of the Royal Air Force (Suite) (arr. Hingley) – *with excerpts and suites from film scores by Bliss, Wilfred Josephs, Walton* (Classics for Pleasure/Premiere – CD)

The People's Land (1943)

Vaughan Williams provided a score of just over 13 minutes for what turned out to be a ten-minute inspirational film showing the natural and historic wonders of the English countryside held by the National Trust. The score, consisting almost entirely of folk songs including *John Barleycorn*, *The Springtime of the Year*, *Love will find out the way*, and *Chairs to mend*, was cut to fit and much of the music had voice-over narration. While the lovely and now nostalgic film is worth seeing on the British Council website, Stephen Hogger's edition of the entire score for its recording by Gamba (Chandos) allows its charms to show forth unobscured by its function.

Recommendation: Rumon Gamba, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra (Vol. 1) – *with suites from Scott of the Antarctic, Coastal Command* (Chandos – CD, Download)

The Flemish Farm (1943)

Vaughan Williams composed the score for this rather melodramatic propaganda film in 1942. The movie tells the story, based on an actual incident, of the return of a Belgian airman to the Flemish farm where the remnants of his air force had been stationed. The story follows the airman's journey behind enemy lines to retrieve the unit's hidden regimental colors and return them to Britain.

As with the previous films, Muir Mathieson conducted for the soundtrack, but in this case, it was the composer rather than Mathieson who created a suite of seven movements, titled *The Story of a Flemish Farm*, from the film score. The score is at turns heroic and poignant, and ultimately triumphant. One can again hear likenesses to the Symphony No. 6 which the composer was composing concurrently, and in fact two themes that did not make it into the finished film later became principal themes in that work.

Sadly, no recording has appeared of a Proms concert performance of the suite Vaughan Williams led in 1945. However, Mathieson recorded the touching Dawn Scene for the BBC in 1944, and those with antiquarian interests will want to hear Pearl's transfer of that transcription disc. Once again the choice of suite recordings falls to excellent accounts by Gamba and Penny. Gamba ultimately gets the top recommendation not only for his heartfelt leadership but for leader Yuri Torchinsky's brilliant playing in the suite's soaring violin solos.

Recommendation (Suite): Rumon Gamba, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra (Vol. 3) – *with suites from Bitter Springs, The Loves of Joanna Godden* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Alternate: Andrew Penny, RTÉ Concert Orchestra (Suite) – *with 49th Parallel Prelude, The Coastal Command Suite, Three Portraits from 'The England of Elizabeth'* (Marco Polo/Naxos – CD, Download)

Historical: Muir Mathieson, London Symphony Orchestra (Prelude and Dawn Patrol) – *with Symphony No. 6, excerpts and suites from Scott of the Antarctic, 49th Parallel, Coastal Command, The Loves of Joanna Godden* (Pearl – CD)

The Stricken Peninsula (1945)

This was the last of Vaughan Williams's Ministry of Information films, finished soon after the end of conflict, but it is not the celebratory production one might expect. Rather, it is a sobering document of the ruined state of the south of Italy as the Axis armies were being pushed north. Highlighted are the efforts of the Allies to assist the civilians to restore their shattered infrastructure, stave off starvation, and eradicate disease left in the wake of the fighting, all while continuing to prosecute the war. A copy of the film is held in the Imperial War Museum's collection and can be viewed on its website. The narration is dispassionate, but the imagery shattering. So too is Vaughan Williams's music, notably in the opening sequences where the grim destruction, burials of the dead found in the ruins, and the privations of the people driven from their homes is shown. It is gently touching at times, as well, and turns more uplifting as the film's narrative becomes hopeful.

In the confusion that the end of the war brought, no one apparently thought to create a suite, and now the score is believed lost. To address that loss, Stephen Connock, on behalf of the RVW Society, commissioned composer Philip Lane, known for his film score rescue work, to reconstruct the score from the soundtrack for a recording on the Albion label. Faced with the nature of the work, however, and the fact that detail is sometimes obscured by the spoken content, he chose instead to create his own work, *Italian Rhapsody for Orchestra*, based on some of the composer's themes. The result is attractive, but anyone who follows the film carefully will realize that there is much of Vaughan Williams left by Lane, as it were, on the cutting room floor. Atypical passages like the Italian street band music – a rare case of Vaughan Williams writing film music synchronized to a specific visual – are perhaps given too much time while some powerful extended sequences are left out. Still, Lane's work makes it possible to hear some unfamiliar Vaughan Williams.

Specialist Recommendation (Lane: The Stricken Peninsula - Italian Rhapsody for Orchestra): Martyn Brabbins, BBC Symphony Orchestra – *with Three Nocturnes for Baritone (orch. Payne), A Road All Paved with Stars (arr. from* The Poisoned Kiss *by Adrian Williams), Four Last Songs (orch. Payne)* (Albion – CD, Download)

The Loves of Joanna Godden (1947)

Vaughan Williams's first post-war film score was written for a romantic drama from a popular novel of the time which follows the efforts of a fiercely independent Edwardian woman to run the farm left to her by her father. Three men, each offering different qualities needed or admired by the heroine, vie for her affections, but it is the land and her work on it to which she remains most dedicated. The dispiriting ending to her quest for autonomy and the lesson it seems to want to impart have not aged well, but surely the score will please Vaughan Williams's admirers. Forceful and evocative of the landscapes of Romney Marsh, his score is made all the more powerful in the film for its limited use. Sounds of nature or

silence are most likely to be the backdrop for the action, so when the music appears in conjunction with the stunning cinematography and crucial dramatic moments, it has special impact.

That impact translates well to the audio-only realm in the two recordings that this music has enjoyed. Vaughan Williams wrote 25 cues and authorized use of ten of them for a 1947 recording by Ernest Irving and the Philharmonia Orchestra (Pearl/Dutton Vocalion) the film's music director and ensemble. The Dutton transfer is remarkably free of surface noise, and some stereo reverberation has been added to restore the ambience removed by digital filtering. The Pearl transfer is reasonably quiet, while retaining the sound of the original 78s. My preference is tipped to the Dutton by its unique program. Even more vivid is the Gamba recording, for which Stephen Hogger has taken the ten cues, added additional music from the score, and created something of a tone poem nearly twice as long as the earlier release.

Note the choir in the listings. Vaughan Williams uses a wordless women's chorus for atmospheric effect in what is essentially a trial for his similar but more extensive use of it in *Scott of the Antarctic* and the *Sinfonia antartica*.

Recommendation (Extended Suite): Rumon Gamba, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, Manchester Chamber Choir (Vol. 3) – *with suite from Bitter Springs, The Story of a Flemish Farm* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Historical: Ernest Irving, Philharmonia Orchestra, chorus (Suite) – *with 49th Parallel Prelude, excerpts from film music by Louis Levy, Walton, Clifton Parker, Alwyn, Lambert Williamson, John Greenwood, Ireland, Philip Green, Gordon Jacob, Arthur Wilkinson, Benjamin Frankel, John Veale, Leighton Lucas* (Dutton Vocalion – CD)

Scott of the Antarctic (1948)

Vaughan Williams's music for *Scott of the Antarctic* is easily his best-known film score, largely because it became the basis for his seventh symphony, the *Sinfonia antartica*. His skills in evocative and often haunting orchestration, honed in his earlier film scores, reaches a zenith in this magnificent work. Here is everything that made his previous scores so effective, with themes of great power, nobility, and emotional depth. Vaughan Williams wrote film scores as if that genre was just as important as any other in which he worked, and in doing so, he made it so.

The entire film score is in 41 sections and runs a few seconds less than eighty minutes. It was created in less than a month in response to a draft script and the composer's studies of the expedition. Ealing Studio's music director Ernest Irving recorded it as written, prior to the shooting of the film. Only about half was used, but the editing of the film was heavily influenced by the music, and some of the unused music found its way into the symphony. In a sense, the *Sinfonia antartica*, which Vaughan Williams began to compose soon after the film was released, serves as uber-symphonic suite for the film music. It incorporates and develops many of the most impressive passages from the film: the evocation of stark grandeur and icy emptiness, the whimsical depiction of penguins, whales, and ponies, and most especially the grim depiction of heroics unequal to nature's challenge. Yet, while the symphony and film music share much – though not, curiously, the symphony's fearsome use of organ to

represent the massive glacial ice – to know one is not to know all of both. There is much fine Vaughan Williams to be discovered in the film score that did not make it into the symphony.

The score in its entirety has been edited and recorded from the manuscripts by Martin Yates, with the music played, as much as possible, as a continuous entity with minimal gaps between sections. His wonderful SACD on Dutton Epoch should be heard by anyone who wants the full experience of this dazzling creation. Those who want a little less will find Stephen Hogger's 41-minute suite from the film an excellent compendium. Gamba paces it impressively, even if he does not attempt the continuity that Yates does. And though the Dutton recording is a little more atmospheric, listeners will appreciate the transparency of the Chandos engineering and the additional inner voices it and Gamba sometimes reveal.

A third recording, containing eight and one-half minutes of music from the score – seven clips in all – was conducted by Irving in 1948, the year of the film's release. Beside leading the score for the soundtrack, he was the dedicatee of the symphony. The soloist is Margaret Ritchie, who also sang for the film. It has been restored three times, by Pearl, Dutton, and CD41. Although the Pearl transfer is vivid, Dutton's version, taken from the composer's own pressing, is easily the finest. CD41's version may be of interest for its inclusion of recordings of explorer Ernest Shackleton, but the transfer is not as well done.

Recommendation (Full Score): Martin Yates, Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Chorus, Ilona Domnich (sop), Christopher Nichol (organ) (Dutton Epoch – CD)

Recommendation (Extended Suite): Rumon Gamba, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus, Merryn Gamba (sop), Jonathan Scott (organ) (Vol. 1) – *with The People's Land and suite from Coastal Command* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Historical: Ernest Irving, Philharmonia Orchestra, chorus, Margaret Ritchie (Suite) – *with The Wasps Overture, Old King Cole [Vaughan Williams], A Flourish for the Coronation [Beecham], Serenade to Music [Wood], A Song of Thanksgiving [Boult]* (Dutton – CD)

The Dim Little Island (1949)

After *Scott of the Antarctic*, Vaughan Williams's film projects were smaller in scope, especially this next film. It was produced by famed documentary maker Humphrey Jennings for the Central Office of Information as a corrective to the post-war letdown that had settled on the country. It is hard, watching the ten-minute film now, to imagine that its reasoned and cautious encouragements were particularly effective. In fact, easily the best parts of the effort are the comments made by Vaughan Williams – one of four narrators – on the essential value of British music rooted in the folk art of the country. To illustrate this, he composed a short prelude based on two folk tunes, *Pretty Betty* and *The Pride of Kildare*. Elsewhere, sections of *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* and a verse of the song itself accompany the reassurances.

Stephen Hogger has recreated the score for Gamba's Chandos series in what is described as a "partial reconstruction." It is well done. There is a fine performance of the sung verse by tenor Martin Hindmarsh, and the score, separated from the film, is revealed as an unexpected gem.

Recommendation: Rumon Gamba, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, Martin Hindmarsh (ten) (Vol. 2) – *with suites from 49th Parallel, The England of Elizabeth* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Bitter Springs (1950)

Vaughan Williams's contribution to this Ealing Studio film, a pioneering exploration of the conflict-ridden issue of Aboriginal land rights in the outback of Australia, consisted of just 38 bars of thematic material. Vaughan Williams deprecated it as "my silly little tune," but it was pregnant with possibilities and provided music director Ernest Irving, who edited, arranged, and orchestrated it, with material enough to produce a large part of the film score. Of the 16 cues that are included by editor Stephen Hogger in his suite for the Gamba (Chandos) recording, nine come from Vaughan Williams's contribution; the rest were written by Irving alone, including the amusing and clever Kangaroos section.

Aside from an LP release of that one section, taken from the soundtrack recording, the score had to wait for the Chandos series to be heard outside of the film. Performance and recording are of the high quality expected from this source, and the music from the collaboration – Vaughan Williams's term – is well worth hearing.

Recommendation: Rumon Gamba, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra (Vol. 3) – *with suites from The Loves of Joanna Godden, The Story of a Flemish Farm* (Chandos – CD, Download)

The England of Elizabeth (1955)

Five years after the request for music for *Bitter Springs*, British Transport Films approached Vaughan Williams for another score. Apparently he found himself with more time. *The England of Elizabeth* celebrates British history, notably Elizabethan, as well as the reign of the new young queen, and encourages the viewer to travel to the many historic sites appearing in the film. It is much enhanced by the sumptuous score the composer provides. He draws on Tudor and folk music, a life-time passion, while also reflecting new avenues of exploration, especially his growing fascination with percussion instruments, using a *batterie* similar to that of the Eighth Symphony on which he was then working. He also – symbolic of the career-spanning nature of the work – uses a theme several places in the movie score that played a part in the early tone poem *The Solent*, in the breakthrough *A Sea Symphony*, and was to be used three years later in his Ninth Symphony.

For the Gamba series, Stephen Hogger has skillfully edited the nearly continuous score of the 25-minute film into a five-movement suite that does not follow the course of the film but does include almost all of the music composed for it. Because it contains music not heard in Muir Mathieson's more familiar *Three Portraits from 'The England of Elizabeth'* – including the composer's lovely choral setting of verses from the Gospel of John in Tudor style – it is the prime recommendation for the film score fancier.

However, Mathieson's suite, published in 1964, is quite satisfying, as well, with its three-movement structure reflecting the three cinematic portraits of the film: the explorer Francis Drake, the poet William Shakespeare, and, of course, the Virgin Queen herself. André Previn (RCA/Sony) led the first recording and had the field to himself for some years before Andrew Penny (Marco Polo/Naxos) and Karl-Heinz Steffens (Capriccio) added theirs. While Previn is the nostalgic favorite, I lean ever so slightly to the Penny, which captures the style of the

John Hollingsworth-led soundtrack performance perfectly. In truth, though, none of the recordings will disappoint.

Mathieson also arranged two songs from the score, *When that I was and a little tiny boy* and *It was a lover and his lass* for intermediate student ensembles with rather more challenging parts for the solo violinist and harpist. Titled *Two Shakespeare Sketches*, the three minute work was published in the same year as his suite. It has been charmingly recorded by James Ross and the Kent Sinfonia (Albion).

Recommendation (Suite): Rumon Gamba, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra (Vol. 2) – *with suites from 49th Parallel, The Dim Little Island* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Recommendation (Three Portraits): Andrew Penny, RTÉ Concert Orchestra – *with 49th Parallel Prelude, The Coastal Command Suite, The Story of a Flemish Farm* (Marco Polo/Naxos – CD, Download)

Recommendation (Two Sketches): James Ross, Kent Sinfonia – *with incidental music for Richard III (excerpt), Richard II (1944 – excerpts – arr. Lew), Henry IV Part II (excerpts), Henry V Overture (arr. Norris/Riley), Stratford Suite (cues from Henry IV Part II, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Richard II, Richard III, Twelfth Night – arr. Lew), plus The Willow Song, Orpheus and His Lute, Dirge for Fidele (arr. Riley)* (Albion – CD, Download)

The Vision of William Blake (1957)

Vaughan Williams's last movie score, written months before his death at the age of 85, is also his most unusual, for it consists almost entirely of the song cycle *Ten Blake Songs*, written for the film. As it happens, only eight were used – excluded were *A Poison Tree* and *The Piper* – and excerpts from *Job* appear as well. The film score itself has not been recorded, but the lovely, austere song cycle has, of course, and will be discussed in the section on vocal music.

WORKS FOR MILITARY OR BRASS BAND

Twenty-five works for wind ensemble have been identified by Jon Ceander Mitchell in his book *Ralph Vaughan Williams' Wind Works*. Not all of these are band works, as such. Some are sections of larger works like the Sanctus of his *Cambridge Mass* or the scherzo of his Eighth Symphony, a couple are wind chamber works, and several, like the original version of *O Clap Your Hands*, are primarily choral works. These will be addressed in their respective sections. Nine works for military or brass band are included here, as well as transcriptions of these for other instrumentation. A tenth work, developed from a fragment left in manuscript, will also be considered.

The nine works for military and brass bands are not a major part of Vaughan Williams's *oeuvre*, but among these are some of the best-known pieces for wind ensemble ever written. These are, with the Holst Suites, core repertoire that has enriched and transformed the British band repertoire and has been widely acknowledged as the start of the serious – as opposed to summer bandshell – American band movement.

