Journal of the RVW Society

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EDITOR
John Bishop
14 Barlby Road
London W10 6AR
0181-969 3579

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plus news and reviews

CHAIRMAN
Stephen Connock
Willow House. 3 Burywoods, Bakers Lane,
Colchester. CO4 5AW
(01206 842245)

SECRETARY
Robin Barber
The Chantry. Stoney Lane, Stocklinch,
Ilminster, Somerset. TA19 9JJ
(01460 57819)

TREASURER
Richard Mason
144 Campbell Road, Florence Park,
Oxford. OX4 3NT
(01865 775449)

A MEMORABLE DAY INDEED!

September 17 was indeed a memorable-day! The trustees who have been responsible for the society's development since its foundation last year could hardly have had a happier fulfilment of their hopes for the first AGM and the events surrounding it. The buzz in the Barbican Hall for the concert which ended the day was palpable, and the press endorsed this in the reviews which followed. 'Fanfare for an uncommon talent' *(Daily Telegraph)* was typical.

A packed day began with attendance at the afternoon rehearsal for the evening concert. Conductor Richard Hickox greeted some 70 of the society's members and their friends before the rehearsal got under way, and later spoke briefly at the reception held after the AGM and before the evening concert.

Ursula becomes President

The chairman's report on the year's activities had been circulated to all members beforehand, but in opening the meeting Stephen Connock was able to make some important additional points. Among these was the welcome news that Ursula Vaughan Williams had agreed to be president of the society and Michael Kennedy (who is chairman of the RVW Trust) the vice-president.

(continued overleaf)

Conductor meets members

Richard Hickox (right) addresses members at the reception which followed the AGM on September 17, before the evening concert which opened the Barbican series.

A MEMORABLE DAY INDEED!
(continued from page 1)

The society, said Mr Connock – had been strongly influential in the decision by Covent Garden to mount *Pilgrim's Progress* in 1997, with performances both in London and in East Anglia.

The financial position is sound - a point amplified by treasurer Richard Mason, who thanked members warmly for their excellent response to his request for early renewal of subscriptions. This had helped the society past a potentially difficult cash-flow situation and gave confidence for the future. A £1000 donation from a record company had been most welcome.

Society membership exceeds 250 and Mr Connock said the trustees' aim is to reach 1000 by the end of 1997. He stressed that the trustees are determined to carry through their objectives, both long-term and short-term. The trustees had between them a wide range of expertise in musical, financial and administrative spheres, but would welcome offers from members for further help in developing the society's activities.

Introducing the post-AGM session, John Bishop said that anyone's list of the four or five writers and critics who had done most for British music would have to include both of the speakers we were to hear. As prolific authors of books, articles, sleeve-notes and radio talks, they represented the middle ground: informative, balanced, wide-ranging, and free from fashionable fads and fancies.

Lewis Foreman, with numerous quick-cut music examples, discussed in characteristically urbane style the evolution of the British symphony over the last 120 years. Michael Kennedy then reflected on his lifetime's experience of RVW as man and artist. We all wished to hear more from both speakers but time would not allow: we hope the opportunity will arise at a later date. Meanwhile, some of Mr Kennedy's comments can be read in his recent *Sunday Telegraph* article, reproduced in this issue of the *Journal*. The revised edition of his monumental *Catalogue of the works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* is due from OUP in the spring of 1996.

After refreshments, members and their friends moved back into the Barbican (the AGM and talks had been in the adjacent Guildhall School of Music) to immerse themselves in a concert which clearly struck fire with the virtually house-full audience. Both the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and the LSO Choir were in commanding form, and Richard Hickox conducted with a passion and conviction that none could have excelled. To perform the complete cycle of symphonies, both in London and Bournemouth, was, he had said, a dream come true for him. It was a dream experience in which we all very happily shared.

First AGM confirms the trustees

The first AGM of the society took place on 17 September to coincide with the first performance in the VW Symphony Cycle being given at the Barbican.

The meeting was chaired by Stephen Connock, who is both chairman of the board of trustees and of the society. Stephen gave the 74 members and guests attending the meeting a synopsis of the musical, promotional and structural work the society had carried out during its first year of operation and a brief description of where the society was likely to be going in the next two to three years.

The formal part of the meeting consisted of the consideration of the annual report and annual accounts, which were presented by Robin Barber and Richard Mason, respectively the membership secretary and treasurer of the society, and after consideration by the members both reports were accepted. Following some questions on the structures and procedures that the society had adopted, standing orders were accepted by the members.

Tony Fuller (secretary to the trustees) dealt with the election of officers and trustees under one item. No nominations, other than those of the current board members, had been received, so the board of trustees was returned *nem con.*

The officers for the new RVW Society year are:

Stephen Connock	Chairman of the board
Robin Ivison	Vice-chairman
Robin Barber	Membership secretary
Richard Mason	Treasurer
Tony Fuller	Secretary to the trustees

After the election a vote of thanks was extended to the board for the work they had done on behalf of the society.

NB. At the reception which took place after the AGM, another member indicated that he would be willing to stand as a trustee. The offer will be dealt with at the next meeting of the board of trustees. Anybody interested in being a trustee should contact Tony Fuller on 01708 473821.

Albion Music lives!

Following discussions at the board of trustees, the society has bought a trading arm, which is a company limited by shares (owned by the RVW Society) registered as Albion Music Limited.

The trustees have a duty to maximise the society's income from all sources, so they have decided to use a trading company, which can covenant any profits back to the society at the financial year-end, to make the operation more effective. The trading company has been set up to enable the trustees to manage the finances of the organisation in a more tax-efficient manner and to enable the society to undertake what is called 'non-charitable trading' without incurring any tax liabilities.

Non-charitable trading is perfectly legal and is work that can be carried out within the remit of charitable status. However, once the level of income from this source reaches a certain level it is subject to corporation tax and, as such, there would be a liability on the society to pay tax.

This development is forward planning because our levels of income from this source have yet to reach the trigger point (roughly £5,000 profit per annum) where tax is a problem. However, the trustees are currently involved in negotiations with a major sponsor, the result of which is likely to be substantial funding from non-charitable trading sources, so the trustees decided to have everything in place before a final decision on sponsorship is taken.

The honourary officers of the society are also the directors of the trading company. The officers of the company are:

Stephen Connock	Chairman of the Board
Richard Mason	Treasurer
Tony Fuller	Company Secretary

Voyages of an – ENGLISH MYSTIC

In her 85th year, Ursula Vaughan Williams plans to attend the Barbican series of concerts beginning next Sunday at which Richard Hickox will conduct her husband's nine symphonies and other works. This is claimed to be the first time a complete cycle of the symphonies has been given in public, although Barbirolli conducted the first six in 1951-2, before Nos 7, 8 and 9 were composed in the last six years of the composer's life.

When I spoke to her last week, the day after she had returned from a holiday in France, she likened the cycle to a 'big continent' in which each individual symphony was a separate entity fertilised by works, large or small, which he had composed around the same time.

'I was only around from the Fifth onwards,' she said, 'but he never said much about what he was writing and I never asked him. That was his inner world, and I knew how much time he spent in it. Even when we were having lunch sometimes, I could see his mind was elsewhere, even though he'd then tell a good story.

Sometimes he'd get up very early to go to his desk, sometimes he'd work late at night. There was no fixed routine. David McFall's bronze head of him is so wonderful because it was done while he was working. You can see the concentration.'

I myself remember hearing him playing a theme over and over again early one morning. This was after the first performance of the Ninth and I asked him if a new work was taking shape. No, he'd dreamt that the Ninth needed a new tune in it somewhere and he'd been trying to remember it from his dream. 'But I couldn't get it, so I suppose it wasn't any good and I'd better leave well alone.'

Self-portrait

Mrs Vaughan Williams remains sceptical of attempts to attach extra-musical programmes to the symphonies without titles. 'I think it's rubbish to say the Fourth is "about" the dangers of Fascism and Nazism,' although it begins very violently. I'm sure it's a kind of self-portrait, and the rage in it was entirely personal. He had quite a temper - ask the Leith Hill choirs.

'Malcolm Sargent claimed that the scherzo of the Sixth, with its jazzy saxophone and explosive climax, was "about" the bomb which fell on the Cafe de Paris in the war and killed the West Indian dance-band leader ("Snakehips" Johnson). It could have been, I suppose, but I don't think it was as specific as that.'

But RVW delighted in prevaricating about even the titled symphonies. His first, the choral *Sea Symphony* (1910), describes the 'dashing spray' but is really about the voyage of the human soul into the unknown (like the finale of No.6), while the *Pastoral* (1921) is not a picture of the English countryside in a Beethovenian manner but a war requiem.

Vaughan Williams joined the Army in 1914 at the age of 42, and served in France and Salonika for most of the war. The brooding, tragedy of this masterpiece, with its poignant trumpet-calls and the disembodied girl's voice that opens and closes the finale, was related, Mrs Vaughan Williams believes, to the deaths in action of the young composer George Butterworth and others of whom Vaughan Williams wrote to his closest friend, Gustav Holst: 'I sometimes dread coming back to normal life with so many gaps.'

Michael Kennedy wrote this article for the 'Sunday Telegraph'

Vaughan Williams put a weapon into the hands of his detractors with his remarks about his technical clumsiness and 'incompetence'. Why did he do this? Self-deprecation as a form of modesty was very much the style of his generation and class but it went deeper in his case. Undoubtedly there was a streak of insecurity in his creative make-up, probably the legacy of the attitude of his family when he was young - 'poor Ralph is working hard at his music, when he's so frightfully bad at it' - and also perhaps of his teacher Stanford's witheringly dismissive comments ('all rot, me bhoy').

In addition, he acknowledged and was possibly awed by the facility and technical expertise of Holst, to whom he showed all his works as he was writing them. After Holst's death he played major new works to a 'jury' of friends, although he rarely took their advice except that proffered by Arthur Bliss, whom he admired for his clarity and conciseness. Even so, I recall crises before the first performances of the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Symphonies when he was in half a mind to tear them up.

In a 1965 broadcast review of my book on Vaughan Williams, Donald Mitchell, in a perceptive if wrong-headed estimation of Vaughan Williams's position in 20th-century music, made much of his 'parochialism', blaming this for the alleged lack of appreciation of his music abroad and concluding that his art would prove to be 'minor'. Since this talk has recently been reprinted in an anthology of Dr Mitchell's writings, I presume he holds to that view after 30 years.

There are more VW performances abroad than is realised, but frankly he is no less great a composer because they don't play him in Vienna and Paris. British criticism in the1930s was certainly parochial, but let no one suppose that Vaughan Williams was unaware of developments elsewhere. He had no interest in Schoenberg's methods and was not alone in that, and his views on other composers were sometimes as deliberately provocative and bizarre as Stravinsky's - and Britten's. But his music tells us that he was wide awake to such seminal influences as Debussy, Ravel, the Stravinsky of *Petrushka*, Sibelius, Bartok, Hindemith and Shostakovich. Not exactly parochial.

As for 'incompetence', composer's imprimatur or not, let us hope Hickox's cycle will extinguish that as a serious criticism. Vaughan Williams was a master of the orchestra and knew exactly how to say what he wanted to say. Listen only to the evocation of London in the Second Symphony - has a city ever been more poetically enshrined in music which captures its atmosphere, traffic, river, pubs, squares, history and people?

And then what of the stricken battlefield in the *Pastoral*, with the lone trumpeter sounding an ethereal Last Post? What of the harsh anger and rumbustious mocking humour of the Fourth; the vision of Bunyan's Celestial City in the Fifth; the clamour and menace of the 20th century in the Sixth, culminating in an epilogue of airs from another planet; the waste and glaciers and ghostly voices in the wind of the Antarctic; the instrumental virtuosity and enigmas of the underrated Eighth; and the ambivalent mixture of wisdom, resignation and vision in the unsettling Ninth?

For all this Mahlerian variety he found the right music and the right sounds. This, I believe, is one of the great symphonic cycles of any century. To categorise it as minor art seems to me a major misconception and a sad undervaluation of British music at its best.

Pioneering film music recordings

Marco Polo have recently released a CD of Vaughan Williams film music (reviewed elsewhere in this issue). Conductor Andrew Penny writes about the gestation of the project and where it might go from here.

