

# Journal of the **RVW** Society

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## plus news and reviews

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## SOCIETY HOPES TO PUBLISH ALL URSULA'S POETRY

The poetry of Ursula Vaughan Williams has been seriously neglected. To make amends, the Society hopes to publish a complete edition of her poems - including around 40 that have never before been published.

The book will include those poems such as *Tired* and *Procris* which Ralph Vaughan Williams set to music and which was published in 1958 as *Four Last Songs*. As Michael Kennedy has put it: "Marriage to a poet restimulated the lyrical gift which had been so pronounced at the start of his career...."

### *Albion Music Limited*

The book is planned to be published in hardback to a similar size and format as Ursula's 1964 OUP biography of her husband. The RVW Society's trading subsidiary, Albion Music Limited, will be used. Initially, the book will be exclusive to RVW Society members, and hopefully on sale at the 1996 AGM.

**See main feature on  
the centre pages.**

## VW FESTIVAL AT THE BARBICAN

Three superb concerts have been planned with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Richard Hickox for October 1997.

The RVW Society, working closely with Richard Hickox have scheduled *A Cotswold Romance* in the first programme of an RVW Festival, and *A Pilgrim's Journey* in the third. However, the highlight of the October 1997 Festival at the Barbican Centre in London will be a performance of *Sir John in Love* on 12th October 1997 - the 125th anniversary of the composer's birth. The Festival promises to be a remarkable occasion, and a fitting prelude to the celebrations at Covent Garden late in the year when *A Pilgrim's Progress* will be staged. Riches indeed!

Full details on page 3.



**'RVW Conducting'**  
by  
Edgar Billingham

# THE UNKNOWN RVW - THE DEBATE CONTINUES

In the first issue of the RVW Society Journal in September 1994, Lewis Foreman argued the case for performances and recordings of the early unpublished works such as the *Serenade in A* from 1898 or the *Piano Quintet in C minor* of 1903. He also felt there was a case for resurrecting the original version of *A London Symphony*. Here, ROY DOUGLAS, returns to the subject of the unknown RVW.

In my opinion, any attempt to reinstate an earlier version of the *London Symphony* is not to be encouraged. RVW had clearly decided long ago that the revised version was what he preferred to be performed, and if he had wanted to change his mind, he surely had plenty of time to do so during his long life. Therefore, the revival of any previous version is, I feel, unfair to the composer and contrary to his known wishes.

The revisions in *Hugh the Drover* were made in 1950, and it is obvious that RVW introduced these changes because he felt they would be improvements to the shape of the opera, after he had heard it many times. So (although I myself don't much like these alterations) I feel that we must - however reluctantly - accept the composer's revisions.

As to the early or the unfinished works I can do no better than refer readers to what I said in my book *Working With Vaughan Williams* published by the British Library in 1988.

Roy Douglas  
photographed working at  
the table at which RVW  
wrote most of his music  
for many years. The table  
is now in the RVW Music  
School at Charterhouse.

"I strongly disagree" with those admirers of RVW's music who plead for his early works to be dug out of their well-merited obscurity.

After his death in 1958 I had the exhausting but absorbingly interesting task of sorting out and identifying an enormous number of MSS from all periods of his long and musically prolific life, before they were given to the British Library.

## Early Works

I studied the full scores of many of the early works, and found that most of them were somewhat embarrassingly feeble: unremarkable themes, unoriginal harmonies, and sometimes unconvincing in construction. Some of them had actually been given a (single?) performance, but were afterwards withdrawn by the composer, presumably because he was dissatisfied with them.

Few of the works showed any traces of the entirely personal idiom and musical characteristics which we now recognise and admire in the music of Vaughan Williams. In fact, I am tempted to suggest that the bigwigs of the RCM in his student days may have been right when they thought that Coleridge Taylor was a more promising composer at that time.

## Lasting Pleasure

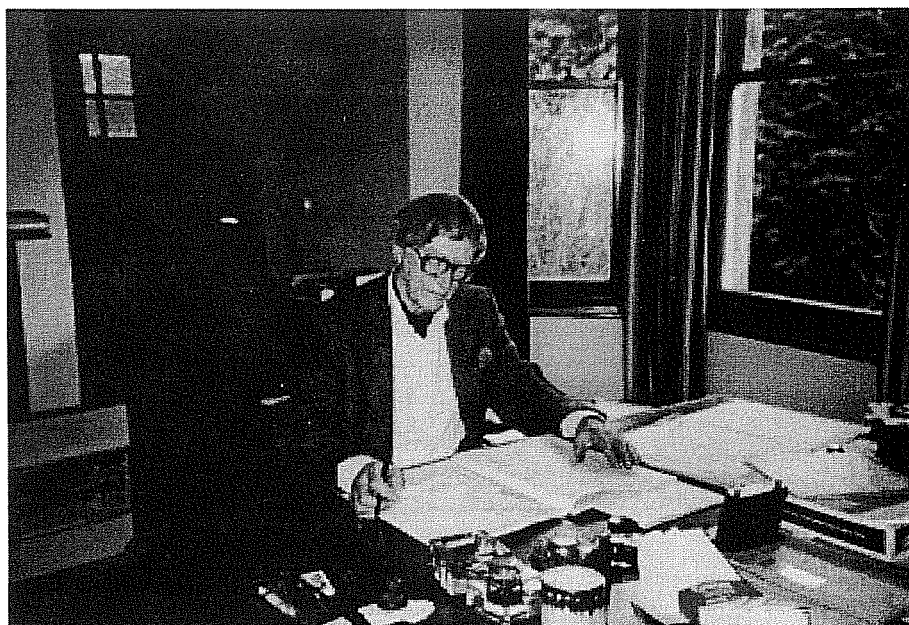
RVW left us well over a hundred of his works to give us lasting pleasure - operas, choral works, symphonies, concertos, orchestral works, anthems, songs - is not this wealth of glorious music enough for us to enjoy and love? Surely it is unnecessary - and unkind to the composer - to resuscitate those early unrepresentative efforts which he had purposely consigned to oblivion in trunks and suit-cases in the boxroom. The MSS are now, of course, in the British Library, and there they should remain: no doubt to be examined by earnest musicologists, but never - I sincerely hope - never performed.

Some lines of WB Yeats would seem appropriate here:

"Accursed who brings to light of day  
The writings I have cast away!  
But blessed he who stirs them not  
And lets the kind worm take the lot!"