Music for Military/Wind Band

English Folk Song Suite for Military Band

Rare indeed must be the wind band that has not, at some point, programmed this evergreen work. And it is no wonder, as it is great fun to play and popular with audiences. It was first performed on July 4, 1923 at Kneller Hall with four movements, but by the time the suite was published in early 1924 it was in its current three-movement configuration while the original second movement *Sea Songs* was published as a separate work (see below). Vaughan Williams based his three-movement suite on nine folk songs: *Seventeen Come Sunday*, *Pretty Caroline*, and *Dives and Lazarus*; *My Bonnie Boy* and *Green Bushes*; and *Blow Away the Morning Dew*, *High Germany*, *The Trees So High*, and *John Barleycorn*.

The release of four 78-rpm recordings between the 1923 premiere and the advent of LP in 1948 reflects the immediate popularity of this new work. So far only the first, a late-1923 or early-1924 acoustic recording of the published three-movement version, has been restored for CD. It is by the Band of H.M. Life Guards led by Lt. H. Eldridge (Albion). Repeats were cut to fit it onto two well-filled 78 sides, so it's not clear how much can be ascertained about period performance practice from this example. But contrary to expectation, Eldridge takes the *poco allegro* in the Intermezzo in three, as directed, and his tempos, in a situation where time is at a premium, are even more measured than those notated. That is worth noting when we consider the recordings that followed.

The first of these was led by American band doyen Frederick Fennell. Recorded in 1955 with the Eastman Wind Ensemble (Mercury/Beulah), it is a brilliant performance in monaural sound, very fine for its age. This was the only recording on LP for over two decades. Twenty-four years later, with the professionals of the Cleveland Orchestra (Telarc), Fennell re-recorded the work in outstanding sound. It, too, was very popular, especially in the US, though Denis Wick's all-star recording (ASV/Resonance) from the year prior (1978) was well received in the UK.

There are two oddities in these seminal Fennell recordings. In both, the initial appearance of the *Pretty Caroline* theme in the first movement is given to the clarinet, as in the orchestral transcription, rather than the designated solo cornet with a clarinet doubling. It is not clear why, and only one other conductor, American Eugene Corporon, follows suit. More troubling, in these and the three recordings that followed, Fennell takes the Intermezzo's *poco allegro (scherzando)* at one beat to the bar, so *Green Bushes* is played at a suddenly realized *presto*. And oddly, despite clear notation of the intended subtlety of the tempo change in the score, this approach has been taken by almost every band since, British and American alike.

British bands can otherwise lay claim to an intrinsic authenticity, especially the military bands for whom this was written. These generally utilize fewer players and/or a lighter touch and more transparency, a *swing* to the three-quarter rhythms, a more varied timbre – a clear distinction between cornet and trumpet, for instance – and often a bit of vibrato in the brass that lends a distinctive quality to the blend. The last is an issue, though, since on several occasions – in letters and a score note – the composer signaled a distaste for it, especially the rather extreme vibrato used by brass bands.

The classic recording by WC Eric Banks and the vibrato-heavy 1984 Central Band of the Royal Air Force (EMI/Regis) cannot therefore be recommended where the composer's wishes are an important criterion. WC Duncan Stubbs made his recording (Chandos) with the same ensemble thirty years later. It retains the basic sound – though the recording is close and a little confined – but the tone is much more in keeping with the composer's wishes. Although Stubbs, too, rushes the central section of the Intermezzo, this is a good choice for collectors who desire a British military band. Otherwise, Wick's small but superlative band of London orchestral players is the best bet, as they use the original scoring with cornet and baritone horn (in addition to trumpets and euphonium) and just a touch of vibrato. What's more, Wick's tempos are closer than most to those of the score, and he carefully observes the often-subdued dynamics. Timothy Reynish, in his recording with the Royal Northern College of Music Wind Orchestra (Chandos) does so, as well. He also uses the original instrumentation, and though his second-movement *allegretto* is particularly *presto* and the baritone horn's vibrato is pronounced, the performance as a whole is outstanding. Fennell's Telarc CD, brilliant despite my qualms, is easily found used and some US sources offer a download. And the Clevelanders' virtuosity is its own reward.

In 1924, Vaughan Williams requested that Gordon Jacob, his student at the RCM and soon to be colleague there, orchestrate the work. This was expertly done; the arrangement maintains the basic character of the original with standard orchestral wind scoring and seamlessly integrated strings. Jacob also, presumedly with the composer's blessing, changed the troublesome tempo notation for the *Green Bushes* section of the Intermezzo from *poco allegro (scherzando)* to *allegretto scherzando*. It was not a tempo change, but rather a clarification.

The first recording was by American Howard Barlow (Columbia) in 1939 with oboist (and later television choir maestro) Mitch Miller playing the Intermezzo solos. The recording has not seen commercial digital release. Boult for Westminster in 1953 was next, and it has been released as a download by Naxos and Pristine and in the complete Boult Mono Recordings set by Warner. Made with the London Philharmonic but mistakenly attributed to the Royal Philharmonic by Naxos, it is lively and well played with an engaging swagger. It is truer overall to the scored tempos than any other version, and if it wasn't monaural, it would be my

prime orchestral recommendation. The Naxos transfer is clean and natural; the Pristine adds some fullness and air at the slight expense of detail, but the Warner remastering is best if you want the whole set. Any of these merits a historic recommendation. Boult's stereo Westminster version with the Vienna State Opera Orchestra made six years later does uniquely present the *allegretto* at tempo. To my mind, this recording vindicates Vaughan Williams's published vision for the movement. The outer movements are good but could be more animated. The recording was available briefly on CD from MCA in the US and from Beulah in the UK in a better transfer. The Beulah can still be downloaded.

Boult's third and final recording (EMI) looks swifter from the timings, but those numbers result from the same repeat cuts that Eldridge made when fitting the piece onto two 78 sides in 1923. Skipping repeats is not sanctioned in the score and upsets the proportions of the piece, so even if Boult was as lively in 1970 as in 1953, which he isn't, it would not be a recommendation. The same cuts disfigure several other recordings – Seaman (Tring), Judd (Naxos), and Wilson (Avie) – though each has other shortcomings, as well. This leaves a limited field of recordings from which to choose, and although one might enjoy any one of them, none of them are ideal. Manze (Onyx) has nice detail but lacks sparkle. Fiedler (Decca/Belart) has a good orchestra but sounds tired. Marriner (Decca/Eloquence) rushes the central *allegretto* even more than most. Handley (EMI/CfP) is lively in the outer movements, but too slow *and* too fast, though charming, in the Intermezzo. Morton Gould (RCA) is quite nice, though a bit slow in the *andantino*, but still awaits commercial digital release. It can be downloaded at no cost from *rediscovery.us/conductors.html*. (Scroll down the alphabetical listing.) A surprise, also available from the internet at no cost, is a very fine live recording by James Allen Gähres with the Ulm Philharmonic Orchestra, once available on a privately published CD and now downloadable from the Wikipedia Commons at *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Folk_Song_Suite*. Gähres is both engaging and closer than most to the intended tempos, so I am including it in my recommendations. Handley is the other alternative recommendation. Boult in Vienna gets top billing, not least for the *allegretto*, though the 1953 recording is the better performance as a whole. Certainly, it is past time for a new recording that more closely observes the composer's published intentions.

This has become the longest article in the discography so far, but there is more yet, as this work has inspired several other arrangements. A composer-commissioned version for brass band by Gordon Jacob, mentioned by Michael Kennedy in his *Catalogue*, appears to be illusory. There *is* a version by famed brass bandsman Frank Wright published in 1956. The Welsh Cory Band led by Philip Harper (Doyen) plays it well enough, but the performance is too leisurely and disfigured by embellishments like the gratuitous xylophone licks in the outer movements. There is a better version, the usual complaints about Intermezzo tempos aside, by Canadian Stephen Chenette and The Hannaford Street Silver Band (CBC Records). The finest recording, however, is by Ian Porthouse and the Tredegar Town Band (Albion) in a version by Phillip Littlemore that is notable for retaining the greater brilliance of the original keys; Wright transposed it down a fourth in his version. What's more, Porthouse, bless him, observes the composer's tempos in the Intermezzo. Contrary to usual practice, I have chosen to give this non-composer arrangement a top-line recommendation. There are also versions for brass quintet by The Paramount Brass (Centaur), string quintet by the St. George Quintet (Pavane), guitar quartet by the Vida Guitar Quartet (BGS), clarinet ensemble by the University of Florida Clarinet Ensemble (Mark Records), and tuba and piano by Skip Gray and Rudolf Ramming (Mark Records). All are attractive (or in the case of the tuba, interesting) novelties. I was especially delighted by the guitar quartet. These are listed as specialist recommendations.

Recommendation (Wind): Denis Wick, London Wind Orchestra – *with Toccata Marziale, Holst: Suites No. 1 and 2 for Military Band, Hammersmith: Prelude and Scherzo* (ASV – CD or Resonance – CD/Download) also *with The Lark Ascending, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Six Studies in English Folk Song, Three Vocalises, Partita for Double String Orchestra [various artists]* (ASV – CD)

Recommendation (Orchestra): Adrian Boult, Vienna State Opera Orchestra – *with Fantasia on Greensleeves, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Elgar: Introduction and Allegro, Britten: Prelude and Fugue* (MCA/Beulah – CD, Download)

Recommendation (Brass): Ian Porthouse, Tredegar Town Band – *with Henry the Fifth, Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes, Variations for Brass Band and arrangements of Flourish for Wind Band, Sea Songs, The Truth from Above, Prelude on Rhosymedre, 49th Parallel Suite, Tuba Concerto* (Albion – CD, Download)

Alternate: WC Duncan Stubbs, Central Band of the Royal Air Force (Wind) – *with works by Holst, Grainger, Tomlinson, Langford* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Timothy Reynish, Royal Northern College of Music Wind Orchestra (Wind) – *with Flourish for Wind Band, Toccata Marziale, and works by Holst* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Frederick Fennell, Cleveland Symphonic Winds (Wind) – *with Sea Songs, works by Grainger, and marches by Arnaud, Barber, Leemans, Fučík, King, Zimmermann, J. Strauss I, Sousa* (Telarc – CD, Download)

James Allen Gähres, Ulm Philharmonic Orchestra (Orchestra) – *with works by Johann I, II, and Josef Strauss, Rossini, Suppé, Hellmesberger, Verdi, Elgar, Saint-Saëns* (Ulmer Theater – CD, Download [VW only – see text])

Vernon Handley, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (Orchestra) – *with Partita for Double String Orchestra, Oboe Concerto, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Fantasia on Greensleeves* (EMI - CD) or *with Symphonies 1-9, Job, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Flos Campi, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Oboe Concerto, Partita for Double String Orchestra, Serenade to Music (choral version)* (EMI/Classics for Pleasure – 7 CDs)

Historical: Lt. H. Eldridge, Band of H.M. Life Guards (Wind) – *with Songs of Travel (excerpts), Silent Noon, Linden Lea, Sea Songs, Sine Nomine, Wassail Song, Holst: Lovely Kind, Kindly Loving, This Have I Done for My True Love, Turn Back O Man, A Moorside Suite, Marching Song, Wassail Song [various artists and ensembles]* (Albion – CD, Download)

Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic Orchestra (Orchestra) – *with Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (Naxos – Download) or *with The Wasps – Aristophanic Suite, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Job, Old King Cole, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Partita for Double String Orchestra* (Pristine – 2 CD-Rs, Download) or *Adrian Boult: Complete Mono Recordings 1920-1957 on HMV, Pye Nixa & Parlophone* (Warner – 36 CDs)

Specialist: Stephen Chenette, Hannaford Street Silver Band – *with Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes, Holst: A Moorside Suite, and works by Leonard Ballantine, Walton, Gordon Langford, Morley Calvert, J. Scott Irvine, Herbert Clarke, Calixa Lavallée* (CBC Records – CD, Download)

The Paramount Brass (Brass Quintet) – *with arrangements of Sea Songs and of works by Grainger, Holst* (Centaur – CD)

St. George Quintet (String Quintet) – *with works by Frederick Kelly, Elgar, Bliss, Lennon/McCartney* (Pavane – CD, Download)

Vida Guitar Quartet (Guitar Quartet) – *with works by Timothy Bowers, Warlock, Dodgson, Britten, Elgar* (BGS – CD, Download)

University of Florida Clarinet Ensemble (Clarinet Ensemble) – *with works by Mendelssohn, Rimsky-Korsakov, Barber, Paul Harvey, Weber, Gershwin, Satoshi Yagisawa, Freddie Mercury* (Mark Records – CD, Download)

Skip Gray (tuba) and Rudolf Ramming (piano) (Tuba and Piano) – *with works by Zoltán Gárdonyi, Antonio Capuzzi, Jan Koetsier, Bertold Hummel, Franz Strauss, Bozza* (Mark Records - Download)

Sea Songs – Quick March

It is unclear whether it was the composer's choice or the publisher's requirement that the second movement of the original four-movement *English Folk Song Suite* be separated from the suite before publication. Regardless, renamed *Sea Songs – Quick March*, it stands very nicely on its own. It has been recorded most often in the composer's own 1924 arrangement for orchestra, though there are some band recordings, as well. As with the other movements of the suite, *Sea Songs* is based on folk songs, in this case *The Princess Royal*, *Admiral Benbow*, and *Portsmouth*.

Anyone who acquires the recommended recordings of *English Folk Song Suite* by Fennell/Cleveland (Telarc) or Reynish (Chandos) will already have an excellent wind band version of *Sea Songs*. An equally fine one by Ian Porthouse and the Tredegar Town Band accompanies their outstanding *English Folk Song Suite* for brass band. *Allegretto* rather than *allegro*, but with plenty of lift and sparkle, the recording by Lowell Graham and the United States Air Force Band (Klavier) is a worthy alternative for concert band. Among orchestral recordings, the lively, crisp, and well-recorded George Hurst (Chandos) leads the list. Hickox's similarly brisk and well-played version (EMI/Warner) is a photo-finish alternative. Also excellent is Walter Hilger's recording with the Brandenburg State Orchestra (Genuin) – spirited, precise, and idiomatic – and, for those fancying a nostalgic trip through radio and television themes, there is a bouncy, loose-limbed reading led by Paul Murphy (Naxos).

To that list add, as a historic recommendation, a vivacious first recording of the work from 1946 by Rae Jenkins and the New Concert Orchestra initially available on a Boosey & Hawkes 78 and issued in a recent transfer on Albion. (There is, as well, a 1950s New Concert Orchestra recording with Nat Nyll (ASV or EMI) which is the one familiar to those who remember Billy Bunter.) For fans of brass quintets there is a brilliant arrangement with percussion by first trumpeter Jon Paul Danté of The Paramount Brass (Centaur).

Recommendation (Wind): Timothy Reynish, Royal Northern College of Music Wind Orchestra – *with English Folk Song Suite, Flourish for Wind Band, Toccata Marziale, and works by Holst* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Recommendation (Orchestra): George Hurst, Bournemouth Sinfonietta – *with The Poisoned Kiss Overture, Two Hymn-Tune Preludes, The Running Set, and works by Elgar* (Chandos – CD) or *with above, minus Elgar, plus Flos Campi, Viola Suite, The Wasps Overture, Fantasia on Greensleeves, and Serenade to Music, House of Life (exc.), Six Studies in English Folk Song, Romance for Harmonica, Linden Lea (arr. Somervell) [various artists and ensembles]* (Chandos – 2 CDs, Download)

Alternate: Frederick Fennell, Cleveland Symphonic Winds (Wind) – *with English Folk Song Suite, works by Grainger, and marches by Arnaud, Barber, Leemans, Fučík, King, Zimmermann, J. Strauss I, Sousa* (Telarc – CD)

Lowell Graham, United States Air Force Band (Wind) – *with works by Grainger, Roussel, Byrd/Jacob, Respighi, Robert Russell Bennett* (Klavier – CD, Download)

Richard Hickox, Northern Sinfonia of England (Orchestra) – *with The Poisoned Kiss Overture, Old King Cole, Flos Campi, The Lark Ascending, 49th Parallel Prelude* (EMI – CD) or as above plus *with Serenade to Music, Five Mystical Songs, Prelude on an Old Carol Tune, The Running Set, Two Hymn-Tune Preludes, Oboe Concerto, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes (exc.), Violin Concerto, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* (EMI/Warner – 2 CDs, Download)

Walter Hilgers, Brandenburg State Orchestra (Orchestra) – *with Tuba Concerto, Symphony No. 5* (Genuin – CD, Download)

Paul Murphy, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (Orchestra) – *with vintage radio and television themes by Mayerl, Vintner, Coates, Spiegl and Arlan, Richardson, Safroni, Slaney, Joyce, Phillips, Watters, John Malcolm, Melachrino, Hill-Bowen, Bath, Hope, Langford, Phillips, Dankworth* (Naxos – CD, Download)

Historical: Rae Jenkins, New Concert Orchestra (Orchestra) – *with Songs of Travel (excerpts), Silent Noon, Linden Lea, English Folk Song Suite, Sine Nomine, Wassail Song, Holst: Lovely Kind, Kindly Loving, This Have I Done for My True Love, Turn Back O Man, A Moorside Suite, Marching Song, Wassail Song [various artists and ensembles]* (Albion – CD, Download)

Specialist: Ian Porthouse, Tredegar Town Band (Brass) – *with Henry the Fifth Overture, Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes, Variations for Brass Band and arrangements of Flourish for Wind Band, English Folk Song Suite, The Truth from Above, Prelude on Rhosymedre, 49th Parallel Suite, Tuba Concerto* (Albion – CD, Download)

The Paramount Brass (Brass Quintet) – *with arrangements of English Folk Song Suite and of works by Grainger, Holst* (Centaur – CD)

Toccata Marziale

This masterpiece of composition for military band is full of brilliant counterpoint and marvelous instrumental color. Commissioned for the 1924 British Empire Exhibition, it was conceived as the first movement of a three-movement Concerto Grosso for band. The third movement was never composed and the second was reworked into the central movement of his violin concerto. The now single-movement work was premiered by a massed band of 600 musicians – or a thousand by one source – which was no doubt…impressive. It is hard to imagine, though, that the intricate rhythms and overlapping blocks of instrumental color were presented with anything like the precision and subtlety the work demands. No doubt those qualities were more in evidence in subsequent Kneller Hall performances that year with forces closer to the standard military band in 24 parts specified by the composer.