In August 1993, almost two years before the final appearance of the CD, the Naxos/Marco Polo group first suggested to me that a disc of Vaughan Williams film music would be an excellent addition to their catalogue. They have a tremendous reputation for recording British music and, more recently, film music of course. For myself, I had by then completed eight recordings for that company, six of which were of British music and one of which was of film music.

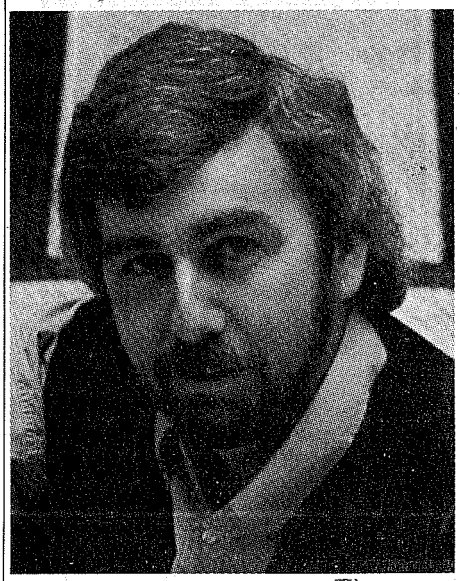
Initially we needed to establish how many scores had been written, how many were in existance, and whether we would be allowed to record them.Of course, the basic list could easily be abstracted from Kennedy's book, and those not published could presumably be viewed in the British Library.

I wrote to Ursula Vaughan Williams, whom I had met several times in the seventies when, as a postgraduate conducting student, I conducted one half of a double bill *(Riders to the Sea)* at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and later at Sadler's Wells Theatre in London. The other half was an opera by Brian Hughes *(Stars and Shadows,)* for which she had written the libretto. The Vaughan Williams Trust had been most generous to me a year earlier, enabling me to attend a conducting course in Holland directed by Edward Downes. Perhaps this project would enable me to give them some interest on their investment, by way of thanks.

Mrs Vaughan Williams was most encouraging from the outset, suggesting all sorts of avenues which might yield up further information if the project were to expand, though of course the Vaughan Williams Trust could not constitutionally assist financially; the composer had insisted that it would not exist for the promotion of his own music, but for other British music and musicians.

'Flemish Farm'

Simon Wright of the hire library at Oxford University Press has been a constant supporter of the project since we began it, and it rapidly became clear that there was sufficient music already in print for a CD - length programme; that is to say *Prelude to The 49th Parallel, The England of Elizabeths* and *Coastal Command.* All of these had been excellently recorded before, of course. He suggested completing the disc with the music from *The Story of a Flemish Farm;* OUP possessed a set of parts, and told us it would be a premier recording if we did it. We did it!



• *Andrew Penny has now made over 20 discs for Marco Polo. Apart from Vaughan Williams, he has championed much British music with them ,including Sullivan, Armstrong Gibbs, German, Holbrooke, Coates, Duncan, Joyce, Brian, Parry, Walton, Britten and Arnold.*

Whilst the DATs were being edited and then second-edited by my producer, Chris Craker, following the sessions with the excellent Concert Orchestra of the RTE in Dublin, it was obvious that more research was needed if the project was to develop. We had exhausted the supply of authorised material at OUP that was publically available, we had made a premier recording, and were looking forward to a good critical reception. Perhaps we would have a stronger case once people were aware of our commitment to the idea.

Arthur Searle, then Curator of Music Manuscripts at the British Library, had been contacted by Simon Wright and a detailed list of what was available arrived on my desk. We arranged to view the collection together with a view to producing a feasibility study detailing exactly what might be possible: either suites drawn from the original material, or larger-scale scenarios. We were particularly interested in *The Loves of Joanna Godden, Scott of the Antarctic, Bitter Springs* (a collaboration with Ernest Irving,) *The People's Land* and other scenes from *49th Parallel.* It is fairly well-known that nothing survives of *Stricken Peninsula* or *Dim Little Island.*

I had written to Bernard Benoliel, administrator of the RVW Trust, who led us to believe that the composer's widow and other directors of RVW Ltd. might wish only for those official publications by OUP to be recorded - which was fair enough. I had hoped to persuade those representing the interests of the composer and of his publisher that it might be possible to bring other scores to public attention, at a time when a great deal of film music by Arnold, Alwyn, Walton and others was being so well received.

Feasibility study

In the end Simon could not join me to view the manuscripts in the British Library, due to the rail strike (summer of 1994) but in a long day I examined about fifteen items related to our study and produced a feasibility study for OUP. The report detailed the state of sketches and scores and the sheer practicality of what would be needed to turn them into suites, scenarios or arrangements in the manner of such splendid work undertaken by Christopher Palmer.

It would be wonderful to record the Scott music from a score donated by Muir Mathieson, former Head of Music at Ealing Studios. There are 28 numbers, some not used in the film. However, it is well documented that VW did not want this score published, so that it would not become known exactly how these numbers had developed into the Seventh Symphony.

The score for *Joanna Godden* was very clear and serviceable, and, as Michael Kennedy has noted, with its use

Michael Gainsford makes a plea for DONA NOBIS PACEM

Nowadays, the range of music available on CD and cassette is very wide, and composers are, in the main, well represented (pace Edmund Rubbra). So it must be rather rare these days to be introduced to a work by one's favourite composer by way of a concert performance.

It was not, of course, always so. In the early 1950s, hearing Stokowski and Beecham 'doing' Brahms 4 and Sibelius 1 started me on a Brahms and Sibelius mania which has lasted ever since.

About twenty years after that I had discovered Vaughan Williams. The range of LPs available then was not wide, although an increasing number of RVW works became available after about 1973. So every month I would feverishly scan under 'V' in the list of new recordings published in *The Gramophone.*

So it was that my introduction to *Dona Nobis Pacem* was at a RVW memorial concert in Down Ampney church on 12th October, 1972.

On Bank Holiday Monday, 1972, I treated the family to a trip out to Broadheath, to visit Elgar's birthplace. I hope they enjoyed it. I found it very nostalgic. And it put an idea into my mind. Was Down Ampney Old Vicarage open to visitors? I had never seen it advertised, but one could hope. So, it being fine on the Tuesday I suggested that a picnic trip to the Cotswolds would be very pleasant.

It so happened that the Old Vicarage turned out to be a private house (I later corresponded with the owner), and not open to the public. But the church was open, and there we saw the grave of RVW's father, and also advertisements for four concerts to be put on in the village to celebrate the Vaughan Williams centenary. Performers at the various concerts were to be the Bookham Choral Society, a choir from Charterhouse School, and the Philomusica of Gloucester. I was aware that more prestigious things would be going on in London, but it occurred to me that the performances at Down Ampney would doubtless meet with the approval of the man himself. So I decided to obtain tickets for the Thursday concert, on RVW's birthday, despite the round trip of some 120 miles. My daughter of 10½ years would accompany me as a special treat. I hope it was!

The concert was given by the Philomusica of Gloucester, an amateur group, with choir, and was preceded by, and concluded with, two well-known RVW hymns. The concert programme was:

Hymn: *Down Ampney (Come down O love divine)*
Toward the unknown region
Serenade to music
Dona nobis pacem
Hymn: *Old Hundredth.*

Of these, the only work I did not know was the penultimate one, described on the concert blurb as 'one of the composer's greatest works'. I had read about it, and hence thought that this was exaggerating things a little. But I was prepared to listen with an open mind.

Down Ampney church is small and, though the orchestra and choir were not large, they seemed to take up more space than the audience. All the seats were taken, and we managed to sit at the front. The only distraction was the young lady cellist's mini-skirt...

Whatever the standard of performance, I was totally bowled over by *Dona nobis pacem.* The 'Dirge for two veterans' was particularly affecting. In the last movement, I noted in my programme that I detected pre-echoes of the Fifth Symphony. As we sped home up the Fosse Way I determined to acquire a record of the work if such existed. It did, and on my next visit to my favourite record shop (Vincent's, Needless Alley, Birmingham - now sadly gone) bought the only available version, by Abravanel and the Utah SO. This disk was replaced next year by the Boult / LPO one, which is now supplemented by the 1936 Pearl recording, with RVW himself conducting. This is well worth having despite the extremely rough surface.

The critics have been rather unkind to this work, as is noted in Michael Kennedy's book, although Kennedy himself is much kinder. I certainly agree with him that it is 'effective in performance'.

Howes and Young refer to its 'lack of unity', presumably implying lack of stylistic homogeneity, because its various parts were composed at different times, the 'Dirge' being much earlier than the rest. But it is all typical RVW. I take issue with AEF Dickinson, who in his book describes the 'Dirge' as a 'digression'! To me, this movement is the very core of the work. Dickinson is over-critical, although I do, regretfully, agree with him that the start of the last movement is 'a jumble of word and tone'. It is difficult to make out the words and 'tune' here. Perhaps it is not being performed properly. But despite what faults it may have, it remains one of my favourite VW pieces.

I have heard the work once subsequently in the concert hall, performed by the Leicester Philharmonic Choir, with the Milton Keynes City Orchestra under Hilary Davan Wetton, as part of VE Day celebrations last May. Although it was no doubt a more polished performance, it did not have the powerful effect on me of that first hearing, in a packed Down Ampney church, 23 years ago.

(continued from previous page)

of female chorus it presages *Scott.* This is a most important score indeed.

The score for *Bitter Springs* is beautiful in both content and appearance; there are 19 numbers and of course was a collaboration with Ernest Irving.

The People's Land could be performed in its entirety, being (as described in Kennedy) the working of four folk-songs and two links.

The other music to *49th Parallel* looks splendid; there is much reworking of the familiar tune and it appears to be in suite form already.

I cannot here give more news of where we go from here, or how events might develop; suffice it to say that from the bottom of my heart I hope that some of this material might be heard again. Could Marco Polo the Explorer give Scott the Explorer a new audience? Vaughan Williams was rightly proud of his film music technique and I cannot imagine that his reputation could be other than enhanced by public appraisal of this side of his art.

Editor says thanks and farewell

John Bishop writes: I have had the pleasure of editing the first four issues of the Journal, but I am now standing down because of the pressure of other work. Friendly contact with contributors and readers has been a valued part of the experience. Many thanks for your enthusiasm and kind remarks.

How I first came to RVW's music...

Two more articles in our series

My case rests happily...

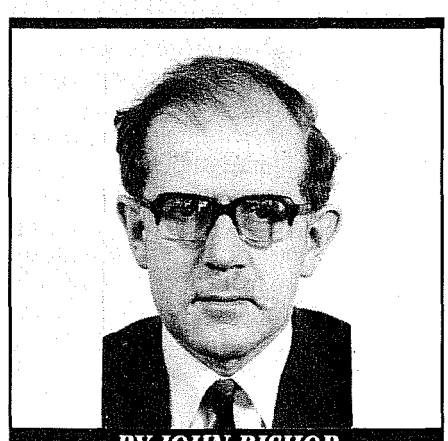
Ralph Vaughan Williams's music has been threaded through my life (I am now 64) but - if you'll forgive the jargon - I'll divide it into sound-bites.

I left school (in Croydon) when I was 16 – most of us did in those days! I had been a chorister in a good old-style church choir, so had some grounding in singing, and quickly found my way into the Croydon Philharmonic Choir, then conducted by the veteran Alan J Kirby, who'd known Elgar well and under whom I was lucky enough to sing *The Kingdom, The Apostles,* and *Gerontius.* My first public concert with the Phil, in the old Civic Hall (long before the Fairfield Halls were built), was of the *Sea Symphony.* A mere boy among the veritable basses of the choir, I was totally swept off my feet by the 'Behold, the sea itself' opening, and indeed the whole choir-and-orchestra experience. It certainly beat my previous big musical moment - *Elijah in* Croydon Parish Church, where the cloud-no-bigger-than-a-man's-hand section seemed a piece of very high drama indeed!

The other J.B...

I went to one of the earliest - perhaps the first - Kings Lynn Festivals, around 1950. One day, wandering the streets and not quite knowing what to do with myself, I heard music coming from a church. I peeped inside and found the Hallé Orchestra and John Barbirolli rehearsing the RVW Fifth Symphony. I was lingering in the back pews when JB came down from the podium to assess the orchestral balance - and perhaps to ask whether I was intruding. What did I think of it? he said, as he sat beside me.... It was at that same festival that RVW came and gave a talk, almost certainly about some aspect of folk-song. I can see him now, 45 years later, shambling onto the platform. Such presence and such unshakeable integrity!