Extract from *Working with Vaughan Williams*, British Library, 1988, pages 100 and 101. Reproduced with the kind permission of the British Library.

*Editor's Note:* See also the letter from Michael Kennedy on page 15.



# LEITH HILL MUSICAL FESTIVAL AND RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

BY RENÉE STEWART

The Festival was founded by Margaret Vaughan Williams (sister of Ralph) and Lady Evangeline Farrer. These two became the first Secretary and Chairman respectively and Ralph was asked to conduct the first Festival on May 10th 1905 with seven village choirs participating in morning competitions and coming together for the evening concert, which consisted of items from *Judas Maccabeas*, a chorus from *Elijah*, a madrigal, some solos and orchestral pieces.

From this small beginning, the Festival, (known then as Leith Hill Musical Competitions) prospered, and in 1911 Sir Hubert Parry came to present the cups and banners and hear the choirs sing his "*Ode on St. Cecilia's Day*". This visit was one of a long list of distinguished musicians who have appeared through the years as performers, adjudicators and composers and whom we continue to welcome. By 1912 the choirs had grown to eleven in number and the Festival was a two day event.

The 1914 War caused the suspension of the Festival, while RVW himself went to tend the wounded. However, 1920 saw the resumption of events with 12 choirs and by 1921 a Children's Day had been added and in 1922 a day for Town Choirs. There are still three adult choir days and a separate Children's Day. RVW always modestly discouraged performances of his works but in 1928 the Town Choirs sang *A Sea Symphony* and in 1930 each division had a work dedicated to it - *Hundredth Psalm*, *Three Choral Hymns* and *Benedicite*.

In the early years, competitions and performances were held in local halls in Dorking but the Festival outgrew them, and largely through the influence of RVW and

his friends, the Dorking Halls were built and opened in 1931. This made possible the first of many performances of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, the first one having a choir of 700, which overflowed into the Auditorium. RVW's *Passion* performances were incredibly powerful experiences which only he could have achieved. Some people did not like his realization of the continuo part on the piano (beautifully played by Eric Gritton), but it seemed right as part of his vision of the work.

## Masterminded by RVW

The Second World War again caused suspension of the competition but not of the concerts which were masterminded by RVW and performed by a combined choir mainly in St. Martin's Church, Dorking as the Halls had been commandeered by the Meat Marketing Board. The normal pattern resumed in 1947 when part of Bach's *B minor Mass* was sung in English.

In 1948, Dr. William Cole became Associate Conductor and he succeeded as Festival Conductor in 1953. RVW's links were not severed however as he appeared as guest conductor in 1954 and 1955 and came to conduct the *St. Matthew Passion* each year until 1958. He died on 26 August that same year. At the 1959 Festival, Sir Adrian Boult, LHMF President, came to conduct *Five Mystical Songs* and unveil a bronze plaque in the foyer of the Dorking Halls. Another visiting conductor that year was Sir David Willcocks, our President since 1978.

**"There is much to look forward to in 1996!"**

Under RVW's successors, William Cole, Christopher Robinson and William Llewellyn, the Festival has continued to develop, notably by the re-introduction of the Children's Day which had not resumed after the war and by the commissioning of works by John Gardner, David

Lancaster and Byron Adams with words by Ursula Vaughan Williams. We look forward to our first Festival with Brian Kay, only the fifth conductor in 90 years. The temporary closure of Dorking Halls in 1992 means that the Festival must leave Dorking for the first time in its history and Charterhouse School, Godalming has invited us there. What more suitable temporary home could there be than RVW's old school and where William Llewellyn was Director of Music and instrumental in the building of the Vaughan Williams' Centre? There is much to look forward to in 1996!

St. John Passion - 17 March.  
The Festival - 11, 12, 13 April.

A shortened version of an article by Renée Stewart, Hon. Secretary 1980 - 1995.

(Enquiries to Chairman, Deidre Hicks - 01737 243931).

## VW FESTIVAL - THE FULL DETAILS

The concerts at the Barbican, with the London Symphony Orchestra under Richard Hickox, are as follows:

October 2, 1997

### *A Cotswold Romance*

for tenor, soprano, chorus and orchestra (adapted by RVW and M Jacobsen from *Hugh the Drover*)

INTERVAL

### *A London Symphony*

October 12, 1997

*Sir John in Love* (concert performance) opera in Four Acts based on the *Merry Wives of Windsor*

October 26, 1997

*A Pilgrim's Journey* for soprano, tenor, baritone, chorus and orchestra (adapted from *The Pilgrim's Progress* by Morris and Douglas)

INTERVAL

### *Symphony No. 5 in D major*

A symposium on Ralph Vaughan Williams, and other concerts, are currently being planned as part of the Festival.

## LEITH HILL MUSICAL FESTIVAL 1996

at Charterhouse School, Godalming, Surrey

FESTIVAL DAYS: 11th - 13th April  
Competitions 9 am - 1 pm. Concerts 7.30pm

Thursday 11th April  
*Israel in Egypt* - Handel

Friday 12th April  
*Harmoniemesse* - Haydn  
*Serenade to Music* - Vaughan Williams

Saturday 13th April  
*Messa di Gloria* - Puccini  
*Festival Te Deum* - Vaughan Williams



Festival Conductor: BRIAN KAY

Conductor Cheltenham Bach Choir and presenter of BBC Radio 3's BRIAN KAY'S SUNDAY MORNING; former King's Singer and Chorus Master of Huddersfield Choral Society

# Redemption of a Fat Man: or *Sir John in Love*

by Wilfrid Mellers

To an earlier issue of the RVW Society Journal I contributed an essay on Vaughan Williams's first opera, *Hugh the Drover*, presenting it as a parable about the old agrarian England in relation to its industrialised reconstitution.