Some three decades passed before the first recording appeared, and that might be surprising until one realizes that even so masterful a wind ensemble leader as Timothy Reynish admitted after his recording with the Royal Northern College of Music Wind Orchestra (Chandos) that he was "wary of tackling this piece." There is the sheer complexity of the counterpoint and the greater than usual need to control balance, articulation, and phrasing to make it sound properly. There are, as well, dozens of errors in the 1924 score found by Frederick Fennell and Reynish, and more have been found in the 2005 revision edited by Frank Battisti. Even the stated tempo creates uncertainty. The composer requests an *allegro maestoso*, qualities – lively *and* majestic – that seem mutually exclusive. Fennell, who made the premiere recording in 1955 with the Eastman Wind Ensemble (Mercury/Heritage), settled on a weighty *allegretto* in his five recordings. This has been adopted in most subsequent recordings. One exception, Phillip Chevallard and the USAF Band of the Rockies (Altissimo), takes it at *allegro* and proves the point; it is way too fast.

There are currently more than two dozen recordings since Fennell, primarily by collegiate and military bands, ranging from sterling to unfortunate. His 1955 recording is brilliantly done and an obvious historic choice. Fennell's second recording, with the Cleveland Symphonic Winds, is even better, and would be on the list if Telarc hadn't inexplicably eliminated it when consolidating three LPs onto two CDs. Two other American recordings, Donald Hunsberger's thrilling recording with the Eastman Wind Ensemble (CBS) and Lowell Graham's imposing reading with the USAF Heritage of America Band (Klavier or Altissimo), are readily available. Yet another non-British ensemble, The Royal Swedish Navy Band led by Andreas Hanson (Nilento), is remarkable for its delineation of the counterpoint and its exquisite balance and dynamics. Reynish's, however, is also of unusual clarity and drama and uses the composer's original instrumentation: cornets *and* trumpets and baritone horn. It is the first choice by a hair.

Recommendation: Timothy Reynish, Royal Northern College of Music Wind Orchestra – *with English Folk Song Suite with Sea Songs, Flourish for Wind Band, and works by Holst* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Alternate: Donald Hunsberger, Eastman Wind Ensemble – *with Variations for Wind Band and works by Hindemith, Copland, Husa* (CBS – CD, Download)

Lowell Graham, USAF Heritage of America Band – *with Flourish for Wind Band and works by Schmitt, Clark McAlister, Aldo Forte, Stamp, Barber, Walter Hartley, Persichetti* (Klavier – CD, Download) or *with Flourish for*

Wind Band and works by Holst, Schmitt, Barber, Grainger, Hindemith (Altissimo – CD, Download)

Andreas Hanson, Royal Swedish Navy Band – *with works by Holst, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Wagner, Hindemith, Barber* (Nilento – Download)

Historical: Frederick Fennell, Eastman Wind Ensemble – *with English Folk Song Suite and works by Holst, Mennin, Persichetti, Reed* (Mercury/Heritage – CD, Download)

Douglas Wagner: The Golden Vanity March

Vaughan Williams began this march for small military band at about the same time as he composed the *Henry the Fifth Overture,* but it was not published, and the manuscript is incomplete. It was finished and arranged for concert band, with the permission of the composer's widow Ursula, by American composer Douglas E. Wagner and has been recorded once in that edition. Wagner has largely composed a new work based on the start he got from the incomplete manuscript, finishing the setting of the title song and adding a second strain based on the folk ballad *The Arethusa* and a trio based on *Just as the Tide was Flowing*.

The finished product was recorded by the Belwin Concert Band, a contract group for the publisher, and is available commercially on the Alfred Music promotional release for 2007-2008. The march, if it was in fact by the composer, would be nowhere near his best work, and since it is not by him, it is at best a curiosity for the absolute completist.

Specialist Recommendation: Unidentified conductor, Belwin Concert Band – *with original compositions and arrangements by Douglas Wagner, Jack Bullock, Robert Smith, Michael Story, et al.* (Alfred Music – Download)

England's Pleasant Land

In 1938, Vaughan Williams was asked to headline a group of local composers who were providing music for a pageant to raise funds for the work of The Dorking and Leith Hill Preservation Society. He had provided all of the music for a pageant at Abinger four years earlier (currently unrecorded), but on this occasion his involvement was limited to two pieces in the second act and some scoring for military band and mixed chorus including settings of Holst's *I Vow to Thee My Country* for the prelude and finale.

The only recording of the composer's original music is by Eugene Corporon and his fine North Texas University ensemble (GIA), part of a first-rate collection of the composer's wind band music most valuable for presenting original works and transcriptions not otherwise available. The second pageant piece, *Funeral March*, included a setting for chorus and military band of *Eheu fugaces, Postume*, an ode by Horace, but Corporon uses an unpublished edition by Robert Grechesky which apparently eliminates the chorus. (Vaughan Williams's arrangement of *I Vow to Thee* has been published, but not commercially recorded.)

Anyone familiar with the Fifth Symphony will recognize some of the thematic material used in these two pieces. There is a chicken-or-egg disagreement over whether the material was written first for the symphony in progress (Michael Kennedy's view) or was written for the pageant and then incorporated into the symphony (Grechesky's assessment), but no

resolution of that issue is necessary to enjoy the composer's small but consequential addition to the pageant.

Recommendation: Eugene Corporon, University of North Texas Wind Symphony (arr. Grechesky) – *with English Folk Song Suite, Flourish for Wind Band, Toccata Marziale, Sea Songs, Symphony No. 8: Scherzo alla Marcia, and arrangements of Flourish for Glorious John, Rhosymedre, The Running Set, The Lark Ascending, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Linden Lea, Sine Nomine, Variations for Brass Band* (GIA – 2 CDs, Download)

Flourish for Wind Band

The next year (1939) brought another request for pageant music, this from composer and Chairman of the Workers' Music Association Alan Bush for his *Music of the People* program held at the Royal Albert Hall. Because of the political nature of the program and Bush's well-known Communist convictions, Vaughan Williams was hesitant. In the end, he provided this flourish with which to open the first of three evenings of programming. The original manuscript was lost until 1971. Once found among the composer's papers at the British Library, it was quickly published by Oxford University Press with optional additions for US concert band instrumentation.

The short, relatively easy-to-play work has found much favor with student ensembles, and a number of the available recordings are by pre-collegiate musicians. These cannot, however, compete with the more polished performances by collegiate and military bands. The published score suggests a timing of one-and-one-half minutes, a tempo Jon Mitchell (*Ralph Vaughan Williams' Wind Works*) finds too fast for Vaughan Williams's ambiguous *maestoso*. Recordings by American ensembles range from 1:45 to approximately 2 minutes, a tempo that allows the music to hold its head high and still be stately. The three recordings led by British conductors, however, take well over two minutes, unconvincingly slow for what is intended to be a fanfare in tribute to the English worker. What I listened for, in either case, is a strong sense of nobility and special attention to the *frisson* created by the tutti entrance at rehearsal letter A. The best American performances are those by Lowell Graham (Klavier or Altissimo) and Eugene Corporon (GIA). Listeners who seek the more measured, reverential British approach would be best served by Reynish (Chandos).

There are arrangements of the *Flourish* for orchestral winds and brass band, both produced posthumously by the composer's late-life amanuensis Roy Douglas. Neither has been recorded commercially, nor has a cornet-conductors' score published by Bush's Workers' Music Association in 1951. However, a new arrangement for brass band has been made by Phillip Littlemore for an Albion release. The tempo is fitting and the playing aptly noble, but the backward placement of the percussion does lessen the impact of the letter-A tutti entrance. Nonetheless, this is a worthy specialist recommendation.

Recommendation: Eugene Corporon, University of North Texas Wind Symphony – *with English Folk Song Suite, Two Movements from England's Pleasant Land, Toccata Marziale, Sea Songs, Symphony No. 8: Scherzo alla Marcia, and arrangements of Flourish for Glorious John, Rhosymedre, The Running Set, The Lark Ascending, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, Linden Lea, Sine Nomine, Variations for Brass Band* (GIA – 2 CDs, Download)

Alternate: Lowell Graham, USAF Heritage of America Band – *with Toccata Marziale and works by Schmitt, Clark McAlister, Aldo Forte, Stamp, Barber, Walter Hartley,*

Persichetti (Klavier – CD, Download) or *with Toccata Marziale, Holst: Suites No. 1 and 2 for Military Band, and works by Schmitt, Barber, Grainger, Hindemith* (Altissimo – CD, Download)

Timothy Reynish, Royal Northern College of Music Wind Orchestra – *with English Folk Song Suite with Sea Songs, Toccata Marziale, and works by Holst* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Specialist: Ian Porthouse, Tredegar Town Band (Brass) – *with Henry the Fifth Overture, Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes, Variations for Brass Band and arrangements of English Folk Song Suite, Sea Songs, The Truth from Above, Prelude on Rhosymedre, 49th Parallel Suite, Tuba Concerto* (Albion – CD, Download)

Music for Brass Band

Recordings of Vaughan Williams's works written specifically for brass band have until recently only been available separately on compilations of works by multiple composers. Albion Records has addressed this with a release of all three major works in one program, plus several excellent transcriptions. (Two sets of flourishes were saved for the 150th anniversary album, *Serenade*.) Because of its completeness, this important release with the renowned Tredegar Town Band stands as a general recommendation in this category, even where individual performances are not the primary choice; they are all superb readings. Comments specific to each work are made below or, in the case of transcriptions, with the listing of the work in its original form. (The ones originating from choral and organ works will appear in Part II.)

Henry the Fifth Overture

Vaughan Williams's first work for brass band was likely composed in 1933 or 1934, based on music written for his 1913 incidental music for Henry V. It is unclear for what occasion it was written, though it may have been for a local historic pageant of the type popular at the time and for which Vaughan Williams was then writing music. It is not known if it was ever played in the composer's lifetime. The composer mentions it in a 1942 letter to newly appointed BBC Director of Music Arthur Bliss, noting that it "is still in my cupboard." Its first documented outing was by Frederick Fennell leading the University of Miami (Florida) Wind Ensemble in 1979, and it was not published until 1981. This reworked concert overture utilizes four songs evocative of the 15th-century king's battle at Agincourt: the *Agincourt Song*; *Magali*, a folk song from Provence; the French battle song *Réveillez vous Piccars*; and *The Earl of Oxford's March*. Given its powerful writing for standard British brass band, its decades-long neglect leaves one, at first, perplexed, for it is certainly not a matter of quality. A performance note from the composer may have been a factor in this neglect, especially if the work was intended as a competition piece, for it suggests playing the cornet parts on trumpets (or at least approximating the sound of trumpets), something a brass band with its mellower conical instruments would be loath to do. Further, it instructs the band to "strictly avoid"…"the vulgar sentimental vibrato which disfigures most brass band performances," a stricture that would have offended many brass band devotees and likely would have limited its use in competition.

Despite his advocacy, Fennell did not record the work, but within four years of its publication there were two competing readings available on disc by James Stobart (CRD) and David Honeyball (Hyperion). Both direct polished virtuoso London ensembles. Stobart, with a cream-of-the-crop student group, tends to stress the *maestoso* marking. His reading is very fine, but Honeyball's professional group also emphasizes brilliance which, in this music, is essential. His London Brass Virtuosi uses cornets and saxhorns, but the martial fanfares sound appropriately brazen. Among the four subsequent releases are three by renowned competition bands: the Grimethorpe Colliery Band (Chandos Brass), The Fairey Band (Egon), and the Tredegar Town Band (Albion). All are superbly played though none avoid the vibrato of which the composer disapproved. The Fairey Band, if you can find it, is the most dramatic and steadiest of tone, but the Tredegar ensemble is also quite exciting, and while soloists certainly don't "strictly avoid" vibrato, the fanfares, played on cornets, are admirably brilliant and straight of tone. (In their excellent jointly authored program notes to the Albion release, producer Paul Hindmarsh and Phillip Littlemore suggest the composer "mellowed" on this point prior to writing the *Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes* in 1953. I am not sure that is the case, for as late as 1958 he had pressed the flugelhorn soloist in the Ninth Symphony to play without vibrato until he was convinced that a little was needed to prevent it sounding "hard". In his program note for the same symphony, he refers, in the context of flugelhorns and brass bands, to "the bad habit of vibrato.")

For those curious, there is an orchestration by Martin Yates (Dutton Epoch) which softens the sound palate a bit – perhaps even to the advantage of the pastoral *Magali* section – while adapting the composer's brass writing to symphonic forces quite effectively. Constructed before parts for the original 1913 overture were located and reconstructed, it may have been assumed that the two works were structurally the same. They are not. (See Incidental Music to Plays by Shakespeare above.)

Recommendation: David Honeyball, London Brass Virtuosi – *with works by Copland, Grieg, Janáček, Richard Strauss, Britten, Holst* (Hyperion – CD, Download)

Alternate: Ian Porthouse, Tredegar Town Band – *with Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes, Variations for Brass Band and arrangements of Flourish for Wind Band, English Folk Song Suite, Sea Songs, The Truth from Above, Prelude on Rhosymedre, 49th Parallel Suite, Tuba Concerto* (Albion – CD, Download)

Allan Withington, The Fairey Band – *with works by Elgar, Ireland, Bliss* (Egon – CD)

James Stobart, London Collegiate Brass – *with works by Elgar, Holst, Ireland* (CRD – CD) or *with above plus works by Ireland, Walton, Tippett, Britten* (CRD – 2 CDs, Download)

Specialist: Martin Yates, Royal Scottish National Orchestra – *with Fat Knight, Serenade to Music* (Dutton Epoch – SACD, Download)

Flourish of Trumpets for a Folk Dance Festival

Vaughan Williams was nearly as great an admirer of folk dancing as he was of folk songs and was the president of the English Folk Dance and Song Society from 1932 until his death. Even when busy with large projects, he found time to participate in and occasionally compose for festivals. This 30-second-long work was written for the first International Folk

Dance Festival in London in 1935 and was originally titled *Flourish for Trumpets (or Cornets), Horns, Trombones, Side Drum and Cymbals (founded on the Morris Call)*. It is commonly abbreviated as *Flourish on the Morris Call* while the title in the headline is from Kennedy's *Catalogue*. Vaughan Williams composed a number of flourishes (fanfares), but these three titles denote this same composition.

Flourish on the Morris Call is scored for the sections of the brass band listed in that first unwieldy title, excluding baritone horns and tubas. It was recorded in 1936 by the Morris Motor Band led by Sydney Wood (Columbia 78 rpm) after their performance at the festival. Released in 1937, it has seemingly vanished since, but John Wilson and Onyx Brass (Chandos) have recorded it for modern brass ensemble aficionados: virtuoso playing and lots of verve. It is touted as a premiere recording, but that would be of Christopher Gordon's edition for symphonic brass.