After the Croydon Phil my next choir was the London Choral Society, conducted by another man of enormous integrity and sense of purpose - John Tobin, whose choral discipline and adventurous programming were important formative influences for me and many others. At the Festival Hall we did one of the early - perhaps even the second - performances of *An Oxford Elegy.* Was it John Westbrook, with whom I was later privileged to collaborate in a poetry recording, who narrated?



BY JOHN BISHOP

In the early 1950s I went to Sadler's Wells most weeks and saw everything that robust resident company had to offer. The freshness and wholesome emotions of *Hugh the Drover* (James Johnston as Hugh?) have stayed with me across the years, and have been happily rejuvenated by the new (1994) Hyperion recording. In particular, Mary's first entry and those passages sung by Sarah Walker reduce me to tears.

I have been pressing Chelsea Opera Group, among whose ageing but resiliant chorus I am proud to number myself, to consider *Hugh* for 1997: it would suit us admirably. The Chinese water-drip treatment I am using on the COG Chairman may yet work...

The first 24 years of my working life (1947-71) were spent with Shell, whose house magazine was in those days one of the two or three most admired in the country. A key function was to keep the many expatriate Englishmen working for the company in touch with their native land, and we carried a substantial arts section. As a fledgling journalist I was allowed to contribute to this, which meant, among other things, sitting in empty West End cinemas during mornings watching new films, and writing up novels of the day at a time when much was happening in literature. On one occasion we ran a substantial article about English music, and this highlighted the then new RVW Sixth Symphony. I think we even reproduced a page of the full score - yes, in an oil company magazine!

Vyvyan recital

I also wrote a regular column reviewing new records. LPs had just come on the market , and I was much taken by a recital of English songs by Jennifer Vyvyan: such recitals are common on CD now but were rare then. Vyvyan's singing of *The New Ghost* and *The Water Mill* haunt me still....

The Lark Ascending has insinuated its way into my consciousness at several points over the last 40 years, but it was a real rounding-the-circle pleasure earlier this year to be asked to organise a series of professional concerts in East Anglia, and to hear *The Lark* played so sympathetically in three wonderful venues, on three successive nights, by the Britten Sinfonia and violinist Pauline Lowbery.

One could go on with this selective trip down Memory Lane: participation, when my adult voice was just beginning to settle, in a performance of the *Serenade to Music,* conducted by a young RAM student we now know as Kenneth Alwyn; my mother - a spirited domestic pianist of the kind now nearly vanished - playing *Linden Lea* on our ungrateful upright; the thrilling bass-notes in an early EP recording of the *Three Shakespeare Songs;* meeting the impecunious musician who became my wife and finding among her few scores a miniature of the *London Symphony...*

My case rests...and very happily.

Linda Hayward – see opposite page.

LINDA HAYWARD tells how the –

Tuba 'Romanza' changed everything

Ever since I can remember I have loved classical music. In my childhood I admired various composers' music, with certain ones claiming number one status: Tchaikovsky was the current favourite when i was eight years old, Handel when I was ten, Bizet when I was eleven, and so on. As I grew up and learned the recorder and clarinet, and play in the school orchestra, I found that the piece I was listening to or trying to play at the time was, in my view, number one.

However, in the mid-1970s I went to a recital given be the London Symphony Orchestra's then tuba player John Fletcher. It was to change everything. An arrangement of the *Romanza* of RVW's Tuba Concerto was played, using piano accompaniment. It was a revelation! I didn't realise until then that the tuba could sound so beautiful. What was the rest of the concerto like? Luckily, they were selling records of it in the interval, but the only one not involving more brass music was coupled with the RVW Third Symphony. This was a closed book to me, but I bought it anyhow. My knowledge of RVW's music at that point was limited to the *Tallis Fantasia*, which I liked, *Linden Lea*, *The Vagabond*, and certain hymn-tunes, which I was ambivalent about.

Stunned

When I put the record of the symphony on for the first time - another revelation! It captured my attention from the first note. The whole symphony captivated me and when the last notes died away I sat in wrapt silence. I wanted to know more about RVW and his music. I was stunned to learn that he had been alive in my lifetime and I hadn't even noticed his music with any degree of enthusiasm before. I must have been asleep!

As time went on my knowledge increased. At first, orchestral works were explored, because I was playing in a local orchestra. Later, tentative steps were made into choral works and opera. The more I listened the more I liked. No more current favourites - just one composer in a class of his own! Works I have become particularly attached to are *The Lark Ascending* and *Serenade to Music*. These defy attempts to put them into any particular category. *The Lark Ascending*, with its solo violin soaring ever upward, always gives me a tingle down my spine. The *Serenade* is a magical setting of Shakespeare's words, with sublime melody and harmony fused together to produce a piece unlike any other.

Of the symphonies, the Fifth has a mystical air to it and I fell in love with it immediately. The Sixth took a little longer to get to grips with, but I grew to appreciate it for the feeling of strength it exudes. The Second always moves me, especially the slow movement. I have an affection for the Eighth, but I am still struggling with the Ninth. Naturally the Third is my favourite, being my initial introduction to RVW's symphonic repertoire. However, all the symphonies are fascinating because each has its own character.

The first opera I explored was *Hugh the Drover*, which I enjoyed, but the one that had a profound effect on me was *Pilgrim's Progress*. I heard an extract on the radio and rushed out to buy the complete version conducted by Sir Adrian Boult. I long to see a live performance. I desperately want to hear *The Poisoned Kiss*, having acquired a vocal score of it signed by the composer and librettist. A friend who plays the piano attempted to play through it and we had fun trying to sing it. It is really funny and we enjoyed exploring it, even if rather inadequately.

Little gem

The *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* was my first taste of the choral works. This was followed by *Sancta Civitas*, *Dona Nobis Pacem*, *Five Mystical Songs* and *Epithalamion*. Of these the *Fantasia* and *Epithalamion* caught my attention immediately, but gradually I came to appreciate *Dona Nobis Pacem* as something special. One work which really took me by surprise, and which I believe is a little gem, is the Mass in G Minor.

Until I discovered the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams my knowledge of songs, choral music and opera was severely limited. His use of voices in orchestral works encouraged a broader outlook in my music listening. This was good preparation for a peripatetic clarinet teacher. RVW's music has opened a Pandora's box which continues to educate and enthrall me.

I have always been amazed at the lack of recordings of RVW conducting his own works. I have the famous recording of the Fourth Symphony conducted by him in the 1930s, but I longed to know how the other symphonies would be performed when the composer was in charge.

Searching through my copy of *RVW* by Ursula Vaughan Williams (OUP, 1964) I found that he had conducted the Fifth Symphony in 1943 and the Second in 1946, both at Promenade Concerts. I therefore wrote to the National Sound Archive in London, asking if they had copies of these recordings, as both had been broadcast by the BBC at the time. The NSA said they could not trace the Second, even though they had access to the BBC sound archive. They did, however, have a copy of RVW conducting the Fifth Symphony - date unknown. I was welcome to listen to it.

On an agreed date a friend and I journeyed to London. We were soon ensconced in separate cubicles, the music filtering through the headphones. I listened with rapture to the exciting and vibrant performance. The orchestra seemed to pull out all the stops: it was so alive and full of zest - a marvellous performance. The recording was a live performance, as evidenced by the occasional coughing of members of the audience and the applause at the end. We were then able to review any portion of the symphony at will, as they allowed it to be taped onto cassette during the first play-through. Unfortunately, we were not allowed to purchase the cassette because of copyright problems.

I thought how lovely it would be if, somehow, this rare recording could be released commercially, even though there are a few bars missing from the beginning of one of the movements. I believe the copyright is the BBC's or British Library's, so whether this will ever occur I don't know.

If you want to hear it at the NSA (29 Exhibition Road, London SW7 2AS) you need to make an appointment, stating what you want to hear. There are also recordings of various talks given by RVW on subjects such as Holst, Parry, Stanford, 'The Singing Englishmen', Bach, and a recording of part of RVW's 85th birthday celebrations.

Editor's note:
We are investigating the possibility of being able to reprint some of these talks. Attention is also drawn to the series of CDs currently being issued by IMP which draws exclusively on BBC archives.

This concerto is a masterpiece

– says MICHAEL KENNEDY

Piano concertos by British composers have a chequered history. Not one of the many they have composed can be said to have entered the international repertoire. Whereas violinists from all over the world have taken up the concertos of Elgar, Walton and Britten, and Elgar's Cello Concerto is an indispensable part of the repertoire everywhere, no such luck with piano concertos.

This is certainly not because they are inferior music, yet even in Britain one can go for long stretches without encountering a performance. John Ireland's, I suppose, comes nearest to being an established work and at one time it seemed that Rawsthorne's two might join it. William Y Hurlstone's was recorded, but that's as far as it went. Tippett's has infrequent performances, even though it is one of his most lyrical and approachable works. No one seems to know Rubbra's these days, a lovely work overdue for revival. Walton's is scarcely a concerto at all as its title, *Sinfonia Concertante*, implies. Britten's is one of his less impressive works, even though he was such a wonderful pianist. It was recorded by Sviatoslav Richter, but I doubt if he took it into his regular repertory. Stanford composed three, but he might as well not have bothered. Parry's was recently revived, but has left no ripples behind it. Herbert Howells wrote two. The first is virtually unknown; after the first performance of the second in 1925 a critic, no less, stood up in Queen's Hall and bellowed 'Thank God that's over', shattering Howells's self-confidence for years. He withdrew the work at once. Elgar contemplated composing one, but it progressed no further than sketches.

Two concertos by major composers remain for consideration, those by Delius and Vaughan Williams. Unlikely as it might seem, there is a link between them. Delius's began as a *Fantasy* for piano and orchestra in 1897. He revised it for Busoni, who was to have played it in Berlin but fell ill. The first performance was in October 1904, with Julius Buths as soloist. Further revision followed during 1906, when the Hungarian pianist Theodor Szanto showed an interest in it. He gave the first London performance at the Promenade Concert conducted by Sir Henry Wood on 22 October 1907. Szántó made some alterations of his own to the concerto while it was being prepared for publication in 1908. Delius violently objected to these and threatened legal action. He wrote to Szántó: 'The piece is not to become a piano showpiece with a faint orchestral accompaniment as you seem to wish...There are already enough superficial piano concertos around without my enriching the world with yet another'.

With a new recording just released, the Piano Concerto is very much up for consideration.

In the Queen's Hall audience for that 1907 performance was Ralph Vaughan Williams. Two days later he wrote to Delius saying: 'I should so much like to show you some of my work. I have had it in mind (and especially now that I have heard your beautiful concerto) that I should profit very much by your advice and if you saw my work you might be able to suggest ways in which I could improve myself – either by going to Paris or not'. Some days later RVW played through what he had then composed of *A Sea Symphony* to Delius. It is quite possible that Delius advised him to go to Paris. He knew Ravel well, although it was M D Calvocoressi who suggested Ravel as a teacher to RVW. Robin Legge, music critic of the *Daily Telegraph* and a friend of Delius, had written to Delius about Vaughan Williams on 20 September 1907, mentioning that his 'scoring is stodgy' and he 'is anxious to go to Paris for a couple of months to learn something of the French style of scoring. Can you recommend anyone who would be of use?' One has to wonder if the name Ravel also came from Delius.

It is interesting to note RVW's reference to the 'beautiful' concerto, which was surely not just flattery. He was not a particularly enthusiastic Delian later in life, but the recent superb recording by Piers Lane which pairs the Delius and Vaughan Williams concertos [reviewed elsewhere in this issue – Editor] reveals unsuspected similarities. The Delius is usually categorised as 'uncharacteristic', but I am not so sure. What RVW perhaps fixed on in 1907 were the unusual harmonies and the clarity of texture in the writing in the slow movement, which may well have been a French influence on Delius. After all, he lived in France and although usually classified as under German influence (or Grieg's), there is a distinctly Ravelian flavour to parts of this shamefully neglected work.