The idea was VW's own, bluntly described as a desire to 'write an opera about a prize fight' - though the tug-o'-war he was really concerned with was that between the values of the Establishment (Church, State and the farming community) and those induced by industrialisation, currently threatened by the chaos and disintegration of the First World War. In face of that, some kind of rebirth seemed imperative; and VW allegorised the possibility in his hero, *Hugh the Drover*, an Outsider for whom wild horses 'stood for' a putative spiritual freedom. Yet the parable was also a paradox since the wild horses Hugh loved and identified with were, in fact, rounded up by him to serve the military - prime agent of Establishment, State and Empire! This is not so much an irony of the type usually called 'bitter' as a Blakean recognition that all human potentialities contain their opposites: 'Without Contraries there can be no Progression'. We relish life the more because it is at once desirable and dangerous; and *Hugh the Drover* ends with the possibility, even the tentative promise, of a fulfilment of youthful dreams and wishes, while offering no guarantee. As musical theatre, the piece works powerfully, since it offers not only fisticuffs between a bumpkin farmer-butcher and his outsider-adversary, but also an age-old conflict between public establishmentarianism and private independence, and even between traditional and revolutionary notions of good and evil. Still more significantly, the parable admits to equivocations as to which is which.

Vaughan Williams's second opera, *Sir John in Love* (originally entitled *The Fat Knight*), is specifically about these equivocations: it does not turn on a quest in either realistic or mythical terms, but rather asks *questions* about human nature. The libretto of *Hugh the Drover*, telling a Quest story suggested by the composer, was written up by an amateur author friend. The libretto of *Sir John in Love*, on the other hand, was by no less professional (and august) an author than Shakespeare who, according to VW, is by now 'fair game, like the Bible', usable even for 'advertisements of soap and razors'. Vaughan Williams had first toyed with the idea of a Falstaff opera in 1913, at the time of *Hugh the Drover*, though he didn't seriously work on it until the mid-twenties, completing the project in 1929. The figure of Falstaff had already prompted operas from Nicolai, Verdi and Holst, but VW considered the legendary knight large enough to support another musicking, especially since his effort was unique in that its text was taken 'almost entirely from Shakespeare, with the addition of lyrics from the Elizabethan poets. A few unimportant remarks (e.g. "Here comes Master Ford") are my own'. Herein lies another paradox: for whereas the amateur-scripted *Hugh the Drover* has a big - indeed the biggest possible - theme, *Sir John in Love*, scripted by Shakespeare, seems to turn on the apparently trivial jests embodied in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, wherein a gang of ordinary folk, including some of the dregs of society, effect the discomfiture of an aged knight who has grown too big for his big boots. None the less, there is a sense in which *Sir John* evolves from *Hugh the Drover*, for if the latter admits to dubieties inherent in the relationship between good and evil, *Sir John in Love* confronts the very nature, and meaning, of those equivocations.

It is often claimed that Shakespeare's preeminence lies in the fact that while his creatures are to varying degrees fictional, legendary and mythical, they also have a reality 'as large as life' - the kind of reality that induced the 19th century critic Bradley to enquire "How many children had Lady Macbeth?" Some of Shakespeare's people have presences coexistent with us all, assuming we have a modicum of literacy: about all, two Shakespearean characters, one 'tragic,' the other 'comic' (though both adjectives need their inverted commas), simultaneously display these real and mythical dimensions - namely, Hamlet and Falstaff. Hamlet has obsessed human consciousness over four centuries and over most of the literate world; and has done so because we all recognise something of ourselves in the 'mystery' of his nature, whereby he cannot make choices and so cannot adequately respond to whatever sea of troubles may beset him. Falstaff, complementarily, is a basically benign being undermined by human weaknesses in which we all share - among them, the rudimentary fact that we are prone to grow fat and old, and are certain to die. In his bibulous propensities and lazy lechery Falstaff ('False-staff?') is humanity writ a bit larger than life, not merely in girth. Clearly, he obsessed Shakespeare, who introduced him as a real character into his cycle of history plays about our royal destiny. In Part I of *Henry IV* (1596) Falstaff, though based on a historical Protestant Gentleman called Oldcastle, is already legendary enough for the earliest title page to refer to 'the Humourous Conceits of Sir John Falstaffe'. Presented as common humanity, alike in his magnanimity and in his self-conceit and self-deceit, he acts as a boozily avuncular companion to a prosperous young Prince: only to be dumped by him in Part II of the play, when Hal's advancing power and glory render Falstaff unacceptable because disreputable. Part II was probably written immediately after Part I, though it may have been momentarily laid aside while Shakespeare tossed off *The Merry Wives of Windsor* which, according to an apochryphal anecdote, Queen Elizabeth had asked for, since she relished the notion of seeing Sir John in love. Though this story is not well authenticated, it indicates the degree to which the Falstaff figure had become part of the popular imagination. Significantly, *The Merry Wives* is the only Shakespeare play set unambiguously in England and written for the most part in prose or in prosily up-to-date verse similar to that of the 'low' sections of the *Henry IV* plays.

Not usually placed among Shakespeare's more distinguished creations, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* none the less has a vivacity springing from its hybrid state in that it is simultaneously a naturalistic 'slice of life' and a rite enacting the redemption of Falstaff, who may be Everyman. There is indeed a possibility, even a probability, that the play was first performed as ritual, in honour of George Carey Lord Hunsdon (the Lord Chamberlain and a patron of Shakespeare's theatrical company), who was installed as a Knight of the Garter, Britain's highest order of chivalry, at Windsor Castle on St George's Day, 1597. St George's Day was also Shakespeare's birthday, and there must surely be point in such concatenations of circumstance. In any case this play, like all Shakespeare's chronicle plays, updates history to reveal what the past contributed to the then present. As Shakespeare's Old Shepherd put it in *The Winter's Tale*, 'Thou meetest with things dying, I with things new-born'. For

Shakespeare, history is always an interfusion of deaths with births, since history is always in process.

So *The Merry Wives* offers a comprehensive panorama of Elizabethan England, both in relation to its past and to potential future. Already in the Henry IV plays we learn that Falstaff's nobility and gentility are suspect because decayed and decaying; yet at the same time we learn that his chivalrous gestures aren't necessarily bogus because he has a sense of humour. The first act of *Sir John in Love* is long and complicated because, like Shakespeare's *Merry Wives* play, it embraces all the stresses and counterstresses that were moulding a new England. Falstaff's humorous humanity, contrasted with the self-righteousness of Justice Shallow, hints at the democratic broadening and relaxation already manifest in Elizabethan England, just as Falstaff's courting of Mistress Page and Mistress Ford is a burlesque turn that seriously reflects aristocracy's contemporary need to cultivate the affluently rising middle class. The first curtain of the opera - there is virtually no overture - plunges us *in medias res*, in a hurly-burly of turmoil and transition.