Recommendation: John Wilson, Onyx Brass – *with brass ensemble works by Walton, Adams, Britten, Florence Price, Arnold, Gershwin, Gordon Langford, Joseph Horovitz, Bernstein (*Chandos – CD, Download)

Flourish for Three Trumpets / Four Cambridge Flourishes for Four Trumpets

The *Flourish for Three Trumpets* was written on a request from the organizer of a performance of the *Festival Te Deum* (1937) by a massed choir of Staffordshire school children in 1951 and received at least two additional performances in that year and the next. It was not available to collectors, however, until 70 years later when it, the *Four Cambridge Flourishes for Four Trumpets*, and the *Vaughan Williams on Brass* release were recorded by the excellent Tredegar Town Band. (Note: the flourishes appear on the separate *Serenade* CD.) These additional four flourishes – Vaughan Williams disliked the fanfare designation – were found in the British Library collection of the composer's papers, in manuscript and uncatalogued. They were edited by Christopher Gordon and are making their first appearance on this release. The date – and for that matter, the attribution to Cambridge – are uncertain, the latter due to the composer's challenging handwriting. Best guess is that they were composed about the same time as the other *Flourish*. All are played here on B♭ cornets.

Recommendation: Ian Porthouse, Members of Tredegar Town Band – *with The Wasps– March Past of the Kitchen Utensils, Serenade to Music, She's Like a Swallow, The Winter's Gone and Past, I will give my Love an Apple, For All the Saints, Suite for Four Hands, Variations on Aberystwyth, Pezzo Ostinato, Five Mystical Songs-The Call, Two Herefordshire Carols, Dives and Lazarus (choral), God be with You Till We Meet Again (*Albion – CD, Download)

Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes

Impressed upon hearing the International Staff Band of the Salvation Army in a concert in Dorking, Vaughan Williams returned to writing for brass band in 1954 with this marvelous composition. As a start, he seems to have revisited the 1920 *Three Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn-Tunes* – the similarity in names can cause confusion – but the work for band is a single movement and the treatment of the two hymns in common, *Calfaria* and *Hyfrydol*, is quite different. Instead of *Rhosymedre*, the tune in the second of the earlier preludes,

Ebenezer in both minor and major mode is used as the primary theme in the band piece, with *Hyfrydol* serving as a touching and eventually majestic finale.

Not surprisingly, Salvation Army bands have embraced the work enthusiastically, and at least seven recordings have been made by the charitable organization's bands in the United Kingdom, United States, and New Zealand. Only two have been issued commercially in a digital format. Happily, one is the premiere performance broadcast by the BBC in 1955 with the International Staff Band conducted by Bernard Adams (Albion). Though a bit rough in its emphatic articulation, heavy on the vibrato, and more measured than subsequent performances, the sense of occasion and new discovery make it a moving historic document. Far more polished is the fine recent traversal by the Tredegar Town Band led by Ian Porthouse (Albion). Less portentous, but still impressively weighty and powerful, it includes percussion, though this could use more presence. So too can that of the London Brass Virtuosi with David Honeyball leading (Hyperion/Helios), though the wonderfully articulate performance, sans characteristic brass band vibrato, is otherwise splendid. Also excellent is the 1992 recording by the New York Staff Band – the first Salvation Army band – led by Brian Bowen (Triumphonic). Bowen makes much of the composer's contrasts and dynamics, the band indulges in little of the characteristic vibrato of British ensembles, and the percussion is more forwardly balanced. For me it's too close to call, but forced to choose I will go for the brilliantly recorded London Brass Virtuosi release, with the other two right there on the shelf next to it.

A concert band arrangement by Jim Curnow, recorded by Philip E. Hill and the Band of the Grenadier Guards (Emblem), adds chimes and orchestral bells. (Stephen Chenette [CBC] adds these to the brass band score, putting an otherwise pleasant performance out of contention.) The result of this and Hill's deliberate pacing is a funereal quality the composer surely did not intend; it is recommended only to the incurably curious. An arrangement for orchestra by Gordon Jacob has so far gone unrecorded.

Recommendation: David Honeyball, London Brass Virtuosi – *with works by Ireland, Elgar* (Hyperion/Helios – CD, Download)

Alternate: Ian Porthouse, Tredegar Town Band – *with Henry the Fifth Overture, Variations for Brass Band and arrangements of Flourish for Wind Band, English Folk Song Suite, Sea Songs, The Truth from Above, Prelude on Rhosymedre, 49th Parallel Suite, Tuba Concerto* (Albion – CD, Download)

Brian Bowen, New York Staff Band of the Salvation Army – *with works and arrangements by Brian Bowen, Bramwell Coles, Stephen Bula, John Peterson, Benjamin Godard, et al.* (Triumphonic – CD)

Historical: Bernard Adams, International Staff Band of the Salvation Army – *with On Wenlock Edge, Merciless Beauty, Five Tudor Portraits [various artists and ensembles]* (Albion – CD, Download)

Specialist: Philip E. Hill, Band of the Grenadier Guards (wind band) – *with Flourish for Wind Band, Toccata Marziale, English Folk Song Suite, Sea Songs, Fantasia on Greensleeves, The Wasps Overture and March Past of the Kitchen Utensils*, *The Old 100th, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, 49th Parallel Prelude, Prelude on*

Rhosymedre, Linden Lea, Flourish for Three Trumpets (Emblem – CD, Download)

Variations for Brass Band

The year 1956 found Vaughan Williams handing out the prizes at the National Brass Band Championship, a reflection of the positive impression the *Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes* had made on the brass band world. The feeling was reciprocal, and the composer agreed to produce the test piece for the First Section of the next year's competition despite already being occupied with a number of substantial projects. *Variations for Brass Band* is surely the finest piece written for brass band competition and is one of the composer's masterpieces regardless of ensemble. Test pieces can be formulaic, but this is a remarkably innovative work. Its form was new to this genre when written, although since it, theme and variations test pieces have become more common. The eleven variations are unusually diverse – from waltz, polonaise, and arabesque to canon and fugue – but develop organically from shorter almost strophic statements to the concluding chorale, with a core variation – the ninth – of profound beauty. Colors are rich and varied and textures are the focus rather than virtuosic solos, with an emphasis on the darker instruments.

Commercial recordings from widely available labels are relatively rare, in part, one suspects, because of the extraordinary challenges the work poses to the players. Three exceptional British competition bands have recorded it, one twice. The 1997 recording of the Williams Fairey Band led by Bryan Hurdley (Chandos) has long been my favorite, with the soundstage open and clear and the band placed so the antiphonal effects are most effective. Virtuosity is second to none with details and textures clearly delineated and the vibrato generous but mostly limited to lead players. The relative swiftness – a full minute faster than some performances – adds vitality and drama to the performance. Tempos are, in fact, closer to those in the manuscript (ignoring the metronome markings believed added by Frank Wright before publication) and the wonderfully mysterious ninth variation, in particular, is more captivating at near the prescribed speed.

No other recordings have supplanted it, though the Tredegar Town Band led by Martyn Brabbins (Albion), a brass band man from his youth, comes closest. Brabbins previously recorded the original edition with the Royal College of Music Brass Band (Hyperion), but the students are less precise than might be wished. This second recording of a new edition by Phillip Littlemore is impressive, with superb playing, an imposing dynamic range, and a dramatic emphasis on lower instruments. On the debit side, the sound is just slightly murky, the ninth variation is more *largo* than *adagio* – not so deliberate as some, but still paced below even the marginally slower metronome marking Littlemore suggests as alternative to Wright's – and the haunting opening of the final variation is not quite so magical here as with Hurdley's band. An earlier (1975) recording, led by Geoffrey Brand with the then John Foster Black Dyke Mills Band (Chandos), is also fine, though the heavier vibrato will not be to all tastes and muddies some textures and details. Vaughan Williams's percussion parts, which are included in all these recordings – they would not have been allowed in the 1957 competition – are often obscured in this release. The second of the recordings by the Black Dyke Band (as it is now known), led by Nicholas Childs (Doyen), is clearer, brilliantly played, and richly sonorous, but the Regionals 2005 CD (I've stretched the definition of *commercial* here) is difficult to find. Moreover, it moves at a statelier pacing, as do Bramwell Tovey and the Hannaford Street Silver Band (CBC), at the occasional expense of energy.

Tovey's band offers a more symphonic sound with straighter tone and an emphasis on clarity. Clarity is certainly a good thing, but Tovey's Canadian professionals can seem a bit cold.

Vaughan Williams died less than a year after the 1957 competition, and it fell to Gordon Jacob to transcribe the work for orchestra in 1959. The transcription has appeared on disc almost as often as the original, and while the latter holds a special place for brass fanciers, there is no denying the appeal of the many different instrumental colors available in a full orchestra. Inevitably, the character of the work is changed, but Jacob has exploited the extra resources skillfully. Two recordings stand out. Martin Yates (Dutton Epoch), recorded in the RSNO's resonant hall, suffers from some clouding of detail, but the forthright performance is both loving and at times quite exciting. However, it is Marriner (Philips/Eloquence) to whom I return for nuance and atmosphere, and for a long view that ties all the disparate elements into a thrilling whole. He proves just how well that ninth variation responds to being taken at a true *adagio* and gives the Chorale the space to be magnificent. The glorious brass helps in that.

It was inevitable that a wind band version would be wanted, and in 1988 Donald Hunsberger provided it for performance by his Eastman Wind Ensemble. This arrangement goes beyond a mere transcription. Hunsberger has revised the work for a larger, more diverse ensemble, smoothed transitions, added some harp glissandi and xylophone figures as punctuation, slowed marked tempos generally, and ended with a work much farther removed from Vaughan Williams's work than Jacob's orchestration. I suppose it is, on its own terms, effective, especially in his own recording (CBS). The only other recording is by Eugene Corporon and the Showa Wind Symphony (Cafua/GIA). Hunsberger is to be preferred. He not only manages to maintain tension better at the slower tempi but is more convincing in those transitions. And fine as the Japanese group is, the Eastman players are simply finer. For those with a special interest.

Recommendation (Brass): Bryan Hurdley, Williams Fairey Band – *with works by Cyril Jenkins, Alwyn, Rubbra, Simpson, Elgar* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Recommendation (Orchestra): Neville Marriner, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields – *with The Wasps - Overture, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, In the Fen Country, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* (Philips – CD, Download) or *with same plus Romance for Harmonica, The Lark Ascending, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Concerto Grosso, English Folk Song Suite, various folk song arrangements* (Eloquence – 2 CDs, Download)

Alternate: Martyn Brabbins, Tredegar Town Band – *with Henry the Fifth Overture, Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes, and arrangements of Flourish for Wind Band, English Folk Song Suite, Sea Songs, The Truth from Above, Prelude on Rhosymedre, 49th Parallel Suite, Tuba Concerto* (Albion – CD, Download)

Geoffrey Brand, John Foster Black Dyke Mills Band (Brass) – *with works by Gregson, G. Bailey, Bantock, Mathias, Langford* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Martin Yates, Royal Scottish National Orchestra (Orchestra) – *with The Blue Bird – Incidental Music, Norfolk Rhapsodies No. 1 and 2, Music for an EFDS Masque, Christmas Overture, Matthews: Norfolk March* (Dutton Epoch – SACD, Download)

Specialist: Donald Hunsberger, Eastman Wind Ensemble (Wind) – *with Toccata Marziale and works by Hindemith, Copland, Husa* (CBS – CD, Download)

CHAMBER WORKS

Though they have tended to be overshadowed by his larger-scale works, Vaughan Williams's chamber music should be of particular interest to anyone trying to better understand him as artist and person. There are some unpublished and unrecorded student pieces which are uncharacteristic, but among his more intimately scaled compositions are many of his finest and most innovative achievements. Though there are relatively few of them, his chamber works were produced throughout his career from young adulthood until the last year of his life, and familiarity with them allows the admirer to see most clearly the development of his art. And because they were often written for friends and artists he most admired, the emotional resources tapped for these pieces often run quite deep. They are among the most important hidden treasures that this discography hopes to make better known.

During Vaughan Williams's lifetime, only a handful of chamber works received much attention from record producers. The Music Group of London began to change that in the early 1970s with a series of recordings for EMI that are still an important part of the catalogue. The Nash Ensemble expanded on their work significantly, producing two releases for Hyperion in 2001 and 2002, a total of three CDs. These offered outstanding performances of much of the composer's chamber music, including, in the latter of these, the premiere recordings of many newly published early works. These are essential listening for anyone interested in this repertoire. Most recently, other labels, including the Society's own, Albion, have continued the exploration of the composer's chamber music.

This section will explore instrumental chamber works and arrangements of those. There are, as well, vocal works with chamber ensemble accompaniment that will be surveyed in the section in Part Two dedicated to his vocal output.

String Quartet in C minor

Composed in 1898, when Vaughan Williams was 26 years old, and apparently only performed once during his lifetime in 1904, this quartet was written after his honeymoon studies in Berlin with Max Bruch and prior to his completion of his Doctor of Music degree at Cambridge. Described by Michael Kennedy in his 1996 *Catalogue* as "one of the most significant of the early unpublished works," it was published in 2002 after it and four other youthful works originally withheld by the composer's widow were approved by her for performance. These were edited by Bernard Benoliel for Faber Music and concurrently recorded by members of the Nash Ensemble (Hyperion).

The String Quartet in C minor, a substantial work running 25 minutes in its four movements, shows Vaughan Williams pushing against the influence of the German Romantics he studied with Stanford and Bruch. In the charming opening, he seems to be channeling Dvořák rather than Brahms. Bruch's influence might be detected in the folk-like melody of the melancholy Andantino movement, but he seems to be trying throughout to change the mood, and in the Finale – in which modal tonality makes an appearance in an *adagio* variation – the theme and six variations seem to throw aside all pretense of unity as Vaughan Williams appears to be parodying the disparate styles he uses. It is cheeky and a great deal of fun.

The fine premiere of this important but immature work by the Nash Ensemble has been joined some twenty years later by another fine reading by the German Verdi Quartett in its

final recording before it disbanded in 2021. The Nash is brighter and lighter and more willing to explore the extremes of the composer's dynamics. The Verdi takes a sterner approach, finding something more portentous – though quite moving at times – in the Andantino and rather darker and serious in the concluding theme and variations finale. I like both, but the sunnier Nash remains the favorite.

Recommendation: The Nash Ensemble – *with Quintet in D major, Piano Quintet in C minor, Scherzo, Nocturne and Scherzo, Suite de Ballet, Romance and Pastorale, Romance for Viola and Piano, Household Music (*Hyperion – 2 CDs, Download)

Alternate: Verdi Quartett – *with String Quartet No. 1, String Quartet No. 2* (CPO – CD, Download)

Quintet in D major

Though Vaughan Williams chafed a bit at Stanford's emphasis on the German Romantics during his studies at the Royal College of Music, Brahms is still a dominant influence on this 1898 quintet for clarinet, horn, violin, cello, and piano. It is a delightfully good-humored work in four movements, rather like a serenade, but it certainly would not be identified by most as a work by the English composer. It was first performed in 1901 but was put away some time after that and only revived 100 years later, with his widow's acquiescence, in a performance prior to its 2002 publication. Members of the Nash Ensemble included it in their 2002 recording of early works for Hyperion.

The writing for this rarely used combination of instruments is wonderfully accomplished, in particular that of the piano, which is often thought to be a weakness for the composer. (His self-deprecating remarks didn't help.) The only contemporary model would be the Fibich Quintet, Op. 42, published in 1895 or 1896, and it is *possible* he heard it, perhaps in Berlin with Bruch. Certain similarities in concept, especially between the Czech composer's jokey Scherzo and Vaughan Williams's Intermezzo, make one wonder. Or perhaps it was clarinetist George Clinton, for whose chamber concerts it was written, who knew of it. In any case, here are but fleeting glimpses of the composer he was to become, but that should not dissuade anyone from exploring this fine work. In addition to the first recording, there are two others to consider by members of the London Soloists Ensemble (Naxos) and members of the Royal Northern Sinfonia Chamber Ensemble (Dutton Epoch). Any of these would serve admirably, though the RNS Chamber Ensemble might well be preferred by those more comfortable with its overtly expressive approach than I am. The playing is exemplary in all three, but while admiring the lyrical ardor of the Dutton performance, one must wonder if Vaughan Williams, even in 1898, would have wanted a performance that so emphasizes its German Romantic roots. The recommendations are made in that light but accompanying works may also be a deciding factor.

Recommendation: The Nash Ensemble – *with String Quartet in C minor, Piano Quintet in C minor, Scherzo, Nocturne and Scherzo, Suite de Ballet, Romance and Pastorale, Romance for Viola and Piano, Household Music (*Hyperion – 2 CDs, Download)

Alternate: London Soloists Ensemble – *with Piano Quintet in C minor, Romance for Viola, Six Studies in English Folk Song* (Naxos – CD, Download)

Sonata for Horn and Piano

The Dutton Epoch release of chamber compositions by the Royal Northern Sinfonia Chamber Ensemble includes one work unique to it: a reconstruction of a sonata for horn and piano completed by Vaughan Williams in 1903. Never published, it survives in a complete manuscript of the solo part with some piano cues, along with seven pages of sketches. The piano score was largely recomposed by conductor Martin Yates in 2019, using the composer's themes and annotations, and it was subsequently recorded for this release. Yates, in his program note, offers evidence that the challenging horn part may have been written for the famed horn virtuoso Adolf Borsdorf, one of the founding members of the London Symphony Orchestra. Whether it was performed by him is uncertain, but it seems likely that he inspired and influenced the work.