Vaughan Williams' concerto, although neglected but not as much today as it used to be, can safely be counted among his major works. It belongs to a prolific and particularly rich decade in his career stretching from 1925 to 1935 and including the short but significant oratorio *Sancta Civitas*; the Violin Concerto; *Flos Campi*; the opera *Sir John in Love*; a start on the operas *Riders to the Sea* and *The Poisoned Kiss*; the 'masque for dancing' *Job;* the *Magnificat*; and the Fourth Symphony. The first two movements of the Piano Concerto were composed in 1926, the *finale* in 1930-1. The concerto was written for Harriet Cohen, who gave the first performance in Queen's Hall, London, on 1 February 1933 at a BBC Symphony Orchestra concert conducted by Adrian Boult. She must have had considerable trouble with it because of her small hands. (Incidentally, Strokowski had hoped to conduct the first performance, but it had already been promised to the BBC.)

Selfish

The history of the concerto and its revisions is among the most complex relating to a work by Vaughan Williams. He wrote to Harriet Cohen: 'As far as I am concerned, my compositions are done when I hear the first performance and I leave the rest to others (you among others!) - very selfish of me, I know, but I *must* have peace to think of the next piece'. But in this case the first performance was very far from the end of the matter. The concerto was completed in May 1931 and played through by friends of Holst at St Paul's Girls School. RVW sent it to Miss Cohen at the end of October. The other works in the concert at which the concerto was

premiéred were Schubert's *Unfinished* Symphony, Bax's *The Garden of Fand* and Delius's *Sea-Drift*. What an extraordinary coincidence - or was it? - that Delius was in this programme as well as Bax, with whom the concerto is intimately associated. RVW wrote the programme-note for the concerto. His penultimate sentence reads: 'The Cadenza (of the *finale*) ends with a quotation two bars long from a contemporary composer, added "according to my promise"'. HC Colles, then chief critic of *The Times*, was in the know - Harriet Cohen was Bax's mistress - and in his review said he found the ending 'unconvincing', adding: 'Perhaps the composer shared with the pianist some personal secret about it (he must have known damned well he did!), otherwise why did he bring in a quotation from Bax's Third Symphony just before the end?'

Bax composed his Third Symphony in 1928-9 and must have played it through to Vaughan Williams, who persuaded him to add sixteen bars to the cresendo which ends the first movement. It can be presumed, therefore, that the brief quotation from the tranquil and lovely epilogue to the symphony was a symbol of friendship and a most unusual occurrence in the music of Vaughan Williams, who generally eschewed such personal references. He wrote to Harriet Cohen a few days before the premiere: 'The 2 bars of Arnold - I like them *slower* (I know Wood takes it quicker) - quite slow and far off like a dream'. (Wood had conducted the symphony's first performance in March 1930.) After the first performance, RWV wrote to Miss Cohen: 'By the way, before you play it again (if you do) let me have good notice as I want some alterations. The fugue wants lengthening and the cadenzas want altering'. In July 1933, when there was the possibility (which materialised) of a Strasbourg performance conducted by Hermann Scherchen, RVW wrote again: 'I meant to have re-written the last movement to make it better [he meant 'easier', but was too tactful] for you - I kept putting it off and off until I could approach it with a calm mind. Now it's got to go once again in its old form. One slight alteration I think we can make. The "quotation' at the end does not "come off" - *we* understand it, but the audience does not. So I will in the next few days think out a new ending, only about 4 new bars for you to learn'. Ten days later he had decided he could not substitute anything and told her simply to omit the Bax quotation 'and go straight from the end of the cadenza to the final bars'. But that was not to be the end of it. A few days later he decided to make a major alteration to the cadenza which leads into the waltz in the *finale*.

The concerto soon followed the fate of other English concertos and dropped out of consideration. Boult and others persuaded the composer that a better balance might be obtained if the work was re-cast for two pianos. (Here one may add that if a pianist other than Harriet Cohen - who was fiercely jealous about 'her' concerto - had taken it up, this might not have been necessary.) So, in collaboration with Joseph Cooper, this was done and the new version was first performed by Cyril Smith and Phyllis Sellick on 22 November 1946. Here again it was the end of the *finale* which received most attention from RVW. He wrote in a new passage for the two pianos unaccompanied, deleted 10 bars of *ritornello* and provided the work with a quiet (and more poetic) ending on a chord of B major. Most pianists who have returned to the one-piano version keep the two-piano ending.

Mystery

An intriguing mystery remains about that Bax quotation. It can only have been added in 1929 or 1930. The cadenza which preceded it hints at the quotation, and the cadenza is derived from a theme in the *Romanza* slow movement which bears a remarkable resemblance to the Bax symphony's epilogue. Yet that movement was written in 1926, three years before the symphony. Perhaps there were revisions in 1930, but it is difficult to imagine that such a major structural change was made then. The sequel to this mystifying episode is that the Fourth Symphony, anticipated in many ways by the Piano Concerto, is dedicated to Bax.

Too much was made of the so-called difficulties of balance in the concerto. It is no more problematical in this respect that Bartók's first concerto, with which it has features in common. The first movement is a *Toccata*, a baroque term and a reminder that Vaughan Williams began to compose the concerto shortly after he'd completed his near-baroque Violin Concerto, which he originally called *Concerto Accademico*. The opening movement of the Violin Concerto is a fusion of Bach-like figuration and counterpoint with modal references to folk-song. In its embrace of neoclassicism, it is not too far away from Stravinsky's Violin Concerto. The Piano Concerto, Vaughan Williams himself said, reflected his admiration for Busoni's arrangements of Bach. The percussive nature of the piano-writing, with strong rhythms, block chords and cross-accents, is exuberant rather than menacing – as, surely, is the opening of the Fourth Symphony, the logical continuation of this strain in Vaughan Williams's music. But he knows better than to keep up this level of violent excitement for too long, and soon folk-like phrases similar to those in the earlier concerto make their appearance. One of these, in the orchestra, becomes the official second subject. A fanfare from the brass launches the piano into a short, rippling cadenza, the link to the *Romanza*.

This very beautiful movement has a theme based on repetition of one note. The influence here is unquestionably Ravel, as it is in the slow movement of the Violin Concerto. A flute elaborates the main theme above piano arpeggios. When the orchestra takes up the melody it does so with glassy harmonies. Solo oboe now appropriates the flute's theme before piano and orchestra enter the world of Ravel's enchanted garden in *Ma Mere I'Oye* and we hear the new theme in 3/2 which anticipates the Baxian element in the *finale*. One may wonder today how this lovely movement failed to win popularity for the whole concerto in the 1930s. It builds to a rapturous climax, subsides and then springs a surprise: the oboe returns, lonely and melancholy, in duet with the viola. Trombones interject brutally and the piano converts the oboe's descending phrase into the fugue theme of the *finale*.

In the helter-skelter which follows, the sheer energy of the music is the clearest pointer to the Fourth Symphony - why were people so surprised by that work when it came? Hadn't they been listening? Answer: no. The fugue culminates in a mighty piano cadenza (Bach-Busoni and no mistake) which ends with a glissando to launch the waltz theme, first cousin to Ravel's savage *La Valse* and worlds away from *Der Rosenkavalier*. The surprises aren't over, though. Another and longer cadenza brings back themes from the *Romanza*, wistfully and tenderly, and unmistakably suggests the epilogue in Bax's Third Symphony. Pizzicato strings gently recall the fugue theme just before the final peaceful chords.

Hubert Foss, in his pioneering book on the composer, classed the Piano Concerto with the symphonies. Frank Howes wrote of similarities to late Beethoven. It has taken everyone else a long time to catch up with these two wise men, but better late then never. The latest recording leaves no doubt that the concerto is a masterpiece. But will other pianists and conductors spread the word to audiences who might welcome a change from their regular diet? I have to say I doubt it.

'The cycle exceeded my wildest expectations'

Stephen Connock interviews RICHARD HICKOX – the man of the moment

SLC You clearly have a considerable empathy for VW's music. When did you first discover him?

RH My father was vicar at St. Nicholas Church in Hedsor, Bucks. I was brought up with the sound of those wonderful hymns – *For all the Saints* and *Down Ampney,* for example – all around me. This music is in my inheritance. As a young boy, I would play *Rhosymedre* on the organ in the church. Another milestone was at the age of fifteen, when I sang in the school choir in the *Sea Symphony*. Shortly after, I formed my own chamber choir and we tackled the *Three Shakespeare Songs* and delightful folk-tunes like *The Turtle Dove. Flos campi* was in my repertoire from the earliest days; it is a work I love and have now recorded twice.

SLC As a professional musician, what were your first projects involving VW?

RH Having set up the City of London Sinfonia in 1971, I was invited to take part in the Vaughan Williams centenary celebrations in London. We did *In Windsor Forest* and *Flos campi,* as well as Holst's *Ode to Death.*

SLC In the 1970s and 1980s, you recorded many fine VW works, but only the *Sea Symphony* on Virgin. Why not more symphonies?

RH Virgin were keen to record all the symphonies with the LSO, but Chandos had just started their cycle with the orchestra under Bryden Thomson. So I did the *Sea Symphony* with the Philharmonia. However, RCA then signed that orchestra for its series with Leonard Slatkin. Later, I became an exclusive Chandos artist, and they of course had the Bryden Thomson recordings. I would like to record the cycle, and after years of study and many performances, I now feel the time is appropriate to commit my interpretations to disc. Let's keep hoping!

SLC Of your many recordings of VW, which ones are you most satisfied with?

RH I particularly like the recording of VW miniatures which included the *49th Parallel*. I am also pleased with my *Job* on EMI.

SLC How highly do you regard Vaughan Williams as a symphonist?

RH I have no doubt that he is our greatest symphonist. The works have incredible variety, and they span all periods of his creative life. It is music of extraordinary quality which was often ahead of its time. Elgar had been influenced by European traditions - form from Wagner and orchestration from Richard Strauss, for example - but VW's influences were folk music and Tudor composers. Ravel had introduced a more exotic range of colour to his orchestration. What distinguishes both Elgar and Vaughan Williams is the sweep of their melody, which is derived from the contours of our landscape and the rise and fall of our language. It is quite special, and I hear it, too, in Purcell and Britten.

SLC Have subsequent English composers matched VW in the symphonic repertoire?

RH Both Rubbra and Arnold have written fine symphonies. Malcolm Arnold's music is less distinguished, but is superbly orchestrated. He was capable - as in the slow movement of the Fifth Symphony - of writing music of great eloquence. Walton's two symphonies are intensely rhythmic, more Mediterranean than English. But what makes VW so special is the ability to write on a large canvas music of enormous character which covers such a wide range of emotions.

SLC Turning to the individual symphonies, what are your feelings on them?

RH I love the *Sea Symphony* and seek to communicate this to the audience. The greatest movement is the fourth, where I try to project the underlying architecture of the piece. The moment when the semi-chorus of sopranos and altos enter with *Wherefore unsatisfied soul?* is very special to me. Similarly, in the *Antartica* I am always keen to convey the shape of the symphony overall. The work could seem episodic unless the overall structure is held together tightly. It is a fantastic piece which we all worked very hard on.

SLC Your performance of the last movement of the Sixth Symphony had great concentration. How did you achieve this?

RH The key is to make each semiquaver melodically very important. Every note must connect, and the tension is sustained within the melodic line for each instrument. To me, Vaughan Williams, who had experienced two World Wars, is saying in this movement 'There is no hope'.

SLC You found considerable depth in the Eighth Symphony. How do you rate the last two symphonies?

RH I am very impressed by both the Eighth and the Ninth. In these works, VW was experimenting to the end of his long life. The Ninth is a work of a man at peace with himself who knew his creative life was at an end. There is such a compelling radiance in this music, and the final E major chord is heavenly. I ask the orchestra not to attack his symphony as if it was the Fourth, but to recognise its luminous qualities.

SLC Forgive the question, but what is your favourite amongst the symphonies?

RH My personal favourite is the *Pastoral*, which moves me greatly. I cannot understand why it is not more widely admired and performed. However, I believe the greatest to be the Fifth, where the spirituality of the music is deeply affecting. I recently performed the work in Tokyo, where is was acclaimed by everyone as a masterpiece.

SLC How do you feel about the audience response at the Barbican?

RH I have been overwhelmed by it. The enthusiasm of the large audiences has surprised and delighted all of us.

The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra has never experienced this at the Barbican. I have been impressed, too, by the way the Barbican organised the events.

SLC The orchestra were in fine form.

RH Yes – marvellous! They can produce a *dolce* sound perfect for English music.It was hard work for them – three symphonies in one evening is demanding on the players' reserves. You know, there were some sceptics in the orchestra, but one by one they were won over.