Through a skittish jig in 6/8 repeatedly penetrated by 3/4 hemiola metres, with jaunty modal tunes and crude harmonies often involving major and minor triads in *false* relation, social and personal polarities clash. Justice Shallow an Establishmentarian figure whose moral unworthiness is symbolized in his name, is confronting Falstaff's rascalion followers, outside Master Page's house in a Windsor street. He accuses them of having assaulted his person and property (in the elegant shape of deer, scions of gentility). That Falstaff, being a gentleman, ought to be on Shallow's side aggravates the situation; but although Falstaff may be feckless, shallow he is not. The Justice is supported in his protests by the Church in the person of Sir Hugh Evans, a comic Welsh priest who may be endearing but hardly ballasts Shallow's cause with religious or moral authority. Nor is Shallow much bolstered by his cousin Slender, described in the dramatis personae as 'a foolish young gentleman' whose slenderness seems proportionate to his uncle's shallowness. That Slender a light Tenor dotes on Mistress Page's daughter Anne - who turns out to be Albion's radiant future - suggests that his heart is in the right place; which makes it the more regrettable that the heart has no backing from his poor little head. Slender's pathetic wooing of Anne slenderly echoes Falstaff's fat if not entirely cynical wooing of her mother; the young man never gets beyond the first half-line of an 'educated' sonnet he tries to sing to his beloved. Such inarticulacy comes over as pitiful, especially in the context of the harshly scored but irresistible rout-music.

The effect is the more subtle because Slender's half-baked love music is in lyric innocence, prophetic of the 'real' love music of Anne and her handsome, unambiguously 'true' love Fenton, who is aristocratic by birth, but presumably not rich since Anne's father opposes his courtship on the grounds that he must be 'after' the Pages' mercantile assets. Page as Heavy Father introduces a darker stain on to the picture of Elizabethan exuberance. A still darker one is spread by the paranoid jealousy of the husband of Falstaff's other intended seducee, Mistress Ford. According to the editors of the Oxford Shakespeare, Falstaff's attempted seductions owe something to a late Renaissance Italian play of love and policy, Giovanni Fiorentino's *Il Pecarone* of 1588. But Ford, though a long way from Iago, is as Jealous Husband no cardboard cut-out or figure of fun; in the context of this optimistic play, his music may sound murky mad. Even so, it is only skin-deep, and his defection doesn't seem to harm his marriage. Even doltish Slender is not dismissed by Shakespeare, Vaughan Williams, or Anne as beneath contempt; the 'hospitality music' - an exquisitely prinking gavotte - to which Anne arranges the dinner table is humorously appropriate to Slender as guest.

So this first act ranges from broad farce to dark and treacherous passion as well as to heartfelt love, opposing policy and intrigue to the rudiments of sex and love. We learn that human love may be warped by policy; but also that policy may be redeemed by love; and it's typical that in this two-way process, laughter and tears are equally balanced. We may observe this too in a minor character

Dr Caius, a comic Frenchman who complements the comic Welsh Priest, adding yet another social dimension in being indicative of Elizabethan England's growing sophistication and cosmopolitanism. Though he may be ludicrous, he too, like poor Slender and young Fenton, pines for the lovely Anne, the focal point of several contrarious passions.

That *Sir John in Love* offers a wish-fulfilment for Elizabethan England, envisaged by Shakespeare and retrospectively shared in by 20th century Vaughan Williams, is suggested by the fact that the piece is, compared with *Hugh the Drover*, a ballad opera in the technical sense. For the unfolding action generates quotations from real folk songs that make incarnate the 'spirit of England', and further introduces settings of well-known Elizabethan lyrics (by Shakespeare and others), these being individualised artefacts that over the years have become the property of popular culture. Vaughan Williams's settings of these poems are traditional in feeling but original in execution. Whereas Verdi, in his Falstaff opera, concentrated on wit rather than lyricism, Vaughan Williams, closer to Old England, stresses love at the expense of comedy, though his fun can be both brilliant and empathic. (Dr Caius's singing of a preciously ornamented French chanson to affirm his love for Anne brings tears to the eyes and chuckles to the vocal organs). Indeed, so strong is the power of love in this opera that it stands as one of VW's most positive utterances - written, interestingly enough, at a time when he was already gestating such darkly intense, even grim works as *Job*, the *Piano Concerto* and the *Fourth Symphony*. The crowded first act is too convoluted to chart blow by blow; but its shape and purpose are clear in the way in which, throughout its duration, love grows progressively more meaningful: from Slender's slender fragment of a sonnet, through the comic-pathetic braggadocio of Falstaff's love-letters, to the love music of Anne and Fenton, in which love's sweet dream seeks consummation. We may illustrate what imaginatively happens during the course of the act by quoting first Slender's wistful fragment of a sonnet, floating over the initial hurly-burly:

#### Ex. 1

SL. SL. O sweet sis

SH. SH. - deed he hath, he hath wronged me at a word he  
- wist, er tat, er tat üe - les mir auf mein Wort er

EV. EV. Shal-low And I be - seech you be  
Shal-low Und ich be - schwör Euch Ver -

FA. FA. I would I could do a good of - fice be -  
Ich wüllt ich könn' Frie - den stif - ten Euch

SL. SL. - se Anne Page  
- se Anne Page

SH. SH. hath, be - lieve me,  
tat, o glaubt mir,

EV. EV. ruled by your well-wishers.  
- trau - et Eu - ren Freunden

FA. FA. - tween - you.  
bei - den



then a snatch of Falstaff's tribute to his 'honour', with which he caps the delivery of his two love-letters (to music borrowing from the folk song "John come kiss me now"):

Ex. 2

144 Andante maestoso

FAL. FAL. Fal - staff will learn the hon - our of the age, French  
Fal - staff lernt jetzt fran - zö - si - sche Ma - nier nach

ff

FAL. FAL. thrifty you rogues, my - self and skirt - ed page.  
neu - ster Art ich und mein Pa - ge hier.

colla voce f. maestoso

Then a bit of the (composed) love song (Ben Johnson's exquisite "O so soft, O so white") that Fenton sings to Anne:

Ex. 3

FEN. FEN. Have you seen but a bright li - ly grow, before rude hands have touched it -  
Sahst Du jemals ein Feldweiser Li - len das un - be - rührt er - glänzte -