We will, of course, never know what Vaughan Williams would have written for the piano, but Yates has done an outstanding job of creating a plausibly idiomatic accompaniment to the composer's horn part. Pianist Victor Sangiorgio plays it with sensitivity and style, and Royal Northern Sinfonia principal French hornist Peter Francomb performs with great flair, clearly relishing the soaring melodies, lovingly shading the nobly themed Romanza, and dashing off the virtuoso Scherzo and Finale with seeming effortlessness. This is not quite yet mature Vaughan Williams in style, though why that would matter to anyone is not clear. Here we have a significant new sonata for the solo French horn repertoire.

Recommendation: Peter Francomb (horn), Victor Sangiorgio (piano) – *with Quintet in D major, Household Music, Bax: Horn Sonata (*Dutton Epoch – SACD, Download)

Piano Quintet in C minor

Vaughan Williams spent a great deal of effort revising his Piano Quintet in C minor; it was first completed in 1903, significantly reworked in 1904 and then again in 1905 for its first performance. It's last known to have been performed in 1918 before being withdrawn. It was not entirely forgotten, however, for he was to use the theme of the final movement in his 1954 Violin Sonata, expanding it somewhat in that later work. Scored for piano, violin, viola, cello and double bass – the same instrumentation as Schubert's *Trout* Quintet and Dvořák's Quintet, Op. 77 – it is laid out in three movements: a magnificent Brahmsian Allegro con fuoco, with striking melodies and inspired development, followed by a lyrical but harmonically restless Andante and a tense, mercurial Fantasia (quasi variazioni) that finds hard-won repose. This is a major work both in its proportions – it runs about 30 minutes – and in the affirmation it provides that even had he not obtained "a little French polish" from Ravel, Vaughan Williams would have been a great, though necessarily different, composer.

Since its publication in 2002, the Quintet has had six outings on disc, three of them – unusual for these early works – by non-British ensembles. Any of these can give pleasure, so choosing some to recommend is difficult. One must, of course, recognize the deeply moving first recording by members of the Nash Ensemble, but there is no denying that its reading tends to smooth out the contrasts a bit. The (unfortunately named) Swedish group, Stockholm Syndrome Ensemble produces a considerably more gripping and exuberant performance, but it is a bit hard driven. The Schubert Ensemble seemed to have found the perfect balance of light and dark – and the chiaroscuro serves this work well – until I heard the quintet made up of Mark Bebbington and principals of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. By embracing the work's German Romantic roots, and playing with exceptional sensitivity, they redefined

perfection in this music. For those seeking a truly Continental approach to the piece, the fabergé-quintett, members of the NDR Symphony Orchestra, beguiles with an elegant lift to the rhythms and uncommonly subtle string-forward balancing of the voices.

Recommendation: Mark Bebbington (piano), Duncan Riddle (violin), Abigail Fenna (viola), Richard Harwood (cello), Benjamin Cunningham (double bass) – *with The Lark Ascending, Romance for Viola and Piano, Fantasia on the Old 104th Psalm Tune* (Resonus – CD, Download)

Alternate: Schubert Ensemble – *with On Wenlock Edge, Romance and Pastorale* (Chandos – CD, Download)

The Nash Ensemble – *with String Quartet in C minor, Quintet in D major, Scherzo, Nocturne and Scherzo, Suite de Ballet, Romance and Pastorale, Romance for Viola and Piano, Household Music* (Hyperion – 2 CDs, Download)

fabergé-quintett – *with Goetz: Quintet* (Es-Dur – CD, Download)

Ballade and Scherzo
and
Nocturne and Scherzo

Since one is a revision of the other, these two works will be considered together. Vaughan Williams had begun collecting folk songs in 1903, and in 1907–1908 he would go to France to study for three months with Ravel. These two events are often identified as essential points in the development of his mature voice, and here are two pairs of works, between these events, that allow some of that process to be heard. In 1904, the composer finished a pair of short pieces for a string quintet with two violas, *Ballade and Scherzo*, the latter of the two a bracing march worked out in a German style with canonic counterpoint. In 1906, Vaughan Williams revisited the work, revising the *Ballade* into a piece he named *Nocturne*, a composition that starts from Wagnerian chromaticism and develops into something remarkably like early Schoenberg: think *Verklärte Nacht*. More characteristic, though, is the new Scherzo based on the modal folk tune *As I walked out*, which Vaughan Williams had collected in 1903 and 1904 in Essex. Here is clear evidence that the composer was already considering French models for working out the exposition of the tune before he ever went to Paris, and the haunting statement of the full melody near the end clearly prefigures the more mature voice he was to develop in the next few years.

Neither of these pairs of works seem to have been performed in the composer's lifetime. The *Nocturne and Scherzo* is included on the Nash Ensemble's two CD set of early chamber music on Hyperion, along with the 1904 *Scherzo*. They are not essential listening unless one wishes to trace the experimentation of the still developing artist. For such a specialist purpose, these are indispensable.

Specialist Recommendation: The Nash Ensemble – *with String Quartet in C minor, Piano Quintet in C minor, Quintet in D major, Suite de Ballet, Romance and Pastorale, Romance for Viola and Piano, Household Music* (Hyperion – 2 CDs, Download)

String Quartet No. 1 in G minor

Ravel famously stated, with apparent approbation, that Vaughan Williams was "my only pupil who does not write my music." One need only listen to the first of the English composer's numbered string quartets to realize this is not entirely accurate. While he quickly assimilated the Frenchman's lessons into a style uniquely his own, there are works where the influence shows through most clearly, and this quartet, begun immediately after his studies in 1908, is primary among them. As the English composer noted, it "caused a friend to say I must have been having tea with Debussy." Even the revision of 1921 – the only version that now exists – does not disguise this, and that and the impression that this is a transitional work may be why this quartet has not received as much attention as the one that followed 35 years later.

The earliest recording of the quartet was in 1963 by the Aeolian String Quartet (Delta/Revolution LP). It has never been issued in digital format but should be. Among those that have been, the Ravelian clarity and luminosity are most obvious in the performance of the Britten Quartet (EMI/Warner) in a program, when first released, which begins with Ravel's own quartet. There are English folk music influences as well, and the Britten Quartet does not neglect them, but these are the aspects most noticeable in the loving performance of the Music Group of London (EMI). Sadly, its recording has never made it to the digital domain either, though the Second Quartet, released on the same LP in 1973, was reissued on CD in 1994.

There have since been recordings by the English Quartet (Unicorn-Kanchana/Alto), the Medici String Quartet (Nimbus), the Maggini String Quartet (Naxos), the Tippett Quartet (SOMM), and the Verdi Quartett (CPO). Standing out among these is the Medici, all warmth and charm with beautifully pacing in a recording that is very closely miked. The foursome is pictured playing for Ursula Vaughan Williams and Jean Stewart in a booklet photo, so perhaps it was accorded some special insights for its heartfelt performance. Then there is the Maggini, which plays below the indicated tempos in all but the last pages of the Finale: well below in the Minuet and Trio, thereby changing its impetuous character. But there is no gainsaying the arresting beauty of the performance, especially of the Romance, which is exquisite. Note, in particular, the very close attention paid to the dynamic extremes; here is one ensemble that differentiates between *pp*, *ppp*, and *pppp* to great effect. The Britten Quartet may not observe these quite so faithfully, but its tempos are those given, the insights are many, and the performance is lovely. I award it the palm leaf, though I would not be without the Maggini or the Medici for that matter.

Recommendation: Britten Quartet – *with On Wenlock Edge, Ravel: String Quartet* (EMI – CD) or *The Collector's Edition/The New Collector's Edition* (EMI/Warner – 30 CDs)

Alternate: Maggini String Quartet – *with Phantasy Quintet, String Quartet No. 2* (Naxos – CD, Download)

Medici String Quartet – *with Phantasy Quintet, String Quartet No. 2* (Nimbus – CD, Download)

Phantasy Quintet

Vaughan Williams's *Phantasy Quintet* for two violins, two violas, and cello came about as a commission in 1912 on behalf of Walter W. Cobbett by the Worshipful Company of Musicians. Cobbett was a wealthy British industrialist and talented amateur music scholar and violinist who, beginning in 1905, had established a generous prize to encourage the composition of relatively short – originally no longer than 12 minutes – single-movement chamber works for strings conceptually based on the Elizabethan viol fantasy. *Phantasy* was Cobbett's preferred spelling for such compositions. The quintet, in four continuous movements, lasts a couple of minutes longer than the statutory twelve, but Cobbett was thrilled, finding it "so exactly the Phantasy as I conceived it that it may well serve as a prototype to those who care to write in this form in the future." A solo viola introduces the pentatonic theme on which the whole is built, there is a breathless Scherzo driven by the cello, a refined Alla Sarabande – sans cello and muted – and a kaleidoscopic Burlesca finale with a *Lark*-like "quasi cadenza" for the first violin and an ethereal conclusion.

Older members of the RVW Society may remember the recording of this work reissued in 1976 on LP by the Barbirolli Society. It was made in 1925 by the Music Society String Quartet in which John Barbirolli was the cellist and is a recording ripe for digital reissue. Meanwhile, the much-loved 1973 outing by the Music Group of London (EMI/Warner) is among the eight that have been released in digital formats, and the warm woodiness of Ian Jewel's viola sets the tone for the whole performance, which has a cozy, well-lived-in quality. Other quintets, however, have been more responsive to the wide dynamic range the composer specifies, and only one has been completely true to his tempos. That is the Nash Ensemble (Hyperion), which also brings more intensity and a nimbler response to the mercurial aspects of the music. So does the Maggini Quartet (Naxos) which, as usual, carefully scales and balances dynamics, and though it tends toward the slow side of the *lentos*, never loses the dance's lightness – as opposed to simply softness – in the Alla Sarabande. In fact, grace, elegance, and brilliance of execution are found throughout, and this earns it the primary recommendation. The Piatti Quartet (Rubicon) has the warmth and beauty of the Music Group of London with a deeper sense of longing, especially in the Prelude and Alla Sarabande, which it takes more slowly than most. Like the London ensemble, it seems more inclined to lyricism than fervency and drama of the moment, though the virtuosic Scherzo lacks nothing in zeal. It softens dynamic contrasts in comparison with the Maggini and Nash ensembles, but for those who respond to its rich sound and evocative style, it is a wonderful performance and part of a fascinating program.

So changed is it by the transformation, it is a little harder to recommend the organ arrangement by Henry Ley of the Alla Sarabande movement. Still, it is a lovely piece of writing and David Briggs works wonders at keeping it light and graceful. Organ fanciers take note, as it is part of a comprehensive collection of Vaughan Williams's organ works.

Recommendation: Maggini String Quartet, Garfield Jackson (viola) – *with String Quartets Nos. 1 and 2* (Naxos – CD, Download)

Alternate: The Nash Ensemble – *with The Lake in the Mountains, Six Studies in English Folk Song, Violin Sonata, String Quartet No. 2* (Hyperion – CD, Download)

Music Group of London, David – *with Violin Sonata, Six Studies In English Folk Song, String Quartet No. 2* (EMI/Warner – CD, Download)

Piatti Quartet, Zahra Benyounes (viola) – *with works by Boyle, Howells, Arnold, Augusta Holmès, Tippett* (Rubicon – CD, Download)

Specialist: David Briggs (organ) (arr. Briggs – Alla Sarabande movement only) – *with Two Organ Preludes Founded on Welsh Folk Songs, Prelude and Fugue in C minor, Three Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes, Passacaglia on BGC, A Wedding Tune for Ann, A Wedding Canon for Nancy, various transcriptions, Ley: Fantasia on Aberystwyth (*Albion – 2 CDs, Download)

Suite de Ballet

This four-movement suite – three miniature dances for flute and piano plus a free-flowing opening titled Improvisation – was likely composed in 1913 for virtuoso flutist Louis Fleury. Vaughan Williams had met Fleury in 1913 while producing incidental music for F. R. Benson's stage productions at Stratford-upon-Avon (see section above) and perhaps earlier while studying in Paris. Through a reference to it in a letter, it is known that the suite was performed by the French flutist in 1920, and that same source alludes to at least one other prior performance. This, the style of the work with its experiments in Impressionistic bitonality, and other evidence from sketchbooks, led biographer Michael Kennedy to propose this date. The suite was found among the composer's papers after his death. (Fleury presumably kept his copy, which has not been located.) It was edited by Roy Douglas, who added tempo markings to the first movement and most of the dynamics and articulations throughout, as the manuscript had few.

Six recordings have been released since this slight but challenging work was published in 1961, all beautifully done. While there are interpretive differences, all are technically brilliant, and availability will likely be the deciding issue. Michael Cox's bravura 1988 premiere recording (Kingdom) is, sadly, nearly impossible to locate. Kenneth Smith's (ASV), part of a three-disc survey of solo flute works, is just as fine and just as out of print. Philippa Davies's charismatic performance (Hyperion) is included in the Nash Ensemble's two-disc survey of the composer's early chamber pieces; the whole release is a primary recommendation but is available new only as a download. Jan Vinci's recording (Albany) is appealing as well, but the companion works will interest primarily flute aficionados. Recordings by Adam Walker (Chandos) and Richard Sherman (Blue Griffin) have more stylistically consistent disc mates, so they seem the best alternatives. I prefer Walker's virtuoso charm to Sherman's more measured lyrical approach, so Walker receives my top vote.

Finally: In 1989, composer/pianist Roger Steptoe arranged the suite for flute and strings; it received its first and, so far, only recording in 2018 with Anna Noakes as soloist and Martin Yates conducting (Dutton Epoch). Tempos in the fast movements are less headlong than in the piano-accompanied recordings, but the transformation is perfectly consistent with the composer's Ravel-influenced style. Contrary to usual practice, this arrangement is listed as an alternate. There is nothing specialist about its appeal. On the other hand, scintillating as Ransom Wilson's performance (EMI) of the suite's Passepied may be – and here there is no slowdown to accommodate the orchestra – only a completist would search out this CD for these two minutes of music.

Recommendation: Adam Walker (flute), Huw Watkins (piano) – *with works by Bowen, Lennox Berkeley, Alwyn, Bax, Ferguson* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Alternate: Richard Sherman (flute), Genadi Zagor (piano) – *with works by Cyril Scott, Mathias, Harty, Bowen* (Blue Griffin – CD, Download)

Philippa Davies (flute), Ian Brown (piano) – *with String Quartet in C minor, Piano Quintet in C minor, Quintet in D major, Scherzo, Nocturne and Scherzo, Romance and Pastorale, Romance for Viola and Piano, Household Music* (Hyperion – 2 CDs, Download)

Martin Yates, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Anna Noakes (arr. Steptoe) – *with Richard II Incidental Music, Fantasia on Sussex Folk Tunes, Songs of Travel (orch. vers.)* (Dutton Epoch – SACD, Download)

Specialist: Ransom Wilson, Chamber Orchestra, Ransom Wilson (Passepied only) – *with works by Ravel, Bartok, Damase, Fauré, Satie, Poulenc, Falla, Pierre Caline, Grainger, Traditional* (EMI – CD)

Two Pieces (Romance and Pastorale)

The date of this little-known gem's composition is even less certain than that of the *Suite de Ballet*. It was published in 1923, but it seems very likely that it is another of the works, like *The Lark Ascending*, whose premiere and publication were postponed by the composer's service in the First World War. Somewhere between 1912 and 1914 is the best guess.

Vaughan Williams's affection for violinist Dorothy Longman (D.M.L.), to whom the work is dedicated, shines through its lyric beauty. She was for many years a violinist in the Leith Hill Festival orchestra, which the composer conducted, and she and her husband R.J. Longman, a publisher, were close friends for many years. The Romance, with upward soaring passages that recall those of *The Lark*, is full of tenderness and a small measure of melancholy, while the modal Pastorale is poised but heartbreakingly gentle.

The first recording which the RVW Society sponsored, featuring violinist Lydia Mordkovitch (IMP/Carlton), included the premiere recording of this work. Mordkovitch plays beautifully, but her extrovert performance and opulent tone tend to overstate the delicate emotions expressed here. Marianne Thorsen (Hyperion) is more inward – and thereby more in line with what is written – and her performance is no less attractive and ultimately more touching for her reserve. This is part of the Nash Ensemble release of early chamber works. Brighter in affect, but also nicely understated, Simon Blendis's performance on Chandos is similarly appealing, and in truth the choice may well come down to one's preference for the couplings. Some may prefer Tasmin Little's more artfully interpreted reading, also on Chandos, and they will get no argument from me. Another recording, by violist Tina Louise Cayoutte (Centaur), is performed in the original key, but with some passages transposed down an octave. It suffers from undistinguished playing and should probably be disregarded by all but those intrigued by the novelty.