SLC What of the future? What are your plans for VW?

RH You know about the *Pilgrim's Progress* at the Royal Opera House in 1997. This will be an exciting venture. I would like to work with the RVW Society on a Vaughan Williams festival in late 1997 to celebrate the 125th anniversary of his birth. I will be talking to the LSO and City of London Sinfonia about this. I am also recording the *Five Tudor Portraits* for Chandos in 1997.

SLC Are there other recording plans, not of VW, which you can tell us about?

RH Yes. I will be completing the Rubbra and Arnold symphony cycles, and there will be a lot more Dyson, including *Canterbury Pilgrims*. I am also recording more Delius, such as the *Mass of Life* and the *Requiem*. I will be recording more Frank Bridge, too. I am tackling all the Britten operas, and *Peter Grimes* is now finished.

SLC Excellent news. Returning to Vaughan Williams, do you have any final thoughts on the project you have completed at the Barbican?

RH Without doubt, the cycle has exceeded my wildest expectations on every front. I hope I have contributed to re-establishing Vaughan Williams as a first-rate symphonist who can fill a concert hall every time. This is what music of this quality deserves.

A TRUE VISION OF ALBION

ROBIN IVISON on the Barbican series

I enjoyed the Nielsen and Sibelius symphony cycles at the Barbican in 1992 quite unaware that a seed was then being sown in the mind of Richard Hickox which would come to such glorious fruition three years later in the first cycles of the complete RVW symphonies, given concurrently in Bournemouth and at the Barbican by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra conducted by Hickox.

It is always interesting to listen to music with ears attuned to its historic background, and those of us who attended Lewis Foreman's talk after the AGM had the benefit of hearing much fine music written in Britain at around the turn of the century. But against this background the wonderful opening bars of the *Sea Symphony* made one exclaim 'Genius, by God!' All those fortunate to attend the cycle will have their particular memories and I have only space to touch on some of mine.

Although the *Antartica* was, given a fine, evocative performance, it was surpassed by a truly superb *Sea Symphony*, which was indeed 'Covered all over with visible power and beauty'. It was glorious sung by the LSO Chorus, with Joan Rodgers and Simon Keenlyside deeply poetic in the communing introspective passages and thrillingly ardent in the stirring ones.

Magical

Throughout the cycle it was clear that Hickox had unerringly chosen the ideal tempo for each movement, so that while the music unfolded with an inevitable momentum, there was always space for it to breath naturally, and there was some magical phrasing from the orchestra.

This was exemplified in the last movement of the Sixth Symphony, which the orchestra played with superb concentration, every note having meaning. In the same concert, Violinist Jonathan Carney was a lilting , poetic 'Lark', while in a purposeful, yet quite magical, *Pastoral Symphony*, the poignant off-stage bugle-and-trumpet calls were hauntingly lovely.

Three symphonies were given in the third concert. Hickox's interpretation of the Fourth did not seek to emulate VW's own seemingly intense vision as recorded by him in 1937, but was lithe and brought out the rich humour as well as the anger in the scherzo and last movement.

The Eighth came up fresh as new paint, from the delightful lilt in the phrasing of the opening bars, through the bounce of the scherzo, joyously played by the woodwind, to the glorious sonority of the strings in the *Cavatina*.

A rapt performance of the Fifth Symphony completed a wonderful evening.

The cycle came to an end on October 9 when 16 soloists gathered for a sonorous performance of the *Serenade to Music*. This preceded the Ninth Symphony, whose awesome vision received a strong, vital interpretation. A celebratory performance of the *London Symphony* captured the work's glorious melodies and its many facets of Edwardian London before the bonus of a bouncing *Wasps Overture* as an encore.

The four concerts were attended by large and enthusiastic audiences which happily included many younger people. This was particularly so in the first two concerts, which were given at weekends. Stephen Connock's programme-note were a model of their kind, bringing out the essence of each symphony against a background of the composer's unceasing exploration.

The cycle was a remarkable success, and I pay tribute to the superb conducting of Richard HIckox and the inspired playing of the orchestra. In 1959, the year following RVW's death, all nine symphonies were played at the Proms, albeit by four different conductors and orchestras. In its introduction the prospectus read: 'It is significant and challenging that our own Vaughan Williams created a British range of nine symphonic peaks which we can display with proud conviction'. In England we have difficulty in honouring our great men. Let us trust that this first cycle by the same conductor and orchestra will be the precursor of many in the future.

CD reviews

PIANO CONCERTO

Vaughan Williams: Piano Concerto in C major / Delius: Piano Concerto in C minor / Finzi: Eclogue. Piers Lane (piano) / Vernon Handley / Royal Liverpool PO. (EMI Eminence 7243 5 65742 2 9)

This is Handley's second recording of VW's troubled Piano Concerto: the other dates from 1984, with Howard Shelley as soloist (Lyrita SRCD 211). It is by no means a conventional concerto, and RVW, tongue in cheek perhaps, referred to the work as an 'orchestra and pianoforte concerto', Hubert Foss regarded it as a symphony miscast as a concerto. Although labelled a difficult work, I find that it repays repeated hearing. To listeners in the late 20th century the angular writing, dissonances and percussive use of the piano in parts of the outer movements should not be too uncomfortable and of course, by way of relief, there is the beauty and calm of the exquisite slow movement.

Piers Lane launches into the first-movement Toccata at a ferocious pace - the instrument must have taken a fearsome hammering ! Here I prefer Shelley in his 1991 recording for Chandos (Chan 8941). Things do, however, calm down and the playing, though powerful, is more restrained in the *largamente* and ensuing cadenza.

The second movement is most beautifully played . Anything that VW called Romanza means that we are in for a profound experience, not to say a treat, and here Lane scores over both of Shelley's performances. His slower tempi (over two minutes longer) remind me of the languid yet refined atmosphere of the *adagio assai* of Ravel's G Major Concerto, particularly the passage where the solo flute weaves around the piano's arpeggios; the playing here suggests that VW was nodding a tribute to his French mentor. The movement is of course pure VW but there is within a tune reminiscent of the epilogue from the last movement of Bax's Third Symphony (1929). This theme is picked up again, briefly, in the finale. The original version of the concerto premiered by the dedicatee, Harriet Cohen, included a direct quotation of the Bax theme in the last movement (to be played .... 'very far off, like a dream'). Bax and Harriet Cohen were, of course, lovers and both great friends of VW. The *Hymn Tune Prelude* of 1928 had been written for Harriet ('price, one thousand kisses') and the magnificent 4th Symphony of 1934, dedicated, to Arnold Bax. Clearly, the friendship was a deep one. It would appear from some of VW's letters to Miss Cohen of the time that the Bax theme was of some highly personal significance to the three of them. However, after the first hearing VW decided that it should not be for public performance, and so it was removed from the final published score. With Handley conducting, it is perhaps not surprising that this marvellous movement reaches its climax in a wash of Baxian sound before subsiding into the cool pastoralism, so reminiscent of *Flos Campi*, that leads to the finale.

The last movement starts abruptly with a percussive fugue that Lane and the RLPO play with considerable panache (reminding one of Handley's recording of the 4th Symphony). After a rather jocular German Waltz, the excellent sound recording gives Piers Lane's wonderfully poetic playing of the final piano cadenza great clarity and presence. Here the solo piano music does indeed create a detached and dream-like feeling before quietly fading into the returning pizzicato strings, which bring the work to a peaceful end.

I have no hesitation in recommending this CD to members. Indeed, if you do not have this essential work at mid-price and with excellent couplings, you need look no further. This is not in any way to denigrate Howard Shelley's two fine versions but both are at full price and, in the case of the Chandos recording, coupled with a recording of the 9th Symphony that I found a great disappointment.

Concentrated listening to these three excellent versions has made me wonder why on earth VW was persuaded to recast the concerto for two pianos. Leaving aside the technical problems the soloist has to overcome, the original solo version is to my mind more exciting and creates a much clearer piano sound. Let's hope we have a Prom performance of this neglected work soon.

Robin Barber

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS FILM MUSIC

RTE Concert Orchestra, conducted by Andrew Penny Marco Polo 8.223665

RVW's film music is a subject that has arisen several times in the *Journal* already, and will surely arise again - not least as a result of this most welcome disc and Andrew Penny's article in this issue of the *Journal*. Apart from the *49th Parallel* prelude we get the *Story of a Flemish Farm* and *Coastal Command* Suites, and the Three Portraits from The *England of Elizabeth:* all in very spruce, well-drilled performances by the Dublin-based RTE Concert Orchestra. After those recordings were made, in 1993, Marco Polo were somewhat at a loss to know who to turn to for expert booklet notes. The society was able to put them on to Lewis Foreman, who has excelled himself: the notes could not be bettered, not least because Foreman has clearly seen the films and, where necessary, relates image to sound.

Virtually all the music was new to me, and what strikes one again and again is the richness of the invention and the composer's characteristic commitment to the subjects in hand: this was anything but hack work. Such movements as 'Down in the barn' and 'The dead man's kit' (from *Flemish Farm*), and almost all of *Coastal Command*, offer arresting music by any standards, evocatively scored and the equal of anything achieved by the many fine composers who have bent their talents to the screen. There is talk of a successor to this disc - there were, after all, 11 films with RVW scores. Let us hope this disc sells as well as it deserves to, and so encourages Marco Polo to explore further.

John Bishop

SYMPHONY NO. 5 IN D SANCTA CIVITAS

Gareth Roberts (tenor), Brian Rayner Cook (baritone), BBC Singers, BBC Symphony Chorus, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Rozhdestvensky. BBC Classics, BBC RD 9125 (bargain price).

This is the first time these two works have been the coupled together, and only the fifth recording for Vaughan Williams' 1925 oratorio. Gennedi Rozhdestvensky has already shown what a fine interpreter of English music he is through, for example, his recordings of Howells choral works on Chandos. His *Sea Symphony* (on Melodiya) is a serious and expressive performance flawed by the heavy accents of the Russian soloists. Here,

with the reliable Brian Rayner Cook, the lyrical Gareth Roberts and BBC forces, what impresses is the conductor's grasp of the work's structure. His pacing of that wonderful cantabile section *For in one hour is thy judgement come* is ideal, as is the *adagio* return of the solo violin and ppp chorus at *And they shall see his face.* If occasionally ponderous – as at the *poco animato* section from figure 51 of the vocal score – this performance can be very moving and is always sincere and committed.

First choice remains Richard Hickox's EMI recording (CDC 7 54788 2) with Bryn Terfel a much more vivid and expressive soloist than Brian Rayner Cook. Hickox, too, maintains that free and elastic pace sought by Vaughan Williams, and the solo violin in the beautiful passage *And I saw a new heav'n and a new earth* is more lyrical than in the BBC recording.

The Fifth Symphony demonstates similar qualities from Rozhdestvensky. It is a weighty interpretation, with a particularly searching slow movement. The coughing of the audience is rather a distraction, although perhaps realising the audience may have been gripped by the early stages of the Ebola virus, the orchestra console them with playing of genuine warmth and spirituality.

For less than £6, I urge members to investigate this CD.

Stephen Connock

BUSHES AND BRIARS

London Madrigal Singers/Baccholian Singers
EMI CMS 651232

A harmony of part-songs is, I suppose, the collective phrase. These two CDs - a sumptuous collection indeed - are devised from three LPs of the early 1970s. One was devoted entirely to RVW folksong arrangements, sung by the London Madrigal Singers, a pick-up professional group consisting of such stalwarts as Ian Partridge and Christopher Keyte and directed by Christopher Bishop. The other two were by the Baccholian Singers, another small professional group of that period, in which Partridge also featured, as well as other experienced hands such as Michael George and Stephen Varcoe. They offer more RVW and also Elgar's *Part-songs from the Greek Anthology*, a substantial selection of Holst items, and choice pieces of Howells, Bax, Delius, Warlock and Britten. All very professionally done and most welcome even if you have got the original LPs. The RVW items include the *Five English Folksongs*, and such gems as *The Unquiet Grave* and *Bushes and Briars.*

John Bishop

SONGS OF TRAVEL

Bryn Terfel (baritone), Malcolm Martineau (piano). DG 445 946 2 (full priced, with songs by Finzi, Ireland and Butterworth).