Tempo I

FEN. FEN. Have you marked but the fall of the snow be - fore the soil hath  
Gingst Du je auf den Flocken des Schnees, eh' der Schmutz sie ver -

and finally Anne's own love-calls, with their yearningly rising thirds and subtly 'altered' intervals, along with a lyric tune that VW made for her which is, like a real folk song, fulfilled in both personal and social terms:

Ex. 4a

ANNE ANNA O what a world of vile ill - fa - voured faults looks handsome on three -  
O wel - che Welt von hässlich - schlimmem Fehl wird schön wenn nur drei -

She sits down sadly  
sitzt sich traurig

- hun - dred pounds a - year -  
- hun - dert Pfund da - hinter

Obse. (senza misura)

Ex. 4b

17 Andante sostenuto

ANNE ANNA Weep eyes, break heart, My love and I must part,  
We - ne nur Herz, die Lie - be macht dir viel Schmerz

Andante sostenuto

Str. pp

So in this first act the young and foolish Slender doesn't get the lovely Anne he doesn't deserve, though she's not ruthless with him; while Falstaff gets no further than plotting his elderly seductions. The lyricism of Anne and Fenton, on the contrary, increasingly pervades the score; and routs 'intrigue' to the extent that its spirit survives even after Intrigue has been given a boost when Falstaff's raggetty rout, idly gossiping, let slip to Ford the rumour that Falstaff is pursuing his wife. The final ensemble and chorus, a setting of Shakespeare's 'When d'sies pied', may be a ditty about cuckoldry, unpleasing to Ford's married ear, but it is pleasing to ours because fleet of foot and luminous in texture. The ensemble chorus indicates that, despite the darker stains spread by rising middle-class Ford and Page, Anne and Fenton are, in the new New Elizabethan age, Britain's future. Shakespeare being Shakespeare, this remains true today, four hundred years after the play's genesis, and in despite of the still darker stains left by us. No wonder Vaughan Williams, here Shakespeare's artistic colleague, changed the title of his opera from *The Fat Knight* to *Sir John in Love*.

After this complex act, presenting so wide a conspectus of Tudor history and of the Elizabethan present, and involving an interfusion of class distinctions with increasingly democratic ranges of feeling, Vaughan Williams focusses, in his second act, on his ambiguous Hero, recounting the 'merry jests' of Sir John as portrayed in Shakespeare's play. Act II opens with an orchestral prelude based on the heroic dotted rhythm familiar to us from a later, supremely courtly culture, that of Louis XIV's France. The writing, in upward-thrusting, widely spaced parts, is genuinely grand yet also, when stalked to by bulky Falstaff, susceptible to parody; indeed the music soon dissolves into bitonal dissonances over a pedal point:

Ex. 5

Allegro moderato e maestoso

ff

This grand or grandiose music is juxtaposed with a perky motif shifting from the aeolian mode on E to G minor-major:



Together, the two musics make for a comprehensive portrait of Sir John - a synthesis of traditional gallantry with demotic vivacity such as was typical of Elizabethan England itself. When the curtain rises, Mistress Quickly has delivered Falstaff's love-letters to Mistress Page and Mistress Fenton; while the letters are read aloud, the orchestral commentary jumbles the noble dotted-rhythm figure with the 'perky' motif, now incorporating both false relations and devilish tritones. The two women, who have received identical letters, parody, in duologue, Sir John's fulsome avowals. They decide to play games with him, as does he with them, and return Mistress Quickly to him, bearing encouraging answers. Mistress Quickly, housekeeper to the comic Frenchman, Dr Caius, is a commonly humane and very English character, as is suggested by her name. As go-between in the love intrigues, she seems eager to help everyone but not quite 'quick' enough to see that such a course can only make confusion worse confounded. She rounds off the double-letter scene by singing a setting of Shakespeare's "*Sigh no more, ladies*" to an easily lilting waltz in the aeolian mode on E, ironically breaking at the hey-nonny-no refrains, into 'celestial' E major. The concluding line, harmonized with a flat submediant chord, carries a potent punch: 'Men were deceivers ever', and the return of the prelude music - both the heroic dotted motif and the impudently prancing tune - is more sharply articulated, with the tritones and false relations more acidly scored. In retrospect this scene seems funny, but hardly jolly.

A fade-out shifts the scene to Falstaff's bedroom in the Garter Inn. Having bellowed a drinking song in the aeolian mode on B flat, he receives Mistress Quickly with her tantalising messages from the two women. The early part of the scene is dominated by frivolously frisky jig rhythms; but when the messenger has left the mood changes, for 'old Jack' kids himself into believing that he is a courtly lover. He sings to himself in a resonant D major, in spacious phrases involving cross-rhythms. But when he decides to compose a love song of celebration, the act of composition again punctures his image, for it hints at a parody of Mistress Quickly's cuckoldry song, "*Sigh no more*". In G minor hopefully tipping (or tipling) to E major, it's riddled with the affectations of what VW calls 'singers' English'. Parody acquires a darker dimension when Ford appears disguised as a Mr Brook, investigating the rumours that he's picked up about Falstaff's alleged affair with Ford's wife. He appends a counter-theme to Falstaff's waltz, counteracting its meaning, and then, with a shift to a slightly sinister march pulse, weaves a cunning plot in which Falstaff is ironically encouraged to spy on Ford's wife. The machinations of the spyings and counterspyings are observed, and are meant to be, but inevitably end in confusion analogous to that of the opera's opening, though we now know more about the issues at stake. Bedroom farce merges into ludicrous challenges, capped by the masterstroke of the act's conclusion. Falstaff enters from his bedroom, flamboyantly dressed for his assignation. As he swaggers across the room, not forgetting to glance at himself in a mirror, the orchestra takes up the initial Heroic Overture theme, now prancing in unsullied E major. Brave ostentation is again deflated by polytonal changes of gear, and the final tricky tritonal figure sounds like a raspberry:



Falstaff's farcical Fall plummets still lower in the third act, which is also mainly a jape, covering the fat knight's dumping into the Thames in a laundry-basket, ostensibly to effect escape from the furious Ford. Like most farce, the Thames-dousing incident - anthropologically echoing sundry mediæval and 'primitive' rehabilitation rites - carries undertones of cruelty, though once more its outcome is blithe. The women plotters, substituting Mistress Page for the gargantuan Falstaff cowering behind the arras, succeed in releasing Ford from his delusions: not, one suspects, through the mere act of discovery, but rather because Mistress Ford's (riply mezzosoprano) singing of VW's ravishing version of 'Greensleeves' - pretending to be a naughty seduction song to welcome Sir John, but 'really' dedicated to the husband she still loves - would cleanse anyone's ears and even conscience. The concluding chorus, beginning in vernal A major (a key of youth and hope) and in the familiar jiggling rhythms - modulates licentiously, but ends 'realistically' in a duplex rhythm A minor, partially scored - at least as compared with the young love euphonies of the first act.