For those willing to settle for just the Romance, Siân Philipps and Per Rundberg (Claudio) offer a reading of melting lyricism with just the right amount darkness in the middle. The sound is state of the art on CD or Blu-ray Audio. Too bad they did not record the Pastorale.

Recommendation: Marianne Thorsen (violin), Ian Brown (piano) – *with String Quartet in C minor, Piano Quintet in C minor, Quintet in D major, Scherzo, Nocturne and Scherzo, Suite de Ballet, Romance for Viola and Piano, Household Music* (Hyperion – 2 CDs, Download)

Alternate: Simon Blendis (violin), William Howard (piano) – *with On Wenlock Edge, Piano Quintet in C Minor* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Tasmin Little (violin), Piers Lane (piano) – *with sonatas by Bridge, Ireland, Bliss, and work by Lloyd Webber* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Siân Philipps (piano), Per Rundgard (piano) (Romance only) – *with The Lark Ascending and works by John Hawkins, Grace Williams, Paul Ladmirault, Egon Wellesz, Sally Beamish* (Claudio – CD, Blu-ray Audio, Download)

Romance for Viola and Piano

This is the last of the chamber works whose dates of composition may have been made uncertain by the First World War. Found among Vaughan Williams's paper after his death, it was likely intended for Lionel Tertis who premiered *Flos Campi* and to whom the Suite for Viola was dedicated. The year of composition most often proposed is 1914, though Michael Kennedy suggests it could also have been written in the 1920s. Stephen Connock suggests as late as 1934 or 1936. What is certain is that it was published in 1962 after the viola part was edited by Bernard Shore and the piano part by Eric Gritton, and it was they who first played the work in concert and for broadcast that same year.

The appeal of this short work – technically challenging and emotionally complex – and the obvious experience that Vaughan Williams brought to his writing – the viola, after all, was his own instrument of choice – are clear reasons for its acceptance since. The first recording was made in 1984 by Kim Kashkashian (ECM) who set a high standard in technical facility for those that followed. She also set the tempo a notch slower than the composer's *andantino*. Others have followed suit, but most with more raw intensity in the central section with its stark dynamic contrasts, dissonances, complex chording (double, triple, and quadruple stops), range extremes, and *appassionato* notation. The return to the opening material after all this uproar, especially once both viola and piano are muted, restores the lyricism the title implies and is almost like a sigh of relief.

The Nash Ensemble's valuable set of early chamber music includes a fine dramatic reading by Lawrence Power and Ian Brown (Hyperion), although the primo tempo is closer to *larghetto* than *andantino*. Benjamin Beck (Genuin), a student of Kashkashian, is a bit closer to score in basic pulse, is wonderfully expressive, creates a heartbreaking hesitancy in the hushed opening, attacks the central section with tremendous passion, and is then meltingly beautiful in the reflective passages nearer the end. His duo partner, Marie Rosa Günter, stands out in an impressive group of accompanists. They edge out the Paul Coletti/Leslie Howard duo (Hyperion/Helios) which is very dramatic – almost aggressively so – and resolves the conflict most beautifully. The ranking is a very close thing. Jordan Bak with Richard Uttley (Delphian) is decidedly *lento* in the beginning and end, with a distinctively plaintive quality at the start, a definite feeling of struggle in the central section, and a striking sadness at the end. I am less taken with the large, unmarked break at the awkward transition seven measures before the *poco animando*, but the impact of the whole is winning. The viola-only works by Jonathan Harvey and Bright Sheng appearing on either side of it are fascinating, and the Sheng quite exquisite, but are very different in character.

Among the 20-some recordings extant are two arrangements. One, with harp accompaniment and Doris Lederer on viola (Centaur) is reasonably paced, but the harp, deftly played by Jude Mollenhauer, works best in the sections with vertical chording and less well in the contrapuntal middle section. In the other, violist Roger Chase (Dutton Epoch) has orchestrated the work, in the process remaking it into a wholly pastoral string work. Some may like it better than I do. It is undoubtedly lovely, but it changes the essence of the original.

Recommendation: Benjamin Beck (viola), Marie Rosa Günter (piano) – *with works by Schumann, Prokofiev, Britten, François-Hugues Leclair* (Genuin – CD, Download)

Alternate: Paul Coletti (viola), Leslie Howard (piano) – *with works by Britten, Clarke, Grainger, Bax, Bridge* (Hyperion/Helios – CD, Download)

Lawrence Power (viola), Ian Brown (piano) – *with String Quartet in C minor, Piano Quintet in C minor, Quintet in D major, Scherzo, Nocturne and Scherzo, Suite de Ballet, Romance and Pastorale, Household Music* (Hyperion – 2 CDs, Download)

Jordan Bak (viola), Richard Uttley (piano) – *with works by Jonathan Harvey, Bright Sheng, Bax, Augusta Reed Thomas, Britten* (Delphian – CD, Download)

Specialist: Doris Lederer (viola), Jude Mollenhauer (harp) (arr. unknown) – *with Fantasia on Greensleeves, Six Studies in English Folk Song, A Winter's Willow, and works by Bax, Bridge, Britten, Grainger* (Centaur – CD, Download)

Stephen Bell, BBC Concert Orchestra, Roger Chase – *with works by Stanley Bate and William Henry Bell* (Dutton Epoch – CD)

Six Studies in English Folk Song

Vaughan Williams's *Six Studies in English Folk Song*, composed in 1926 for celebrated cellist May Mukle, is the most recorded of his chamber works by a factor of three. Its six folk-song-based settings – these are not literal quotations of folk tunes – are short, often reflective, and speak to the heart when the soloist is sensitive to them. While the approach differs slightly from study to study, each includes a solo presentation of the melody and then elaboration by the solo instrument over the harmonized restatement in the accompaniment. The pianist often gets a moment in the sun, while the soloist provides counterpoint or background. Many of the tunes on which the melodies are based are familiar: Lovely on the Water (titled The Springtime of the Year in his *Five English Folksongs*) (*Adagio*), Spurn Point (*Andante sostenuto*), Van Diemen's Land (*Larghetto*), She Borrowed Some of Her Mother's Gold (*Lento*), The Lady and the Dragon (*Andante tranquillo*), and the lively As I Walked Over London Bridge (*Allegro vivace*), the only up-tempo study.

Their charisma and the relatively modest technical challenges make the studies a popular recital piece for artists looking for a work that is tuneful and accessible. Other than the concluding *allegro vivace* study, and some challenging pianissimo and softer high notes, these are not technical showpieces, so expression becomes the artist's focus. The composer provided versions for violin, viola, and clarinet in addition to the original cello, and they have been adapted to others with varying success. We now find recordings of transcriptions for

everything from tuba to the unlikely combination of accordion, recorder, cello, and Greek bouzouki. All of the solo arrangements use the original piano accompaniment. In addition, some artists have arranged the accompaniment for string chamber groups or even orchestra. Most arrangers have been content to leave the solo part as is, with only the necessary transpositions and some adjustments to register to accommodate range limitations. Others, notably American saxophonist and oboist Robert Stanton, have more invasively edited their versions, adding metronome markings and even modifying a tempo in one case, adjusting dynamics, changing grace notes into literal notation, inserting breathing points at the cost of the flow of long lines, and, on occasion, removing background solo parts when the piano has the lead. It is notable that some artists choose to ignore such changes, and I tend to prefer those who stick more closely to the original conception in dynamics and phrasing.

In a sense, the instrumentation seems to matter little, though some instruments are more suited than others to creating the gentle, poignant qualities inherent in the score. But finding the best regardless of solo instrument among the dozens of recordings would mean comparing apples to oranges. So, I have done some grouping of instruments or instrument families. I make recommendations where there are multiples and offer a brief assessment for the unique. In keeping with what has become standard practice, arrangements by others will be treated as specialist recommendations, though I will differentiate between primary and alternate recommendations where appropriate. In all cases the composer's dictum that these lovely miniatures should be treated "with love" is kept well in mind.

Cello

The first recording of the original version was made in 1973 by cellist Eileen Croxford and pianist David Parkhouse (EMI/Warner) of the Music Group of London. These readings are particularly songlike and spontaneous and remain the outstanding performances of this version on disc. The opening studies are soulful and inward, with the oft-subdued dynamics heeded throughout. The last two sparkle with wit and energy. So do those of Natalie Clein and her pianist partner Christian Ihle Hadland (Hyperion) who pace their performance somewhat faster in general but are similarly engaging in a close but attractive recording.

There is a transcription for harp accompaniment by Dariusz Skoraczewski and harpist Jacqueline Pollauf (Monument Music). The conversion is effective enough, but several of the studies are rather leaden with no offsetting lift, especially the last. Perhaps another will come along.

The composer's cello part has been recorded by **double bass** soloist Craig Butterfield with Charles Fugo on piano (Centaur). He plays in the original register for cello except, as he explains in his program note, "for a few brief explorations of the depth of the sound of the double bass." The performances are as lively as any cello performance: arguably too swift in the fourth and fifth study. A nice *allegro vivace* is maintained in the sixth study, and though the instrument is structurally incapable in this context of true *pianissimos* and *pianississimos*, the soloist achieves remarkable delicacy and gentleness. Performing a piece in this range requires remarkable facility in harmonics, in which Butterfield is clearly a virtuoso. He is brilliantly partnered by Fugo. Bravo.

Recommendation: Eileen Croxford (cello), David Parkhouse (piano) – *with Violin Sonata, Phantasy Quintet, String Quartet No. 2* (EMI/Warner – CD, Download)

Alternate: Natalie Clein (cello), Christian Ihle Hadland (piano) – *with works by Clarke, Bridge* (Hyperion – CD, Download)

Specialist: Craig Butterfield (double bass), Charles Fugo (piano) – *with works by Franck, Schubert* (Centaur – CD, Download)

Violin

The premiere recording of this version, which is simply the cello version with the solo part transposed up an octave, was made under Society auspices by violinist Lydia Mordkovitch with Julian Milford (IMP/Carlton). Unlike her *Two Pieces*, which I found somewhat overwrought, her *Six Studies* is exquisitely done. Tempos in the first two studies are leisurely, but the balances and subtle dynamics are very effectively observed, and the final study is an absolute delight. Another Society-sponsored release, by Matthew Trusler and pianist Iain Burnside (Albion), runs to swifter tempos, except for the last study which is taken at an *allegretto*, but the charm and affection are marvelously engaging.

Recommendation: Lydia Mordkovitch (violin), Julian Milford (piano) – with *The Lark Ascending, Violin Sonata, Romance and Pastorale, Fantasia on Greensleeves* (IMP/Carlton – CD)

Alternate: Matthew Trusler (violin), Iain Burnside (piano) – *with Songs of Travel, Three Songs from The Pilgrim's Progress, Violin Concerto, The Lark Ascending* (Albion – CD, Download)

Viola

The viola version of the *Six Studies* is essentially the cello version with some modifications where the solo line goes below the viola's range. The first recording was made in 1963 by violist Jean Stewart whom Vaughan Williams had known since she was a student player in the Leith Hill Festival orchestra. She was a favorite "honorary niece" and a close friend of his second wife Ursula. It was for Stewart that he later wrote his String Quartet No. 2, and one might assume she would have a special feeling for the composer's music. Stephen Connock, my predecessor in this discography, expressed a special fondness for her recording, but I found it disappointing: rather monochromatic and often deliberate. French violist Adrien La Marca and Thomas Hoppe are much the opposite. Their performance is free and expressive, but much too fast in some studies. Their obvious joy in these works, though, is wonderfully engaging, and I must include it. I considered doing the same for Timothy Ridout's recording with James Baillieu (Harmonia Mundi) for the lovely tone and delightfully songlike performances, but this set is even faster – the fastest of any version on record – and ignores Vaughan Williams's tempos almost completely to be so. There is an essential melancholy missing as a result, so sadly I will pass it over. Philip Dukes and Anna Tilbrook earn the top accolade for their well-paced and delicately shaped performances with an especially witty sixth study. Dukes's creamy warm tone is a joy to hear, and Tilbrook is impressive for the subtle charm of her keyboard work.

There is also a warmly satisfying recording of the *Six Studies* for viola and harp with Doris Lederer and Jude Mollenhauer. The *allegro vivace* is played below pace, almost certainly for the harpist's sake, but the tempos otherwise are nicely taken and the performance is first-rate.

Recommendation: Philip Dukes (viola), Anna Tilbrook (piano) – *with Songs of Travel, The Sky Above the Roof, Orpheus with his Lute, Silent Noon, The Winter's Willow, Romance for Viola and Piano, Rhosymedre, Four Hymns* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Alternate: Adrien La Marca (viola), Thomas Hoppe (piano) – *with works by Clarke, Dowland, Britten, Bridge, Jonathan Harvey, Purcell* (La Dolce Volta – CD, Download)

Specialist: Doris Lederer (viola) and Jude Mollenhauer (harp) (arr. unknown) – *with Romance for Violin and Piano, Fantasia on Greensleeves, A Winter's Willow, and works by Bax, Bridge, Britten, Grainger* (Centaur – CD, Download)

Clarinet

Vaughan Williams's clarinet version has more commercial recordings than any other and was, in 1957, the first version to be recorded. Reginald Kell is the clarinetist, with Brooks Smith, pianist (DG). Kell's controversial vibrato is much in evidence but more disturbing is the unidiomatic, quasi-improvisatory approach, the arbitrary changes to phrasing, dynamics, and, at the end of study four, the register, and in study five, the elimination of over three bars of the clarinet line while the piano has the lead. The recording has obvious historical importance, and that is why I include it here.

Artists are often, as noted before, rather free with the given tempos, in part, I suspect, to create contrasts between movements that the composer chose not to make. It hardly seems worth commenting upon anymore, except that Anthony Pike and John Lenehan (Naxos) of the London Soloists Ensemble observe all tempos, as well as expressive and dynamic notations. The artists, fine as they are, are less distinctive otherwise, so this cannot be the prime recommendation. Top contenders for that include the warmly lyrical Janet Hilton and Keith Swallow (Chandos) and Victoria Soames's recording with John Flinders (Clarinet Classics) which is unusually affectionate and tender. But it is Emma Johnson (ASV), whose delicacy and melancholy are matched by her subtle and imaginative partner Malcolm Martineau, who claims top honors.

In 1957, Arnold Foster, a composer known for his folk song arrangements, orchestrated the *Six Studies* for an ensemble of woodwinds, harp or piano, and strings. The only recording of it so far is with clarinet solo, played by Ian Scott with Barry Wordsworth conducting (Dutton Epoch). The orchestration only fitfully sounds like Vaughan Williams and, at least with clarinet solo, the writing for winds in contrapuntal passages gets cluttered. It earns a specialist recommendation for the curious. The arrangement of three of the studies for string quartet by clarinetist James Campbell (Marquis) does not. Campbell allows the slower studies to plod while the strings create a vague impressionistic backdrop with few of the qualities of the original piano accompaniment.

Recommendation: Emma Johnson (clarinet), Malcolm Martineau (piano) – *with Three Vocalises for Soprano and Clarinet and works by Ireland, Bax, Bliss, Stanford* (ASV – CD, Download) or *with English Folk Song Suite, The Lark Ascending, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Three Vocalises, Partita for Double String Orchestra [various artists]* (ASV – CD)

Alternate: Janet Hilton (clarinet), Keith Swallow (piano) – *with works by Bax, Bliss* (Chandos – CD, Download) or *with The Poisoned Kiss Overture, Two Hymn-Tune Preludes, The Running Set, Flos Campi, Viola Suite, Sea Songs, The Wasps Overture, Fantasia on Greensleeves, Serenade to Music, House of Life (exc.), Romance for Harmonica, Linden Lea (arr. Somervell) [various artists and ensembles]* (Chandos – 2 CDs, Download)

Victoria Soames (clarinet), John Flinders (piano) – *with works by Stanford, Ireland, Finzi, Bliss, Arnold* (Clarinet Classics – CD, Download)

Anthony Pike (clarinet), John Lenehan (piano) – *with Piano Quintet in C minor, Romance for Viola, Quintet in D major* (Naxos – CD, Download)

Historic: Reginald Kell (clarinet), Brooks Smith (piano) – *with works by Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Weber, Brahms, Saint-Saëns, Debussy, Hindemith, Stravinsky, Bartók, and others* (Deutsche Grammophon – 6 CDs, Download)

Specialist: Barry Wordsworth, Royal Ballet Sinfonia, Ian Scott (arr. Foster) – *with works by John Carmichael, Leighton Lucas, Humphrey Procter-Gregg* (Dutton Epoch – CD, Download)

Flute and Piccolo

This recording of the *Six Studies* appears to be the first for flute and piano. The arrangement is by flutist/composer Katrina Penman, who uses both concert and alto flute plus piccolo or treble flute in the finale movement. There are no release notes and no further information about the instruments or arrangements online. Generally, this appears to be the composer's arrangement for violin with minimal adjustments to melodic line and octave to accommodate the range of the instruments. British-born Penman, with extensive experience as an orchestral and chamber musician and recitalist, largely in Italy and Spain, plays impressively, as does pianist Claudia Vior. Basic tempos and dynamics are well-taken, though the duo is fairly free with speeds within the short movements and the softest passages could be more delicate. Still, this is a good performance and recording that will particularly appeal to flute fanciers. Note though that full price for a release of 19 minutes of music total does seem a bit steep.