I have been reflecting at length on why my initial enthusiasm for this new DG recording has waned a little. Bryn Terfel's astonishing dynamic range, the power and beauty of his voice, his characterisation, his understanding of the poet's meaning – all this continues to impress. And yet... My concern centres on the artist's choice of tempi, and can be heard most clearly in Finzi's marvellous song-cycle *Let us garlands bring.* Stephen Varcoe, in his Chandos recording with the City of London Sinfonia under Hickox (Chandos 8743), takes 12.42 minutes, compared to Bryn Terfel's 16.03. One song alone – *Fear no more the heat o' the sun* – is almost two minutes longer in the DG recording! Both this and *Come away, Come away death* are simply too ponderous, too heavy and the line can then become distorted. At this pace, the characterisation can also sound overdone and rather self-conscious. John Carol Case on a Lyrita LP with the LPO/Boult presents the most idiomatic interpretation of this cycle (will this ever turn up on CD?).

The Songs of Travel have a similar tendency to slow tempi. Thomas Allen, for example, in his fine EMI recording with the CBSO/Rattle (EMI CDM 7 64731 2) is quicker in all bar one song. Robert Tear and Philip Ledger, however, in my recommended recording on Argo (London 430 368 RLM) take 26.05, compared to Bryn Terfel and Malcolm Martineau, who take 25.12 minutes. However, there is sometimes more spontaneity in Tear's interpretation – compare, for example, *Let beauty awake*, especially with Philip Ledger's superb accompaniment.

Having analysed my reservations, the *Songs of Travel* do contain many fresh insights and singing of remarkable expressiveness. *The Vagabond* best suits Terfel's vivid style. In *Whither must I wander* the eager anticipation of *spring shall come, come again* is memorable. *I have trod the upward and downward slope* is more heartfelt than other recordings and Terfel's humanity makes its mark as much as the vocal strengths.

Overall, a recording I would not want to be without, even if other versions have not been completely eclipsed.

Stephen Connock

RIDERS TO THE SEA HOUSEHOLD MUSIC FLOS CAMPI

Soloist, Northern Sinfonia/Richard Hickox
Chandos 9392

The one-act opera *Riders to the Sea* is a tale of unmitigated tragedy, with the sea steadily claiming all the sons of a much-grief-to-bear Irish woman. Not a lot of laughs: none at all, in fact. The work's appeal lies in its dignified acceptance of the grim reality of life for those in the dangerous callings. I have known the piece since my wife sang in a production of it, well, rather many years ago, and I sat through the rehearsals. I've only seen the opera two or three times since - most recently at the RAM a year or so ago. It wears well and in many ways is ideally suited to the gramophone: the minimal action throws the emphasis very much on the compassion the singers can engender, and was convincingly rendered by the recording of some 20 years ago with Helen Watts in the lead and Meredith Davies on the podium. The cast here - Linda Finnie impressive as the distraught mother Maura, Lynne Dawson and Ingrid Attrot (a new name to me) as the trying-to-be-tactful daughters - is not to be faulted, and Richard Hickox's seasoned hand is evident at the helm. My only criticism is that the sea-sounds are perhaps too prominent.

One might have expected another principally vocal work to accompany the opera but what one gets is a slightly odd mixture of *Flos Campi* (which admittedly has a chorus part) and what is a premiere recording (following a suggestion from the RVW Society) of the rather off-puttingly named *Household Music* - which suggests something of a utility piece. These ruminations on three Welsh hymn-tunes (not to be confused with the organ pieces of that title written 20 years earlier) were not definitively scored - performers are offered several options - and are done here in a version for string orchestra. They are quite substantial, particularly the third of them, a set of neatly crafted variations on our old friend 'Aberystwyth', and last in total over 17 minutes; the middle tune, 'St Denio', becomes an effervescent scherzo. I was decidedly pleased to make their acquaintance, and surprised they haven't made their way onto disc before or been played in concerts more often. They are quintessential RVW. Welcome!

John Bishop

Display at Down Ampney

Down Ampney is the lovely Gloucestershire village where the Rev Arthur Vaughan Williams was vicar when his son was born on 12th October 1872 and christened Ralph in All Saints Parish Church, and where, less than two-and-a-half years later, the Rev Arthur was buried: he was just 40 years old.

In the church today there is a small desk display on RVW, put up 25 years ago, that is greatly in need of refurbishing and modernising. I suggest such a project (it could include the cleaning of the grave) would be inexpensive and a practical expression of interest to mark the launch of the Vaughan Williams Society.

The visitors' book has many comments wishing to see a VW museum here, perhaps inspired by the excellent Holst birthplace 22 miles away in Cheltenham. Down Ampney lies 6 miles south-east of Gloucester, off the A419.

Victor Sheppard

Editor's note:
The society's trustees will certainly consider this suggestion.

View from Down Under

I note with immense envy that the inaugural meeting of our society is due to take place soon, together with performances of both *A Sea Symphony and Sinfonia Antartica* and the opportunity to attend rehearsals.

Believe me, I shall be tearing my hair out in frustration on 17th September, not least because it would have been nice to meet some fellow enthusiasts.

I wonder, is there any possibility of making audio recordings of the proceedings available to those of us too far away to attend?

For a long time I had complete recordings of *Hugh the Drover, Sir John in Love* and *The Poisoned Kiss* on cassette, taken many years ago from BBC radio broadcasts.

Unfortunately my only 'audio equipment' at that time was a cheap portable radio/cassette player and the recordings were in consequence terrible.

YOUR LETTERS

We are always pleased to receive contributions for this page

The performances themselves may well have been superb - I can't remember who the artists were - but in spite of being by then irredeemably hooked on RVW's music, in particular *Pilgrim's Progress,* I could not get into these works and eventually re-used the tapes.

But Matthew Best's wonderful new recording of *Hugh* has won me over - and I should have known better in the first place. And in spite of the painful sound quality I regret no longer being able to reassess *Sir John in Love* and *The Poisoned Kiss*. Here's hoping that Matthew Best will be persuaded to make new versions of them.

I have, incidentally, a recording of the cantata *In Windsor Forest* - featuring music drawn from *Sir John in Love* - on a Classics for Pleasure LP dated 1960 called 'Choral Classics' (CFP 113).

In his Discography, Stephen Connock expresses some dissatisfaction with Norman del Mar's version of this enchanting music, the only one currently available on CD. I'm sure he would enjoy my CfP recording, which has only been allowed to gather dust since I transferred it for convenience onto cassette. *In Windsor Forest* is coupled with choral pieces by Stanford, Parry (*Jerusalem*, of course), Mendelssohn, Mozart and Brahms, and is performed by The Bach Choir and The Jacques Orchestra conducted by Dr Reginald Jacques with soprano Elsie Morrison. Perhaps it's the same recording mentioned by Mr Connock as being on World Record Club TP53.

If any members are desperate to hear it and can't locate it any other way, they can write to me and I'll be happy to record it for them. A blank cassette and an international reply coupon would be appreciated, just in case I'm flooded with requests!

Well, have a wonderful day on Sunday the 17th and spare a thought for those of us for whom 18,800 kilometres is a little too far to travel, even for the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Ron Hoares
New Zealand

An RVW first performance

I count myself very lucky to have attended a first performance of a RVW work, albeit a very minor one. But I have been unable to find any other record of the piece in current catalogues of the composer's works.

On Saturday, October 16th, 1982, at Holy Trinity Church, Hinckley, the Hinckley Music Club presented a concert by the Legrand Ensemble. This group comprised Honor Shepherd (soprano), John Turner (recorder), Basil Howitt (cello), and Keith Elcombe (piano/harpsichord).

The music ranged from Byrd to Alwyn, and included four songs by Vaughan Williams. These were: *Orpheus and his lute* (first setting), *He that is down* (from *Pilgrim's Progress*), *The water mill*, and *The willow whistle* (voice and pipe). As far as I can recollect, this last work is unpublished; and the performance was announced in the programme as its first. I do not know the date of composition, and, as stated above, I have been unable to find any mention of it elsewhere.

It was, as I recall, typical VW, and lasted about two minutes. I wonder if it was composed around the same time as the Suite for pipes, which was recorded about 20 years ago by David Munrow, and which dates from 1939?

Whilst on the subject of willows, I would dearly like a chance to hear *Willow-Wood*, which was published (1903). I wonder whether there is any chance of that being recorded sometime?

Michael Gainsford

Comparisons with Elgar, Hardy

I will watch with interest Peter Neville's progress with the National Trust over possible access to Leith Hill Place. A recent visit to Down Ampney turned out to be frustrating. Only after much searching did I find the rectory where he was born, and of course I could not get close to it, and there was nothing to acknowledge his ever being connected with the village.

Being also a Thomas Hardy and Edward Elgar enthusiast, it is hard not to draw comparisons between the attention these two get in their native countries, and the neglect of RVW. In Dorset there is even a blue plaque on Barclays Bank in Dorchester telling that the fictional Mayor of Casterbridge lived there!

Perhaps RVW's neglect stems from not being associated with one particular part of England (ie, Hardy's Wessex or Elgar's Malvern), as he lived in Gloucestershire, London and Surrey, but then Elgar and Hardy both moved around during their lives, also living in London (although it did not agree with either of them, whereas RVW loved it).

Having been brought up in Surrey (Leith Hill Place and Charterhouse School at Godalming) from 1875 onwards, and having bought the 'White Gates' in Dorking in 1929 (where he lived until 1953, now sadly pulled down due to dry rot), as well as creating the Leith Hill Music Festival, there is some justification for 'Vaughan Williams' Surrey'.

Until now RVW has not had as high a profile as the other gentlemen I have mentioned. Hardy's novels are often compulsory reading at school,and Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* marches have made both these men household names to people with no or little interest in literature or music.

Both Elgar and Hardy are also seen to epitomise the aristocratic English Edwardian gentleman (ironic really when you consider that only RVW actually went to public school or university, or had an aristocratic background: perhaps he should have grown a moustache) in that golden period of the empire before the 'great' war.

Personally, I doubt that RVW will ever become a household name in the way that composers such as Beethoven or indeed Elgar have, and in a way I am glad, as I fear RVW would be associated with only one work (probably *Greensleeves*), in the same way that Gustav Holst may as well have written *The Planets* for all most people know of him.

However, with more recordings being released every month, as well as concert performances (a whole symphony cycle, completely unbelievable even two years ago), I have every confidence that many people already listening to classical music with minds closed to anything by an English composer will be pleasantly surprised, and may even become converts.

• I recently bought the Marco Polo issue of RVW's film music, and would like to endorse the piece written in the *Journal*, recommending society members to buy it immediately.

While it is nice to have more symphony cycles and reissues, it is exciting when a completely new piece of music by RVW comes your way. *The Prelude to the 49th Parallel* is a wonderful piece of heroic stuff, and the *Flemish Farm* suite has RVW in all of his moods. *Coastal Command* was also new to me, and is a major find. The only familiar piece was the *Three Portraits* from *The England of Elizabeth*, and this too has come out as well as on Previn's recording (with the 5th Symphony).

A mention too for Lewis Foreman's booklet notes, which are as comprehensive as on any RVW release I have ever bought, and for once contained a lot of information new to me. They run to six and a half sides: that usually only occurs when you have five different languages translated in the same booklet!

He mentions many moments in the wartime film music reminiscent of *Job*, the 4th Symphony and the Piano Concerto, and after a couple of playings I started to pick these up.

If future issues of VWs' film music are dependent on the sales of this one, I would urge all members to support this enterprise, we may then get music from *The Loves of Joanna Godden*, which I have long felt to be some of his most original and descriptive film music (and which was recorded by Irving according to my discography).

Keith Douglas

Can you help?

Please can anyone supply member Raymond Monk with a CD of VW's piano music as listed in the discography (the number being BMG TRXCD 126 and another CD of songs (Savidge, Steptoe – BMG TRX CD116). 'These are the only two items missing from my VW collection and I will gladly pay a good price for them (both deletions)', he says.

Concert Review

Performance shortcomings but glorious melodies

With both York Opera and Peterborough Opera presenting *Hugh the Drover* within a few weeks of each other, the years of neglect of this romantic, tuneful opera seemed over. Alas, the Peterborough Opera production on June 18 turned out to be a concert version rather than staged. To attempt to sing the boxing match in black tie was ludicrous. The company should have opted for the *Cotswold Romance* rather than the full opera. Since staging is essential, I came away dispirited and hoping for better things from York on June 27.