Shakespeare's play, and therefore Vaughan Williams's opera turn on the relationship between innocence and experience, and therefore between reality and dream. It is too simple to say that in growing up we enter reality and leave illusion behind, for our unconscious motivations may reveal more than our conscious awareness, and only in dreams may we be born again. A few years previously to the *Merry Wives* Shakespeare had engaged profoundly with this theme in the comedy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: wherein the Dark Forest in which the muddled lovers encounter supernatural beings proves a catalyst for their mistaken identities. Lost in 'the blind mazes of this tangled wood' the lovers are 'transported', as is Bottom in his ass's head; they are both imprisoned in, and freed by, their 'lost' state. Although *The Merry Wives* is an adjunct to a history play, it too, in its consummatory act, views the confusions of all-too-mortal life in the redeeming light of dream. The last act is set in Windsor Forest, a Dark Wood wherein presumptive fairies effect renewal and, in the psychological sense, restitution. The difference between the two plays is that in the *Merry Wives* the fairies are not 'really' supernatural but are humans in disguises deliberately adopted to effect psychological and social ends. But the distinction between the two is itself illusory, since sharp dividing lines between conscious and unconscious states are impossible to chart. Certainly in the theatre, in a performance of Shakespeare's play, the effect of the act is totally magical: super-human even if humanly motivated.

In Vaughan Williams's opera, the last act significantly opens not in the magic wood, but in 'a room in Ford's house', into which Ford and his wife, reconciled, enter 'in loving converse'. The illusion of Ford's jealousy has evaporated into love music in B flat major, unsullied by a single accidental. The orchestral music is ripely textured, in a flowing triple pulse; they sing of love and forgiveness. Yet they are not sure if they're prepared to forgive

Falstaff for his two identical letters to different women; or at least, goaded by the Welsh Priest, they think he ought to be made to confront his fallacious self, if not the evils illusion may generate. The Fords and the Pages, with the help of the Welsh Priest, hatch a Plot whereby a masked masque will be enacted at midnight in Windsor Forest: the psychological purpose of which will be to effect the redemption of fallen Falstaff, while the social purpose will be to right the wrongs perpetrated in the intrigues of love. Parents and children dress up as 'urchins, ouphes and fairies green and white', while Falstaff is persuaded to enact Herne the Hunter, a ghost from an 'Old Tale', said to range Windsor Forest at dead of night, around a Magic Oak, his head sporting horns (that might be mistaken for a cuckold's). Disguise or guizing unties the tangled love-knots: for 'fair Anne' is supposed by her father to be married off, in the midnight wood, to aristocratic Slender, while her mother thinks she's marrying Dr Caius. In fact, by way of cunningly contrived mistaken identities, Anne is wedded to Fenton, and both the parents learn that illusion (magic) may be truer than truth.

As for Falstaff, he is punished by the pinches of the ouphs and urchins, and comes to see his horns as monstrous as well as marvellous. This midnight forest scene is a miracle in Vaughan Williams's opera, as it is in Shakespeare's play: as soon as we hear the magic music - with its unrelated polytonal triads and its exotically whirling melismata - we know that *this* illusion is paradoxically for real.

Ex. 8

19 Molto adagio ANNE PAGE ANNA PAGE (senza misura)

FAL. cross me thus. in die Quer Fairies black, grey, green and Feen schwarz, grün, weiss und

S. A. Oo Oo Oo Oo

T. B. Hye they all bow to Anne Page Alle erbeugen sich vor Anna Page

19 Molto adagio

ANNE white, You moon-shine rev-el-lers and shades of ANNA weiß, Ihr Schweiß-mer in des Mond-scheins feuch-tem

ANNE night, You orphan heirs of fix-ed des-ti-ny, Attend your of-fice and your qua-Tau, ver-wai-ite Pflle-ge-kin-der ew'ger Mächte, Tut Ewre Pflicht, achmt Ewre heil-

When the orchestral music turns into a round dance over a drone on a bare fifth, Vaughan Williams reanimates a mediæval and Renaissance convention whereby a mystic rite can become earthly here and now. The clumping dance (of gremlins rather than of ethereal sprites) sounds grittily earthy, unworldly though the bitonally echoing horn-calls may be. Illusion reveals its own kind of reality in the climactic unmasking scene, in which Slender and Caius find themselves 'married' to little boys, while Fenton at last gets 'the right Anne', hopefully to live happily ever after. We

expect Shakespeare to make magic out of mundanity; here Vaughan Williams worthily abets him, for the flowing 9 8 tune that welcomes the 'chariot of love' is an inspiration not far from sublimity:

Ex. 9

ri - deth; Each that draws a swan or a dove, and well the car. Love thro - net. Tau - be nur- zum Ziel - her kommt, die Lie - be Treu - e

ri - deth; Each is a swan or a dove, and well the car. Love thro - net. Tau - be zum Ziel - her kommt, die Lie - be Treu - e

la - dy ri - deth; and well the car. Love Lieb - ste thro - net. die Lie - be Treu - e

Harp in G treble, (Harp in G in treble)

Note. Anne is veiled and Fenton wears a mask. Anmerkung. Anna ist verschleiert und Fenton trägt eine Maske. Enter a group of young men dragging a country cart all decked with flowers. Young women walk on each side dressed in white. Anne and Fenton are riding. All are dressed in holiday attire. When the procession enters it must be arranged that Miss and Mrs Page cannot see who the bride and bridegroom are. Eine Gruppe von Jugendlichen treten auf und ziehen einen mit Blumen geschmückten Bauernwagen hinter sich her. Jünglinge gehen auf jeder Seite in weiß gekleidet. Anna und Fenton reiten auf dem Wagen. Alle in Festtracht. Im Aufzuge des Tages muß so eingerichtet werden, dass Page und Frau Page nicht sehen, wer Braut und Bräutigam sind.