Sarah Miller includes her mostly octave-higher rendition of the *Six Studies* in a recital of largely transcriptions for piccolo. Whether or not the Vaughan Williams is a good fit for that instrument – it was after all, originally written for cello – one must admire Miller's sustained lines, excellent intonation, and fine expressive skills when her instrument's general purview tends to the fleet and brilliant. The initial two movements do test her breath control at the indicated tempos. After that, she and pianist Pieter-Jan Verhoyen choose faster ones, with the fifth movement taken at a spritely *allegro* instead of the requested *andante tranquillo*. As some compensation, the final *allegro vivace* movement is both fast and vivacious. Elsewhere, the too-cute fairytale narration of the title work, *Taken Voice*, and the distracting reading of Britten's movement headings in the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* are small concerns in a recital that has novelty and artistry.

Specialist Recommendation (flute): Katrina Penman (flute), Claudia Vior (piano) (arr. Penman) – *with works by Fauré, J.S. Bach, Mozart, Bach/Gounod* (Novus Promusica – Download)

Specialist Recommendation (piccolo): Sarah Miller (piccolo), Pieter-Jan Verhoyen (piano) (arr. Miller) – *with works by Matt Smith, Ferguson, Carla Rees, Madeleine Dring, Britten, Traditional* (Et'Cetera – CD, Download)

Saxophone

The standard Robert Stanton arrangement for the alto saxophone in E♭ was published in 1982 by Stainer & Bell, the publisher of the composer's versions. It includes editorial changes noted in my introduction, as well as – likely a mistake – a modification to the melody of the first study. (Most soloists correct this in their recordings. Allen Harrington on Ravello does not.) Beyond editing issues, though, while a well-played saxophone is mesmerizing in the appropriate repertoire, it does not seem a natural fit here. Of the five recordings available – one of excerpts – only Amy Dickson (Sony) creates the subtle atmosphere of the original. Dickson, to be clear, has extraordinary breath control, and can maintain tone and pitch at very low volumes in all registers. She has also mastered the art of circular breathing and is able to spin out the long lines, originally for a string soloist, that Stanton has broken up to add breathing space. Perhaps it is unfair, but she has spoiled me, and hers is the only alto saxophone recording I thoroughly enjoy.

Specialist Recommendation: Amy Dickson (alto saxophone), Daniel de Borah (piano) (arr. Stanton) – *with works by Émile Pessard, Sculthorpe, Falla. MacMillan, Grainger, Brahms, William Barton, Ross Edwards, Traditional, Anonymous* (Sony – CD, Download)

Double-Reed Instruments

Pastoral music and the instruments of the oboe family are associated in many people's minds, seemingly making them ideal for the *Six Studies in English Folk Song*. While I would maintain that there is more than mere pastoralism here – and Vaughan Williams's choice not to arrange for double reeds rather supports this – there is no denying that the result can be quite beautiful.

There is no version for oboe at this time – published or recorded – but Robin Canter's recording on an **oboe d'amore** with James Judd and the strings of the London Symphony (IMP Masters) is, indeed, lovely. The orchestration changes the character of the suite of works significantly, but Canter's arrangement creates a plausible Vaughan Williams sound and style, and he only makes a few register changes when necessary. The enjoyment is enhanced by the long lines that Canter creates, I presume by circular breathing, so that the spun-out melodies of the original are wonderfully realized.

There are several recordings with **cor anglais**; the one by James Turnbull with pianist Libby Burgess (Champs Hill) is the standout among them. Turnbull plays with a pleasant, reedy tone, and though he does not quite achieve the pianissimos, he phrases sensitively and in long lines. What is more, he has made improvements to Stanton's edition, adjusting some register changes to provide a line closer to VW's original and restoring the ornamental quality of the grace notes. I am less enthused with the John Dee recording with the Tantallon Ensemble (Klavier), a string quartet plus double bass. The arrangement by Clark McAlister is agreeable – a similar error to Stanton's in the first study melody of his saxophone version aside – but Dee's pacing in the third study is so rushed that it demands comment, he doesn't correct the score error and, surprisingly, he adds a number of his own wrong notes. Nicholas Daniel with

the Doric String Quartet (Chandos), using the Stanton edition, is far preferable. His refined tone is a pleasure, as are his long-lined phrasing and the various other improvements to the edition. The string playing is gorgeous, but the rich tone and use of portamento is, again, in stark contrast to the sparer original accompaniment.

There are a trio of recordings with **bassoon**. One, with orchestral accompaniment, offers only four of the studies. In the better of the two complete sets, Daniel Smith is partnered by Roger Vignoles (ASV). The hollow reediness of Smith's tone is as expected, but the reading of the Alan Hawkins edition – mostly true to the original – is quite satisfying. Those who know Smith's Vivaldi will know he could never resist pushing a fast tempo, and that is the case with the *allegro vivace*, here a breathless *presto*. Vignoles, as usual, is a superb accompanist. So, for that matter, is Sam Haywood who partners Roger Birnstingl (SanCtuS). Too bad that Birnstingl didn't listen more closely to his pianist, for Haywood clearly knows the style while the foursquare and often hasty soloist does not seem to. Finally, Laurence Perkins is joined by Ronald Corp and The New London Orchestra (Hyperion) for a performance of the Stanton orchestration: the same one used by the Doric Quartet for Nicholas Daniel. Perkins has the most attractive timbre of the three and an excellent feeling for the idiom. Corp keeps the strings light and steady. I would have been happier if they had chosen a slightly brisker tempo for the final study, but even more so if they had also recorded the first and fifth to make the complete set.

Specialist Recommendation (oboe d'amore): James Judd, London Symphony Orchestra, Robin Canter (arr. Canter) – *with Oboe Concerto and Strauss: Oboe Concerto* (IMP Masters – CD)

Specialist Recommendation (cor anglais): James Turnbull (cor anglais), Libby Burgess (piano) (arr. Stanton/Turnbull) – *with works by Rubbra, Edward Longstaff, Thomas Walmisley, Casken, Holst, Michael Berkeley* (Champs Hill – CD, Download)

Specialist Recommendation (bassoon): Daniel Smith (bassoon), Roger Vignoles (piano) (arr. Hawkins) – *with works by Hurlstone, Elgar, Jacob, Arne, Thomas Dunhill, Charles Avison* (ASV – CD)

Alternate: Nicholas Daniel (cor anglais), Doric String Quartet (arr. Stanton) – *with works by Bax, Finzi, Bliss, Delius* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Ronald Corp, New London Orchestra, Laurence Perkins (bassoon) (arr. Stanton) – *with works by Johann Ganglberger, Elgar, Jean Senaillé, Traditional, Fauré, Gilbert Vinter, Fred Godfrey, Gounod, Fučík, Ravel, James Hume, J. Quenton Ashlyn* (Hyperion – CD, Download)

Brass Instruments

Though arrangements of *Six Studies in English Folk Song* exist for all major brass instruments – trumpet, flugelhorn, French horn, trombone, euphonium, and tuba – commercial recordings are relatively scarce. A brass instrument is not, of course, an ideal proponent of a work so dependent on understatement and a subdued dynamic, but oddly, the tuba, which one might imagine the least adaptable to this work, has multiple performances. No recordings exist by flugelhorn or French horn players.

Trumpeter Travis Heath is upfront in his notes about the difficulties presented by the wide range required by the *Six Studies* – three octaves from D_3 to D_6 even with some register changes – and the need for "extreme dolce playing." The tempos are again a bit wayward, but Heath and pianist Steve Zivin (Mark Masters) handle the challenges with commendable skill, and *dolce* is often exactly what they achieve.

In the sole recording for this instrument, Sue Addison (Cala) demonstrates Edward Elgar's own **trombone**, which he took up in 1904 at the age of 43 and never, by his own admission, mastered. Frances Kelly does a fine job on the harp accompaniment, but the connection with the *Six Studies* is tenuous and the final movement is not included. Questions of "why?" aside, the old small-bore trombone balances better with the harp than a modern instrument could, and the solo line is sensitively played in the slightly detached legato inherent to the instrument. The illustrated history of the instrument is fascinating, and no doubt trombonists will enjoy this, especially played by an artist of Addison's caliber.

The one **euphonium** recording is performed by Japanese virtuoso Sotaro Fukaishi on a B♭ instrument with pianist Mariko Ono (Doyen) using the edition by Luc Vertommen. Backward placement of the piano and the self-effacing accompanist add to the balance challenges created by the instrument's full, rich sound. Fukaishi uses a gentle vibrato and phrases sensitively in long lines, but tempos are leisurely throughout, most notably in the *allegro vivace* final study. I prefer the Dowling recording on tenor tuba discussed below.

Vaughan Williams on the **tuba** is, of course, no novelty. In fact, Eugene Dowling (ProArte/Tromba Bassa) plays the *Six Studies* on a release that also includes his fine, if not outstanding, reading of the Concerto for Bass Tuba. The *Six Studies*, performed on a French C tenor tuba in the edition by Paul Droste, are stylish and expressive, well balanced with some remarkable soft playing, and the tempos are spot-on. One might occasionally wish for more precise intonation. The fine pianist is Edward Norman. David Zerkel and Paolo Gualdi (Mark Masters) use the Michael Wagner version in a release designed to introduce repertoire to student players. Perhaps that is why the spotlight is on the soloist and tempos are more measured. Wagner's edition has a number of octave transpositions for the CC contrabass tuba. I would opt for Dowling's greater eloquence, but Zerkel is a good advocate for the octave-lower option.

Specialist Recommendation (trumpet): Travis Heath (trumpet), Steve Zivin (piano) (arr. unidentified) – *with works by Laura Caviani, Michael Mikulka, Oskar Bohme, Jean Hubeau* (Mark Masters – CD, Download)

Specialist Recommendation (trombone): Sue Addison (trombone), Frances Kelly (harp) (arr. unidentified) – *with Fantasia on Greensleeves and works by Elgar, Bridge, Britten, Sullivan, J.A. Greenwood, Quilter, Gurney* (Cala – CD, Download)

Specialist Recommendation (tuba): Eugene Dowling (tuba), Edward Norman (piano) (arr. Droste) – *with Tuba Concerto and works by Handel, Elgar, Arnold, Jacob* (ProArte/Tromba Bassa – CD)

Alternate: Sotaro Fukaishi (euphonium), Mariko Ono (piano) (arr. Vertommen) – *with works by Joseph Horovitz, Stanford, Ireland, W. Grant Jones, Jan van der Roost, Philip Wilby* (Doyen – CD)

David Zerkel (tuba), Paolo Gualdi (piano) (arr. M. Wagner) – *with works by Donald Haddad, Giuseppe Capuzzi, Alexei Lebedev, Benedetto Marcello, Walter Hartley, William Bell* (Mark Masters – CD, Download)

Miscellaneous

Many words have now been expended on this charming but relatively minor work, but there are three unusual arrangements of the *Six Studies in English Folk Song* that remain to be considered: one for panpipes and harp, another for double wind quintet (decet) – two each of flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and French horn – and the third for accordion, recorder, cello, and Greek bouzouki. The arrangement for panpipes and harp, performed by Michel Tirabosco and Nathalie Chatelain respectively, must be acknowledged to be a novelty, but to dismiss it as such would be unfair. The performances are loving and musical, the tempos reasonable, and if there are small modifications, including adjustments of octaves and the addition of some passing tone figurations, they are all tastefully done. I enjoyed it. The decet version by David Bussick is performed by Massachusetts-based Kammerwerke, an amateur ensemble directed by Alan Pearlmutter. The 2015 private-label recording is available from Amazon.com. One must overlook slightly unfocused monaural sound and a few live-concert mishaps to enjoy the performance itself, but it is attractive and worth seeking out. The other arrangement is a delightful surprise. The predominately Mediterranean and Eastern European ethos of the Danish ensemble Kottos (Orchid Classics) should not work with this exceedingly English work, but it does so brilliantly. The solo line is given to the cello in the first two studies, but others have their chance as well, while the keyboard quality is maintained by accordion and bouzouki and the bass line is richly limned as well. Bravo! It's a joy.

Specialist Recommendation (panpipes): Michel Tirabosco (panpipes), Nathalie Chatelain (harp) (arr. Tirabosco) – *with works by Mendelssohn, German, Fauré, Verdi, Bellini, Fernando Obradors, Carlos Guastavino, Massenet, Bizet, Granados* (Gallo – CD, Download)

Specialist Recommendation (wind decet): Kammerwerke (arr. Bussick) – *with works by Gipps, Gordon Karr, Adrian Beaumont, Guy Wolfenden* (Private Label – CD)

Specialist Recommendation (special ensemble): Kottos (arr. Mogensen/Kottos) – *with works by Bartok, Grieg, Rimsky-Korsakov, Vivaldi, Lyadov, Skalkottas, Gade* (Orchid Classics – CD, Download)

Suite for Two Pipes

The potential for confusion of this and the better-though-hardly-well known 1938/39 Suite for [Four] Pipes does not lie exclusively in the similarity of the titles. The 1933 Suite for Two Pipes does not have a separate listing in Michael Kennedy's *Catalogue*, appearing instead as a footnote in the listing for the later work. Both were written for the English Pipers' Guild, later the Pipers' Guild of Great Britain. Vaughan Williams had just become the guild's president when he composed this enchanting suite for two ethereal hand-made bamboo pipes. His involvement with the guild, encouraged by its founder Margaret James, and his composition of works for it was an extension of his mission to make music accessible to a broader public and especially to students.

The Suite is a case of simple means, but not simple art. The five short movements, a little over seven minutes of music, include a remarkable array of forms with simple and complex contrapuntal writing throughout and, aptly, a pastoral. It can be heard in the premiere recording by the Flanders Recorder Duo on an Aeolus SACD. This has been reissued on a Dutch Pipers' Guild's commemorative release, *A 99 Years Celebration of the International Pipers' Guilds*. The Duo – Joris Van Goethem, the current Pipers' Guild president, and Tom Beets – plays on pipes they created for themselves and uses the version they edited from the manuscript which resides at the British Library. There is a version for recorders, as well. Recording in a resonant church nave, the performers rescue this music, wonderfully, from its obscurity. The reissue, in the commemorative CD celebrating James's pioneering work, has an advantage: recordings of all known ensemble pieces by Vaughan Williams for this simple but expressive instrument.

Recommendation: Flanders Recorder Duo – *with works by J.S. Bach, Telemann, Sammartini, Stefan Franz, Marc Mellits, Glen Shannon, Sören Sieg, de la Rue, Anonymous* (Aeolus – SACD) or *with Suite for [Four] Pipes, Carol, Musette, and Christmas Dance for Four Pipes and Piano, Canzona for Three Pipes, and works by J.S. Bach (attr.), Telemann, Francesco Landini, Henk Badings, Stijn Kuppens, and Anonymous* (Dutch Pipers' Guild – CD)

Suite for [Four] Pipes

The *Suite for Pipes* from 1938 or 1939, scored for SATB pipe quartet, has been, along with the earlier Suite for Two Pipes, the core of the Guilds' repertoire: "a pinnacle of art music for bamboo pipes" as the Flanders Recorder Duo characterizes them. The Suite for [Four] Pipes is in four movements: a fanfare-like Intrada and three dance movements: a minuet, a waltz, and a lively jig. This charming music is undoubtedly challenging for the performers, but not at all for the listener.

Dedicated to the Pipers' Guild Quartet – apparently at their request – it was recorded by them in 1946 (Columbia 78s) and the score was published the following year. Another recording by a Guild quartet appeared in 1969 (Apollo Sound LP). Neither of these has been transferred to a digital format. Both were played on bamboo pipes. Pipes, in general, produce a gentler, harmonically less complex sound, and the rustic warmth of the sound is undoubtedly appealing. I think, however, it fair to suggest that the difference is as much one of tradition and philosophy, with the *making* of the pipes an important part of the attraction.