The York production was thankfully in full costume and well presented, too. The stall-keepers and Morris Men were very colourful, and the stage was packed with children in the crowd scenes, lending youth and vigour to the interpretation. The fight scene was superbly managed, the more so since both Hugh and, in particular, Ian Thomson-Smith as John the Butcher had an impressive physical appearance. The flower-seller returned to hand out primroses after the fight – an imaginative touch.

With such a lively production, and an orchestra of considerable ability under musical conductor Leslie Bresnen (who had conducted *Hugh* in 1981), what of the principal roles? Sarah Ownsworth was a pure-voiced Mary and Linda Baxter as Aunt June was of dependable warmth and character. However, Robert Wade as Hugh was quite unable to handle the demands of the role once the dynamic markings rose above pianissimo. Hugh's role, whether in the *Song of the Road* or *Alone and friendless* or in the passionate love duet of Act 1, requires considerate ardour, and Wade never convinced because of his lack of vocal resource. Given the importance of Hugh to the opera, the evening was another disappointment.

With these performance shortcomings, Vaughan Williams' glorious melodies remain in the memory. When are we going to get a professional performance?

Stephen Connock

Newsbriefs

Chairman Stephen Connock (centre) with the two speakers at the Society's AGM – Michael Kennedy (left) and Lewis Foreman.

- *The Independent* for September 16 carried an interesting feature in which various luminaries of the musical world offered advice to Nicholas Kenyon, who takes over responsibility for the Proms from 1996. For example, Robert Ponsonby, who was Proms director 1972-1985, made a plea for the pursuit of particular themes, and cites some of those he fathered, including RVW, Walton and Janacek - 'something every year', as he put it. More specifically, Fritz Spiegl deplored the fact that there had been 'only one RVW cycle in 36 years. BBC Music Department should be ashamed'.

- **Two RVW works are included in this year's Clerkenwell Music Series, which features Luxembourg music and musicians as well as British music. The gala concert on November, with the Parnassus Ensemble, will include the *Concerto Academica,* and the November 10 event features *An Oxford Elegy,* with the New London Orchestra and BBC Singers. The concerts take place in the Church of Our Most Holy Redeemer, Exmouth Market, Clerkenwell, London. Further details from 0181 422 3119.**

- Boosey and Hawkes have issued a leaflet giving details of all RVW works published by them and available either as over-the-counter items or through their archive service. Copies of the leaflet can be obtained from the B and H Promotion Department, 295 Regent Street, London W1R 8JH.

- **The historic and secluded Dillington House in the heart of rural Somerset will be the venue for a weekend course, 'Towards the Unknown Region, the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams'. The tutor for the course is John Pickard, BMus, PhD, from the University of Bristol, who, as well as being an authority on English music, is also a composer with two symphonies and a substantial tone poem, *Channel Firing,* to his credit. The latter was recently broadcast on Radio 3. John promises a general overview of VW's music. The 16th-century house and grounds are a superbly tranquil setting and there is a small theatre/concert hall, bar restaurant. The Society's secretary, who lives just round the corner, highly recommends the catering. The weekend starts with dinner on Friday evening and finishes after lunch on Sunday. The cost is £109 (residential) and £89 (non-residential) and includes two nights' residence (where appropriate), meals and refreshments during the course. For further details please contact The Booking Secretary, Dillington House, Ilminster, Somerset TA19 9DT (01460 52427). The course dates are March 22-24 1996.**

- Heard on the dreaded Classic FM on the night of July 8, publicising a forthcoming concert at Nottingham: 'Donna nobilis pack 'em', and 'Toward the unknown religion'(!)

- **The 1996 Leith Hill Musical Festival, held at Charterhouse School, Surrey, with Brian Kay as conductor, will feature *Serenade to Music* on April 12 and the *Festival Te Deum* the following day. Further information from 01737 243931. RVW was the festival conductor from 1905 to 1953 and some of his works received their first performance there.**

> Found at the AGM – a Sheaffer pen in a leather holder.
>
> If it's yours, contact the chairman – see page 1.

- The 1995-96 International Orchestral Series at the Fairfield Hall, Croydon, includes a performance on March 27 by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Andrew Davis of *A Pastoral Symphony.*

- **Chances to hear *Hodie* in full are not too numerous. One occurs on December 9, when Gloucester Choral Society, with conductor David Briggs and the Orchestra of the Royal Academy of Music, will give a performance in Gloucester Cathedral at 7.30p.m. Tickets (£12, £8, £5) can be ordered from the Concert Manager at 10 Pitt Street, Gloucester, GL1 2BH.**

- The 1996 Three Choirs Festival will be in Worcester, where on successive days (August 21-23) you can hear *The Lark Ascending*, the *Sea Symphony* and *An Oxford Elegy.* The August 18 afternoon programme includes *On Wenlock Edge.*

- **Listening rather unspecifically to a recently issued BBC Classics CD featuring English music (Elgar, Holst, Ireland, Bax, Bliss) we were delighted to make the acquaintance of Patrick Hadley's *One morning in Spring,* not least because it features the 'As I was walking one morning in spring' tune so effectively sang**

by the Ballad Singer and then *Mary in Hugh the Drover.*

- Violinist Lydia Mordkovitch's Wigmore Hall recital on September 4 included a powerfully projected performance of *The Lark Ascending* in the version for violin and piano. This work has been included on the all-RVW CD she has recorded recently for Carlton Classics, for issue in 1996. The main work on the disc is the Violin Sonata.

- **Highgate Choral Society's 1995-6 season, conducted by Ronald Corp and given in conjunction with the New London Orchestra, includes *In Windsor Forest.* The concert date is July 13 and the venue All Hallows' Church, Gospel Oak, London NW3.**

- Issue No.3 of the *Journal* carried a news item about the availability of greetings cards featuring Leith Hill Place. The artist, Bridget Duckenfield, has now issued cards showing other RVW homes - 13 Cheyne Walk and The White Gates. Full details from her at 94 Station Avenue, West Ewell, Epsom, KT19 9UG.

- **Among outside-England perfomances of RVW works in the period July-October 1995 we note the *Serenade to Music* and *In Windsor Forest* (Nairobi), the Tuba Concerto (Kreis-Sinfonieorchester Saarlouis, Germany), the Oboe Concerto (Queensland Symphony Orchestra, Australia), *Serenade to Music* (Beecroft Symphony Orchestra, Australia), *Dona Nobis Pacem* (Santa Fe Desert Chorale, USA), *Folk-songs of the Four Seasons* (Presbyterian Ladies' College Choir, Honash University, Australia), *Norfolk Rhapsody No.1* (North Holland Youth Orchestra), *Riders to the Sea* (Victoria College of Arts, Melbourne, Australia), *Flos Campi* (St Matthew's Chamber Orchestra, Auckland), *Pilgrim's Journey* (University of Alberta), Symphony No.5 (Prince George Symphony Orchestra, Canada) and Symphony No.6 (Orchestra Philharmonique de Liege, Belgium).**

- OUP are to reissue RVW's *National Music* early in 1996.

So who was the model for *Mountgarret Camden?*

Michael Gainsford asks us to speculate

In the preamble, marked 'Author's Warning', to his book Sir Michael and Sir George, J B Priestley goes out of his way to stress that all of the book's characters are fictitious, and he states emphatically that... 'I have never had in mind any person of my acquaintance – or of yours, dear reader'. I have my doubts!

The book is quite a humourous one, recounting the rivalries between duplicate Government departments, each charged with allocating grant money to deserving artists.

Quite early in the book, a character appears with the name of Dr Mountgarret Camden. He is a composer, and is described as '...a great man, a great old man, a giant'; and later as '...a magnificent old man'. He has requested a meeting with the heads of the two departments, to discuss their treatment of a young and struggling avant-garde composer. Not only has this composer had his application for a grant refused, but this has been done in a deliberately rude manner.

Dr (NOT, let it be noted, Sir) Mountgarret Camden is 80, and '...does not care a damn'. He fills the sofa, and 'The weight of years seemed to have driven his great head into his shoulders. He seemed one of the survivors of a giant race'.

At the meeting with the Sirs Michael and George of the title, Mountgarret Camden proceeds to put them both in their place. They are taken to task for daring to write rudely to the young composer. "He is Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms. He is MUSIC-by God!' and so on. It is also quite clear that he does not admire the young composer's work, although he is determined that he should be given a chance. Having blasted the two civil servants out of the hotel room, 'Dr Mountgarret Camden picked up a large orchestral score and buried his great head in it'.

You'll need to read the book to get the full effect of this sketch of the 'Grand Old Man' of music, but perhaps from even the brief extracts here, a certain composer springs to mind.

Did J B Priestley know RVW? I feel he must have done. Although not exact contemporaries, they have always, to me, seemed to have very similar outlooks on humanity. When the book was published, Priestley was about 70, and RVW had been dead for just six years.

Reading again Priestley's 'Author's Warning', I note that it does refer to 'living' persons.

ANSWERS TO THE QUIZ – BUT DON'T LOOK UNTIL YOU'VE READ PAGE 20!

1. Leith Hill Place, Surrey.
2. 10 Hanover Terrace.
3. Sir Hubert Parry.
4. Charterhouse School.
5. *The robin's nest.*
6. Max Bruch.
7. Ingrave, Essex.
8. *Dona Nobis Pacem.*
9. Sir Edward Elgar.
10. 'He's the only composer who does not write music like mine.'
11. Frederick Delius.
12. 'I don't know if I like it, but it's what I meant at the time'.
13. *Sinfonia Antartica.*
14. 'Our captain calls all hands'.
15. *Pilgrim's Progress.*
16. *49th Parallel.*
17. *Sancta Civitas.*

Composer Steve Martland gave this 1995 'Proms' interval talk about the SIXTH SYMPHONY

***Boys and Girls* is a hit song from the recent album *Park Life* by the British band Blur. Bands like Blur and Oasis are at the forefront of what is now being called the renaissance of British pop music - once again melodic and accessible, perhaps retrospective in style, but above all, to pop music journalists it's considered good and eminently exportable to the world market. For some time now the pop media has discussed this notion of a rebirth of quality British acts after what has been seen as a period where nothing of any consequence has emerged. This necessity for popular culture to show that it can compete with the best of America clearly demonstrates some sort of neurosis about exactly what defines that which is British music. It's interesting that English culture, in particular, has regularly suffered its periods of introspection as to its place in world culture and specifically its standing in relation to European and American culture.**

A similar form of navel-gazing has characterised the classical music world. How many times do people ask, what makes the music of Elgar and Vaughan Williams English? This constant need to address the national characteristics of our home-grown music surely suggest an insecurity about the quality of the music. Everyone thinks it's great but the aren't quite so certain if they're conning themselves - after all, German orchestras hardly ever programme the stuff. The great Vaughan Williams conductor Vernon Handley found a different story.....*(Vernon Handley)*

• *I was on tour with the Ulster Orchestra. We played a concert in Munich and the Director of the Richard Strauss Institute came up to me and said 'I understand that on your travels you are doing the Elgar 2nd Symphony'. I said 'Yes, that's right' He said 'Why did you not give us the Elgar 2nd Symphony here?' (we had just played the Prokofiev 5th). I said to him 'The promoters thought that the Prokofiev, being more universal, would draw and that the Elgar wouldn't, and he said 'What a pity', what a pity. because for me, Elgar is second only to the main symphonist of the 20th century'. And I thought, here it comes... Sibelius or Shostakovitch or such. He said 'I mean of course Vaughan Williams'.*

Maybe an island mentality (being cut off from the continent and the lack of a continuing musical tradition along the lines of the Austro-German one) creates a sense of inferiority or even parochialism. Perhaps the English are just too modest about their cultural heritage.

I started this article by mentioning a track by the band Blur, partly to be provocative but more seriously as an introduction to what I'm specifically going to discuss, which is the Sixth Symphony of Vaughan Williams. I was going to say that quintessentially English composer but then I'd be falling into the same trap I've just being describing.

Middle-class and voguish

In the album *Park Life*, Blur, and in particular the vocal accent of the lead singer Damon Albarn, deliberately affect an image of being working class. The songs refer to what the band consider to be urban working-class activities, and the picture of a greyhound race on the cover of the CD is there to emphasis this image. The pursuit and celebration of some metaphorical folk ideal is actually common not only to much popular music but also to composers like Holst and Vaughan Williams. Vaughan Williams went out to rural areas of the country and notated the land workers singing English folk-song. Collecting folk-song material was very much a middle-class and voguish activity at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. But without it our national music would have developed differently because, after all, it was folk-song above all that influenced the stylistic development of Vaughan Williams' musical language.