gui - deth; un - to her loh - net; der Schönheit sich

gui - deth; As she goes all hearts do du - ty un - loh - net; Und vor ihr die Heizen im Rei - gen der

gui - deth; un - to her loh - net; der Schönheit sich

gui - deth; As she goes all hearts do du - ty un - loh - net; Und vor ihr die Heizen im Rei - gen der

The epiphanic nature of this consummation is profoundly Shakespearean: as is the fact that Falstaff, apparently the butt of ridicule, is permitted, at the end, to become a Master of Ceremonies, Court Jester, and even a Holy Fool who, admitting to his folly, proves big enough, in his very vulnerability, to pass blessing on all. Hopefully, the young lovers he blesses will have children, who may live to fight another day. This is why the opera, like Shakespeare's play, is 'really' about us: and it is no accident that it closes not in magic realms, but back in sturdy B flat major - a key which, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was often associated with earthiness, perhaps because of its 'flatness', by contemporary standards. Both Falstaff, a somewhat seedy Old English Gentleman, and Ford, a New Elizabethan Man, led the final ensemble, Falstaff being a dreamer who dreams outrageous truths, Ford a rational man prone to nightmares. The ultimate statement of democratic principle -

All our pride is but a jest,  
None are worst and none are best,  
Grief and joy and hope and fear  
Play their pageants everywhere

confronts the hazardous future undismayed.

Musical examples printed with the kind permission of Oxford University Press.

<sup>1</sup> In 17th century England the bass line in dance music was played, not on a double bass, but on a 'bass violin', which was tuned down to B flat, not C. Perhaps this encouraged the 'earthing' of dance music on B flat.

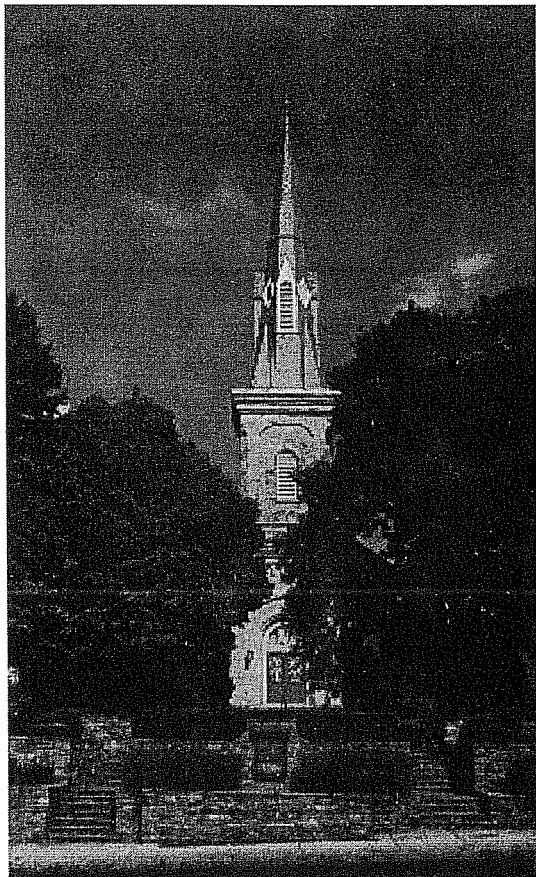


# REVIEWS FROM AMERICA

## Sancta Civitas

The Oratorio Choir and the Abington Chamber Orchestra based at the Abington Presbyterian Church in suburban Philadelphia presented the area première of Vaughan Williams's *Sancta Civitas* before a capacity house on Friday, November 17, 1995. The community orchestra has outgrown its name and now numbers close to 70 players. The distant choir of teenage girls was comprised of The Chapel Choir of Abington Presbyterian Church and guests from Nassau Presbyterian Church in Princeton, New Jersey.

The performance was a very good one



Abington Presbyterian Church

although somewhat hampered by the physical constraints of the building and a rather dry acoustic. In this performance, the large chorus which sang very well and with good energy and good intonation was jammed into a chancel notorious for trapping sound. The orchestra was spread out before them on the nave floor which is heavily carpeted. I know from my own experience singing there with another group on several occasions, that from the back of the chancel it is not possible to hear instruments down in front. So, high marks

for holding everything together! The organ was not used in this performance probably because there would not be room to move the console to a position where the organist could see.

Conductor Michael Kemp conducted with a sure hand and held all forces under control. The baritone soloist, Peter Stewart, sang from the pulpit with a dramatic flair but was swamped when chorus and orchestra were in full cry. Judicious miking might have been in order. The girls' choir sang with impeccable intonation and beautiful shading from the rear of the church and was under the direction of Sue Ellen Page. The single trumpet in the rear also was effective. The entire performance ran to about 31 minutes which is exactly what RVW estimates in the score.

I was thrilled by the harmonies but less so by the text which was only partially conveyed given the room. The orchestral playing was quite good, but the lower strings had much of their sound absorbed by the carpeting. One knowledgeable musician present who loves English music was rather unimpressed by the whole thing. Shades of Holst at the time of the première!

The evening opened with a rather slow performance of Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony* which was marred by faulty intonation in the violins, especially in the first movement. But the orchestra recovered nicely with a rare performance here of Delius's *The Walk to the Paradise Garden* in a brisk reading clocking in at 8½ minutes.

The standing ovation at the close of the RVW told the story for most present, and we can be thankful for the effort that went into this concert.

Bill Marsh

## English Pastoral Style and Sugarplum Fairies

by Allan Kozinn

Anglophilia and seasonal cheer are the order of the week at the New York Philharmonic, where Andrew Davis is offering glimpses of the English pastoral symphonic style, by way of Delius and Vaughan Williams, as well as visions of sugarplum fairies and

other apparitions from Tchaikovsky's "*Nutcracker*". The program, heard on Wednesday evening, is to be repeated this morning at 11 at Avery Fisher Hall.

English neo-Romanticism has always been an acquired taste for American listeners, and even though the increasingly plentiful recordings suggest that this repertory bears more serious investigation, many listeners still think of it as uncommonly bland.