Joris Van Goethem and Tom Beets, collectively The Flanders Recorder Duo, play the Suite on handmade bamboo pipes as do virtuoso recorder players Pieter Campo and Bert Honig who fill out the quartet. Since this was the sound Vaughan Williams intended, it gives their reading a special authority which is bolstered by the excellence of their performance.

There is, as well, a version for recorders published in 1980, and the remaining recordings use those instruments. The first of these recordings, preceding this publication, was on a 1976 LP by David Munrow and the Early Music Consort of London. It has been reissued on an Erato/Warner CD from Japan. Lovely of tone and balance, precise of ensemble, and full of exuberance, the legendary artists offer as fine a performance as one could imagine, and the companion pieces are a great deal of fun. The other two recordings are only marginally less attractive. Of these, I would choose the Flanders Recorder Quartet (Aeolus), a predecessor of

the Flanders Recorder Duo, over the Swedish Recorder Quartet (Caprice). I love the vivacity of the Swedish ensemble but they get a slight demerit for fudging some rapid figurations.

Recommendation (pipes): Flanders Recorder Duo, Pieter Campo, Bert Honig (pipes) – *with Suite for Two Pipes, Carol, Musette, and Christmas Dance for Four Pipes and Piano, Canzona for Three Pipes, and works by J.S. Bach (attr.), Telemann, Francesco Landini, Henk Badings, Stijn Kuppens, and Anonymous* (Dutch Pipers' Guild – CD)

Recommendation (recorders): Early Music Consort of London – *with Fantasia on Greensleeves and works by Anonymous, Dowland, William Williams, Purcell, Paisible/Finger, Warlock, Rubbra, Clive Richardson* (Erato/Warner – CD)

Alternate (recorders): Flanders Recorder Quartet – *with works by Johann Hermann Schein, J.S. Bach, Tarquinio Merula, Pier Swerts, Jan Van der Roost, Frans Geysen, and Anonymous* (Aeolus – CD, Download)

Canzona for Three Pipes

Catalogued by the British Library with the manuscripts for the Suite for [Four] Pipes and the Suite for Two Pipes is a diminutive movement for a trio of pipes that is likely part of a suite now otherwise lost or one that was never completed. Although undated, it would seem to have been composed at about the same time as the four-part suite. Nowhere nearly as technically challenging as the other two suites, it was clearly intended for players of more moderate skill. Its charm comes, in large part, from its artless simplicity.

The only recording of *Canzona* shares the Dutch Pipers' Guild release with all of Vaughan Williams's known compositions for bamboo pipe ensemble. The excellent Flanders Recorder Duo, playing on their handmade pipes, are joined by Guild piper Rose Atkinson.

Specialist Recommendation: Flanders Recorder Duo, Rose Atkinson (pipes) – *with Suite for Two Pipes, Suite for [Four] Pipes, Carol, Musette, and Christmas Dance for Four Pipes and Piano, and works by J.S. Bach (attr.), Telemann, Francesco Landini, Henk Badings, Stijn Kuppens, and Anonymous* (Dutch Pipers' Guild – CD)

Carol, Musette, and Christmas Dance (Viola Suite for Four Pipes and Piano)

See under Suite for Viola and Orchestra

Household Music: Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn Tunes

Vaughan Williams's resolve to provide engaging practical music for performance by students and non-musicians finds its highpoint in his *Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn Tunes*, collectively titled *Household Music*. Written between 1940 and 1941, the three preludes were envisioned as music for war-weary amateurs to play together. The primary instrumentation is a string quartet with an optional horn part, but the composer encouraged the substitution of other instruments and wrote parts for a variety of alternatives in several keys.

Here again we have a piece based on three Welsh hymn tunes. With the 1920 *Three Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn-Tunes* for organ and the *Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes* that he would write in 1954 for brass band – not to mention the *Two Hymn-Tune Preludes* of 1936 for orchestra – it can all get a little confusing. In this case the three hymns are Crug-y-bar, St. Denio, and Aberystwyth, the first treated as a fantasia, the second as a scherzo with the actual tune hidden until near the end, while the third appears as eight variations on Joseph Parry's (still copyrighted, as it happened) tune. The work was premiered by the Blech String Quartet on October 4, 1941, and popular response to subsequent broadcasts by it and the Griller Quartet led to publication in 1943 despite wartime constraints.

Neither of these distinguished quartets recorded the work. The first recording was not, in fact, made with a quartet or alternate instrumentation, but by the strings of the Northern Sinfonia with subtle *ad lib* horn, all stylishly conducted by Richard Hickox (Chandos). This is not Vaughan Williams's own orchestration with winds, strings, and percussion – which has not been recorded – but rather the chamber work played by a chamber orchestra. The inevitable loss of intimacy is compensated for by the richness of the sound.

The first recording to scale was made by a string quartet from the Nash Ensemble (Hyperion). The reading is lovely, played with elegance and delicacy. In comparison, the performance by a quartet of the Budapest Strings (Capriccio) with oboe in place of the first violin seems a touch impatient, especially the *lento* final prelude. But the oboe is a lovely addition, adding a pastoral quality to the work, and the playing is first-rate. So too is that of the string quartet and horn of the Royal Northern Sinfonia Chamber Ensemble (Dutton Epoch), with violinist Bradley Creswick, violist Michael Gerrard, and hornist Peter Francomb returning to the work 24 years after recording it with Hickox. Their reading is warmer and, in the scherzo, a little less spirited than the Nash Ensemble's. Francomb's contribution is more prominent than before, but once again gracefully done. *Graceful* would also be a good descriptor for the performance of the string quartet of the Swedish Little Venice Ensemble (Stone), as would *genial* or *sunny*. Particularly touching is the gentle reading of the final Aberystwyth variation, and the English and Swedish summer concert fare that accompanies the Vaughan Williams is rare and congenial. And though it means, in effect, recommending every recording of this charming work, the warmly expansive reading by the Piatti Quartet is exceptionally fine, as well, and needs to be on this list, and the premiere of the string quartet by Vaughan Williams's student Ina Boyle makes the release even more important.

For organ fanciers, Herbert Byard's 1949 arrangement of the eight Aberystwyth variations is available, handsomely played by Charles Matthews on the historic 19th-century Bryceson instrument in the Temple Speech Room of Rugby School.

Recommendation (string quartet): The Nash Ensemble – *with String Quartet in C minor, Quintet in D major, Piano Quintet in C minor, Scherzo, Nocturne and Scherzo, Suite de Ballet, Romance and Pastorale, Romance for Viola and Piano* (Hyperion – 2CDs, Download)

Alternate: Piatti Quartet (string quartet) – *with works by Ina Boyle, Moeran, Ireland* (Rubicon – CD, Download)

Little Venice Ensemble (string quartet) – *with works by Nils Lindberg, Duarte, Björn Kleiman, Wilhelm Peterson-Berger, Benny Andersson, Arnold, Monica Dominique* (Stone – CD, Download)

Royal Northern Sinfonia Chamber Ensemble (string quartet plus horn) – *with Horn Sonata, Quintet in D major, Bax: Horn Sonata* (Dutton Epoch – CD, Download)

Budapest Strings, Lajos Lencsés (oboe quartet) – *with Oboe Concerto, Ten Blake Songs, Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (Capriccio – CD, Download)

Specialist: Richard Hickox, Northern Sinfonia, Peter Francomb (horn) – *with Riders to the Sea, Flos Campi* (Chandos – CD, Download)

Charles Matthews (organ) (Variations on Aberystwyth) – *with The Wasps– March Past of the Kitchen Utensils, Flourish for Three Trumpets, Serenade to Music, She's Like a Swallow, The Winter's Gone and Past, I will give my Love an Apple, Four Cambridge Flourishes, For All the Saints, Suite for Four Hands, Pezzo Ostinato, Five Mystical Songs-The Call, Two Herefordshire Carols, Dives and Lazarus (choral), God be with You Till We Meet Again (*Albion – CD, Download)

String Quartet No. 2 in A minor (For Jean on her Birthday)

The Jean referenced in the title is Jean Stewart, the violist of the Menges Quartet. A favorite "honorary niece" and a close friend of Ursula Wood, who was to become his second wife, Vaughan Williams had known her since she was a student player in the Leith Hill Festival orchestra. The composer began a string quartet in 1942 to be dedicated to her while he was working on wartime film projects and finishing the Fifth Symphony. It was not ready for her February 17th birthday in 1943, since, as he explained in a letter (vaughanwilliams.uk/letter/vwl5158), "the scherzo refuses to materialize." He sent the first two movements on that occasion and the rest of the four-movement quartet the following December. It premiered on the composer's birthday the following year.

Not surprisingly, given the dedication, the violist is given a prominent and technically challenging role in the quartet, introducing the main theme of each movement, as well as getting the 'final word' in two, and often leading the development. A darker work than the Ravel-influenced First Quartet, it has less in common with the rapturous Fifth Symphony than with the grim Sixth that was soon to come. The uncooperative scherzo eventually 'materialized' from music for the 1941 film *49th Parallel* depicting ruthless Nazi submariners on the run, played by the viola against biting muted accompaniment. The Romance, contrary to expectation, is bleak: begun and ended *sans vibrato* to heighten its cheerlessness. Only its brief central section and the benedictory Epilogue, based on a theme written for an unproduced film of Shaw's play *Saint Joan*, achieve uneasy serenity. (The subtitle of the latter is *Greetings from Joan to Jean*; the blessing comes from a saint who knew war and sorrow.)

True to form, the premiere 1973 recording by the Music Group of London (EMI/Warner) is warmest of tone and approach, and this and the generally measured tempos create something of a nostalgic glow. The bleak modernity of much of the writing remains, but other quartets get more to the dark heart of the piece. In fact, three remarkable recordings by the Verdi Quartet (CPO), the Maggini String Quartet (Naxos), and the quartet of the Nash Ensemble (Hyperion) are all exemplary in their different ways. Besides digging deeply into the work, they are technically faultless, especially in the difficult *pianissimo senza vibrato* sections of

the Romance, which is heartbreaking. Their Scherzos are almost alarming in their hushed intensity. One might at first question all three quartets' tempos in the Epilogue – barely an *andante sostenuto* for the Nash and *largo* for the other two, with the Maggini daringly slow – but only a hopeless pedant could remain unmoved. The Nash underscores the restlessness of the score with tempos generally closer to those specified, the Maggini again works its magic with the lowest dynamics, and the Verdi is extraordinarily vivid and intensely felt. The Maggini and Verdi tend to have a bit warmer tone, the Nash finds an amazing icy tonelessness in the *pianissimo* muted tremolos of the Scherzo. All are wonderful performances and on any given day might be the prime recommendation; for now, it is the Nash Ensemble.

Recommendation: The Nash Ensemble – *with The Lake in the Mountains, Six Studies in English Folk Song, Phantasy Quintet, Violin Sonata* (Hyperion – CD, Download)

Alternate: Verdi Quartet – *with String Quartet in C minor, String Quartet No. 1* (CPO – CD, Download

Maggini String Quartet – *with Phantasy Quintet, String Quartet No. 1* (Naxos – CD, Download)

Violin Sonata in A minor

On Friday, September 19th, 1958, Ralph Vaughan Williams's ashes were laid to rest in Westminster Abbey, and among the artists lending their talents to the celebration of the great man's life was violinist Frederick Grinke. Almost four years earlier he had premiered the composer's Violin Sonata in an 82nd-birthday broadcast with pianist Michael Mullinar, an artist closely associated with the composer as student, associate, and friend. Written for and dedicated to Grinke – Vaughan Williams admired greatly his playing, notably of *The Lark Ascending* – the sonata was begun in the period between the death of his first wife Adeline in 1951 and his marriage to his second wife Ursula in 1953. Whether the sonata's dark aspect is a result of those unsettled times is a matter of conjecture, but there is no denying the tense and troubled nature of this last of his chamber compositions. Even the closing movement, a set of six variations based on a theme taken and expanded from his 1903 Piano Quintet, turns that theme to rather darker purpose. Only gradually does the mood lighten and, in a passage reminiscent of the flight of *The Lark*, finally achieve some release.

The writing is extraordinarily demanding for the artists – even Grinke, a virtuoso of exceptional skill, had to ask for some changes prior to the premiere to make it playable – and the piano part is unconventional, as is so often the case with this composer. So, the work is not calculated to ever find a place in Classic FM's popularity listing. It is therefore initially gratifying that there have been so many recordings of the sonata. The earliest of these was by Grinke and Mullinar recorded in 1955. It is the finest recorded performance the sonata has had, and it is the only commercial recording by Mullinar, so it is good that it is finally available on Albion.

Another important historical release is part of a 1955 recital by Joseph Szigeti in Seattle, Washington, recently found and published by Biddulph. Szigeti, who added the sonata to his repertoire as soon as he could acquire a score, was in fact the first to perform it in a public concert with Carlo Bussatti, his partner in this recording. Grinke and Mullinar had broadcast the work twice by then and offered private performances for gatherings in the Vaughan

Williamses's home but did not present the UK public premiere until more than a month later. Szigeti, entering the too-long twilight of his career by this time, might not have been the ideal exponent of this challenging work, but the stars aligned brilliantly, at least on this occasion, and his extrovert and technically admirable performance is a highlight of his later years. There is also Hugh Bean's performance with David Parkhouse (EMI/Warner), a performance of the angry, rhythmically crazed Scherzo with its lightning-fast double- and triple-stops that is simply astounding. In truth, it is too fast – *allegro furioso* without the stipulated *ma non troppo* – but it is peerless as a virtuoso display. Sadly, Bean's third movement is a letdown. Marked *andante*, it drifts between a *grave* and a *largo* and only achieves the *andante* in the *allegro* sixth variation. He is not alone in such lingering, apparently not convinced that Vaughan Williams really wanted the expressive restraint his markings imply.

Yehudi and Hephzibah Menuhin's (EMI/Warner) general timings hang below tempo, and there are significant liberties in pacing and dynamics in their 1978 recording, even in movements and sections marked for strict time (*giusto*). This will be considered fascinating or infuriating according to taste and convictions. Note, too, that earlier single CD releases of this recording increased the speed slightly – and consequently raised pitch – in order to fit the program of Elgar and Walton sonatas on the same disc as the Vaughan Williams. Only the most recent reissue, in *The Menuhin Century* boxes and associated download files, has corrected this.

In a review of Jennifer Pike's recording (Chandos) for the Society's *Journal*, I cited it, the Mehuhin (EMI/Warner) and Lydia Mordkovitch (IMP) versions as exemplars. Study of the score and familiarity with the Grinke and Szigeti recordings has changed my mind and left me wondering if there will ever be a modern recording that equals these. Susanne Stanzeleit's performance with Julian Jacobson (Cala, Portrait) is close. It has reappeared as a download and can still be found used, especially in its budget Portrait Classics reissue. She is slower in the first two movements and not quite as vehement as Grinke, but she maintains the tempos even when the challenges seem unreasonable and her steady *andante* in the theme and first five variations of the final movement assures the contrasting rhythmic variations are not obscured. Also impressive is a recent release by Charlie Siem (Signum), a performance with pianist Itamar Golan that I now recommend along with the Stanzeleit. Siem and Golan also maintain the steady drive and create the emotional fire required, even though at slower tempos than indicated. The Scherzo is powerful, and while the Tema con variationi is more *larghetto* than *andante*, the duo establishes the desired contrast in the final *allegro*. Stanzeleit is on top not least for presenting the variations at tempo. Pike's performance is not without significant merit, either. Still, one should hear the Szigeti/Bussatti and Grinke/Mullinar, as both demonstrate the headlong fury the composer seems to have intended for the Scherzo and the poised desolation of the Tema con variationi.

Recommendation: Susanne Stanzeleit (violin), Julian Jacobson (piano) – *with Peter Fricker: Violin Sonatas Nos. 1 and 2, Rawsthorne: Violin Sonata* (Cala – CD, Download) or *with same plus Thomas Dunhill: Violin Sonata No. 2, Bantock: Violin Sonata No. 3, Stanford Violin Sonata No. 1 (Portrait – 2 CDs)*

Alternate: Charlie Siem (violin), Itamar Golan (piano) – *with Grieg: Violin Sonata No. 2, Solveig's Song* (Signum – CD, Download)

Historical: Boyd Neel, Boyd Neel Orchestra, Frederick Grinke – *with Concerto Accademico, The Lark Ascending, Eventide Hymn-Tune Prelude, Arthur Benjamin: Violin Sonatina* (Albion – CD, Download)

Joseph Szigeti (violin), Carlo Bussatti (piano) – *with Bach: Violin Partita No. 3, Brahms: Violin Sonata No. 3* (Biddulph – CD, Download)

End of Part One