For me the issue of national characteristics is not the burning issue. It's pretty obvious that Bartok, having collected and studied the folk music of Eastern Europe, developed a unique musical language which is the direct consequence of his ethnomusicological work. He actually said that in folk song he saw a way of developing a music of his own which could release him from the shackles of the Western major-minor system. It's therefore obvious that Vaughan Williams is an English composer in the sense that his musical style not only utilises and refers to original English folk melodies but his harmonic language, like Bartok's, doesn't rely on the Austro-German (or Western) major-minor system.

Vaughan Williams' use of modal scales and harmony relates to the modality of folk song and also the music of Tudor England. Everyone knows that his most famous piece, the *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*, is based on a tune by Tallis, a major figure in renaissance English music. This earlier English music was little known at the beginning of the 20th century and it is thanks to composers like Vaughan Williams and Holst that it was rediscovered. So, the lyricism, the mystical sounding harmonic progressions, the lilting folk-melodies are the particularly English components of Vaughan Williams' music - by this definition he's an English composer. But that doesn't mean that his music can't appeal to anyone not English. Perhaps one explanation for the obsession with national characteristics in music has something to do with a general sense across the world today about nationhood and ethnicity. The millennium approaches and everyone is getting nervous.

What I do find interesting is that for the younger generation of composers, a figure like Vaughan Williams is no longer anathema. Remember that when Britten and Tippett were first emerging as the new force back in the 'thirties and 'forties, Vaughan Williams was already the grand old man of English music. Britten and Tippett, whilst having respect for Vaughan Williams' achievements, believed that his obvious Englishness was far too constricting for the type of music that they were beginning to compose and rejected what they saw as music which seemed to lack a rigorous compositional technique. By that they meant a good old German grounding. Well, times change and VW is much more in vogue with composers now. Maybe it's easier to like someone once they're dead.

Too insular?

The criticisms levelled at VW by Tippett and Britten, that he was too insular and not intellectual enough, are not unfounded and my own feeling about VW being given a second chance is intuitive rather being based on any concrete facts. Gorecki and his ubiquitous Third Symphony, as well as music by John Tavener and Arvo Part, inhabits the same pseudo-mystical world of certain works of VW. The *Tallis Fantasia*, although written in the early part of the

century, doesn't sound, superficially at least, so different from any of the composers just mentioned.

But what of Vaughan Williams' Sixth Symphony? How does this piece fit into the picture and why is it considered so significant in British music? The Sixth Symphony in E minor, according to the key signature, was written in the late 1940s, when VW was 75 years old, and first performed at the Albert Hall. Judging by reports the first performance was quite a shattering experience. One of the things shattered was the comfortable, even avuncular, view of the composer represented by the pastoral-sounding Fifth Symphony. The Sixth Symphony opens tumultuously.

Rightly or wrongly, critics instantly decided to 'explain' the music by reference to the recently ended Second World War, the symphony's extraordinary Epilogue being interpreted as a vision of some future nuclear catastrophe. The composer of course denied any such interpretation of the work as a War Symphony.

Inexorable

The Sixth is certainly unusual, although not so unorthodox in its structure for it to be questioned as to why it is called a symphony. It's not very long - around 30 minutes - but its four movements are linked, something which contributes to the sense of tension and and inexorable drive that characterises the general mood. Composers are always attracted to writing music which involves the use of the smallest amount of material, and VW in the Sixth Symphony is heard at his most concentrated. As Deryk Cooke has explained in his book *The Language of Music*, VW's Sixth Symphony is characterised by the persistent use, transformation and interpenetration of four of the basic terms of music.

For example (and firstly), the notes C-Eb-C, as in the semiquaver figure in the symphony's Epilogue; secondly, the opposition of major and minor thirds, for example, the clash between G sharp and G natural in the very opening bar; thirdly, the minor progression from the second degree of the scale to the tonic degree, with conflicts between keys separated by that interval; and fourthly, the augmented fourth and the conflict between keys separated by that interval. The second movement of the Sixth is almost entirely based on musical material involving this interval of an augmented fourth.

The first part of the opening movement involves frenzied activity, with little suggestion of a theme in the traditional sense. When a theme does emerge this too is a concentrate of falling minor seconds and minor thirds.

Even the themes of the contrasting section in 12/8 time, different though these are in broad effect, give prominence to the minor-third oscillation. The second subject is a lyrical melody in B *modal* minor, which is later transformed to E major. In traditional sonata form, the recapitulation emphasises the return of the first subject but in VW's Sixth Symphony it is the second subject transformed into a new broad tune that ends the movement. In this first movement the exposition and development sections are treated as one. In the recapitulation the contrast between the two subject-groups is maximised. When the lyrical tune does appear, anything could happen. In fact, once heard this tune brings the first movement to a close and leads us straight into the menacing second movement.

The second movement is reminiscent of Mars or Saturn from *The Planets* - doom-laden and intense. How is this atmosphere achieved compositionally?

Well, with remarkable conciseness; the themes are united by a common tendency to hesitate between two notes a semitone apart. In the first theme, in Bb minor, this hesitation is between the major and minor second.

A contrasting theme oscillates between chords of F minor and E minor - again the distance of a semitone. The first two movements of the Sixth Symphony are tonally related by being set a tritone apart - the tritone is another word for the interval of an augmented fourth. In other words, the key of E for the first movement and Bb for the second. The augmented fourth is an intense interval which acoustically expects to be resolved. The harmonic tension created by VW is deliberate. He is preparing a large-scale resolution aimed towards the finale.

The augmented fourth or tritone is unleashed in the third movement scherzo. The movement is grotesque in effect with much use of counterpoint, imitation and canon technique. The overriding impression is one of satire and parody. The only suggestion of relief is in the saxophone melody, but the sinewy sound of the instrument adds to the unsettled atmosphere rather than providing relief. Later this tune is inflated to become a brutal march. In this scherzo VW manages to create a sort of musical chaos which, with all its academic fugal devices, in the composer's own words - 'works'.

The scherzo is followed by the strange Epilogue which so astounded the symphony's first listeners and gave rise to much speculation as to what it 'meant'

Certainly it is unusual to end a symphony with a long slow movement played quietly throughout, although there are precedents, such as the slow finale of Tchaikovsky's *Pathetique Symphony*. Nothing could be further away from the luxuriance of Tchaikovsky than the Epilogue of VW's Sixth. Musically the tight structural control in maintained throughout. Essentially the movement consists of only one theme based on an amalgam of three of the basic ideas which bind the whole work. For instance, the interval of an augmented fourth (the notes F-B), the minor third (C-Eb-C and F-Ab-F), and the falling semitone or minor second - C-B and F-E. Moreover, as in the second movement, the tonality oscillates between E and F. More interestingly, the first four notes are a paraphrase of the opening of the first movement.

What might strike first-time listeners is a sense of disappointment because this slow movement never becomes a big tune. In fact melodically it doesn't amount to much. In the words of the composer, the theme is nebulous and drifts about contrapuntally only to disintegrate, leaving the chords of Eb and E minor alternating in a void. The effect of this drifting quiet theme is, however, quite shattering, especially coming, as it does. after so much tonal turbulence.

'Tempest' clue

It might be misguided to see this music representing a desolate landscape after some terrible catastrophe, and it might do the quality of the music a major misjustice, but there's no reason why a listener can't be allowed to imagine something beyond the notes. VW himself seems to have been irritated by such interpretations but he did say something about the motives behind the notes. He associated the Epilogue with the words from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest:*

> The Cloudcapp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

A humanist apocalypse then. A sense of reality which is necessarily social as well as cosmic, and one of the archetypal experiences of the twentieth century. Whatever one's interpretation, the entire symphony is, like all great art, a monument to Man's endurance.

Well, how well would you have done?

Your chance to be in the chair for 'Mastermind"

Although I had liked a few of his works as long ago as the early 1950s, my real interest in Vaughan Williams dates from around 1968, when I began collecting LPs in earnest.

By the mid-1970s I had got all the available recorded works, had read everything I could lay my hands on, and had attended the centenary celebrations, in October 1972, at Down Ampney church. My head was stuffed with information on the great man, and on an impulse I wrote off to the BBC, applying to go on 'Mastermind'. Perhaps I could put some of the knowledge to good use: even inspire the odd viewer to listen to a bit of RVW. A colleague at work had appeared on the show a short

by Michael Gainsford

time before, answering questions on Beethoven. The time had come to wave the English flag.

Nobody was more surprised than I when I was invited to an audition at Pebble Mill, Birmingham, in February 1977. This was a very informal affair. All it comprised was answering a few questions from previous broadcasts. I was even more surprised when I was formally notified (on April 1st) that I was invited to appear on the recording to be made in September. In accepting, I gave my specialist subject as 'The life and works of Ralph Vaughan Williams'.

Panic sets in

That gave me nearly six months to prepare. But preparation for a quiz of this nature is problematical. If one doesn't know one's own subject reasonably well, one should not really be there. To my mind it is won and lost on the General Knowledge questions. (A thought has just struck me: why doesn't someone give 'General Knowledge' as a specialist subject?!) So all I did was to play all my records through in chronological order of composition, making sure to read every record sleeve. As the date approached, panic set in. I attempted to get my wife Barbara to test me with some questions, but it wasn't very successful.

The fateful day was September 28th, the venue the Union Ballroom, Keele Hall, near Stoke on Trent. I'd always thought Keele Hall was something brutal sea captains did to naughty sailors, but there you are, I was wrong.

Now although the BBC was not over-generous with expenses and appearance fees, they did not skimp on food and drink, both before and after the recording. Indeed, if a contestant was sufficiently nervous, greedy, or both, he or she could be completely sloshed on sherry before recording started. I detected a vague unease on the part of some of the BBC staff, who seemed haunted by the fear of contestants getting cold feet and disappearing before the show. Perhaps that is why they were plied with food and drink.

The recording itself was not as frightening as it may appear on TV. The contestants can see nothing of the audience. Only Magnus is visible, everything else being in darkness. I cannot recall being nervous, but perhaps I was, because I failed to answer several questions to which I did really know the answers.

I had some good questions, and won quite easily, getting through to the semi-final, where I eventually went out answering questions on something completely different (North American Indians). In round one I scored 13 on RVW and 15 on General Knowledge, making 28 in total. The other scores were 19 (11 and 8), 19 (10 and 9), and 16 (9 and 7). The other subjects were: The life of the Emperor Tiberius', 'The Vikings', and 'The life and travels of David Livingstone'.

Incidentally, 'Mastermind' sessions are recorded two at a time, on the same day. So when Magnus says: 'See you next week', he is fibbing. What happens is a mad scramble whilst everyone changes seats so the audience looks new!

My seventeen questions, of which I got the four marked * wrong, were as follows. I do not know who set them, but I suspect it may have been Michael Kennedy. If you want to give it a try, the answers are given elsewhere.

The Questions

1. What is the name of the house, owned by the National Trust, where RVW lived from age four?

2. What was RVW's London address for the last five years of his life?

3. Name the English composer who taught RVW when he first entered RCM.*

4. Where was the first performance of an RVW work before an audience?*

5. What is the title of RVW's first known composition?

6. Who was the German composer with whom RVW studied in Berlin in 1897?

7. Where did RVW collect the folk-song *Bushes and Briars?*

8. In which work did RVW include a speech by an MP in the House of Commons?

9. The wife of which famous composer told RVW that her husband was too busy to give him lessons in orchestration?

10. How did Ravel sum up the qualities of RVW's music, after giving him lessons?*

11. To which composer did RVW play over the *Sea Symphony* on piano, asking for advice?

12. What did RVW say about his Fourth Symphony after its first rehearsal?

13. RVW used the human voice in three symphonies, the *Sea*, the *Pastoral*, and which other?

14. What is the name of the folk-tune upon which RVW based *He who would valiant be?**

15. Which major work did RVW start in 1906, and not complete for 45 years?

16. What was the title of the first film for which RVW provided music?

17. Which of RVW's works is headed by a quotation from Plato, in the original Greek?

Answers – page 17

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DISCOGRAPHY

A few copies of the 70-page full discography in draft form still available at £4.95.
Contact Stephen Connock.