The musicians of the Philharmonic seem to be of several minds on this issue. Delius's "*Walk to the Paradise Garden*" and Vaughan Williams's meltingly beautiful *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* are a boon to string players, who are given sweetly harmonized, slow-moving chord sequences of the kind that allows an ensemble to show off its tone.

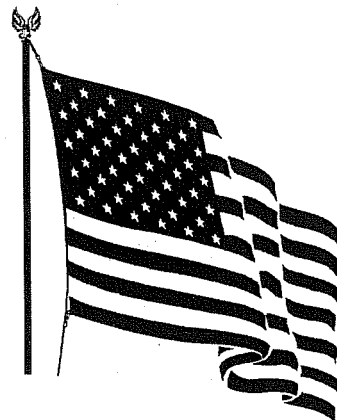
On Wednesday at Avery Fisher Hall, the Philharmonic strings did not let the opportunity pass. With Mr Davis providing dynamic shaping that was detailed but never fussy, the strings played ravishingly in both works and provided a shimmering, silvery backing for Joseph Robinson, the orchestra's principal oboist and the soloist in the Vaughan Williams *Oboe Concerto*.

But Mr Robinson's thoughtful, varied account notwithstanding, the orchestra's winds seemed less fully persuaded than their string-laying colleagues. In the Delius, particularly, they sounded tentative, and although there were lovely moments in the performance, it never fully jelled.

There was greater unity of purpose, not to mention energy, after the intermission. In a suite of "*Nutcracker*" excerpts, Mr Davis kept the dance rhythms sharp and the textures winningly light and transparent. And the orchestra, at its best and brightest, fully illuminated Tchaikovsky's colorful seasonal favorite.

Extract from the New York Times,  
December 22nd, 1995

Submitted by Bill Marsh



(Reviews continued on page 19)

# URSULA VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

an introduction by STEPHEN CONNOCK

Ursula Vaughan Williams was born in Malta the daughter of Captain, (later Major-General Sir) Robert Lock. Not surprisingly for an Army family, she was soon on the move to such places as Woolwich, Blackheath and Salisbury Plain. When attending Finishing School in Brussels, she visited the opera regularly and began to write poetry from the age of ten. "No specific poet or style influenced me" she says, adding that she read every book of poetry she could get her hands on, especially Shelley and Keats. Ursula insists that she "does not belong to any school of poetry".

Ursula became engaged to Captain, (later Lieutenant-Colonel) Michael Forrester Wood in the same week in 1932 that she joined London's Old Vic Theatre Company. This was great fun, and she loved living and working in London. Marrying an Army Officer, however, continued the travelling

lifestyle.

The first work of Ralph Vaughan Williams she heard was *Job* at the Old Vic in 1937. "I loved it, and resolved to write to Ralph with an idea for another story for him. The letter was very formal... it began 'Dear Sir'! His reply was equally formal - 'Dear Madam'!" At their first meeting, she remembers discussing William Barnes and Spenser. From these discussions was to come Ralph's setting of Spenser's *Epithalamion* in *The Bridal Day*, in 1938. Ursula was to have taken the part of the bride in the first performance of the Masque in 1939, but the outbreak of war led to the cancellation of the performance.

The war was to have a profound impact on Ursula's life and poetry. "I lived then in a world dominated by war and death. I lost my husband Michael and my brother, in the Second World War. This was also the time of the

Holocaust. The grief, sorrow, loneliness and despair of this period is reflected in my poetry".

Friendship with Ralph was the source of much comfort, and following Adeline Vaughan Williams death in 1951, she married Ralph in 1953. Her poetry is often about Ralph. For example, in *Tired* she writes:

"I shall remember firelight on your sleeping face,  
I shall remember shadows growing deeper  
as the fire fell to ashes and the minutes passed"

"Yes, the reference in *Tired* was about Ralph", Ursula told me "This is how I remembered him then, and how I remember him now".

(Tired is reproduced in full below)

## FOUR POEMS of URSULA VAUGHAN WILLIAMS set to music by RVW

### PROCRIUS (1958)

Procris is lying at the waterside,  
the yellow flowers show spring, the grass is green,  
before a gentle wind the thin trees lean  
towards the rushes, the rushes to the tide.  
She will not see  
the green spring turn to summer, summer go  
in a long golden dusk towards the snow,  
with eyes so lit by love that everything  
burned, flowed, grew, blossomed, moved on foot or wing  
with the guessed rhythm of eternity.  
All her hope and will  
flowed from her unavailing  
and she knew darkness, as her eyes know now  
shut to the daylight, and despair prevailing  
she saw no way to go.

### Four Last Songs (1958)

### TIRED (1956)

Sleep, and I'll be as still as another sleeper,  
holding you in my arms,  
glad that you lie  
so near at last.  
This sheltering midnight is our meeting  
place,  
no passion or despair or hope divide  
me from your side.  
I shall remember firelight on your sleeping  
face,  
I shall remember shadows growing deeper  
as the fire fell to ashes and the minutes passed.

### HANDS, EYES AND HEART (1956)

Hands, give him all the measure of my love  
surer than any word.  
Eyes, be deep pools of truth, where he may see  
a thought more whole than constancy.  
Heart, in his keeping, be at rest and live  
as music and silence meet, and both are heard.

### Stanza 7 of Prologue

"I am two fools I know  
for loving, and for saying so..."

### MENELAUS (1954)

You will come home,  
not to the home you knew  
that your thought remembers,  
going from rose to rose  
along the terraces  
and staying to gaze  
at the vines and reeds  
and iris beside the lake  
in the morning haze.  
Forgetting the place you are in  
where the cold seawinds go  
crying like gulls  
on the beach  
where the horned sea poppies grow.

Homesick wanderer,  
you will come home,  
to a home more ancient,  
waiting your return:  
sea frets the steps  
that lie green under waves  
and swallows nest below lintel and eaves;  
there lamps are kindled for you,  
they will burn till you come,  
however late you come,  
till the west wind's sheltering wing  
folds round your sail  
and brings you to land.

Stretch out your hand,  
murmuring, lapping sea  
and the lamps and the welcome  
wait to draw you home to rest.  
You shall come home  
and love shall fold you in joy  
and lay your heart on her breast.

# LITERARY WORKS by URSULA VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (URSULA WOOD)

## Poems:

No other Choice	Basil Blackwell: Oxford	1941
Fall of Leaf	Basil Blackwell: Oxford	1943
Need for Speech	Basil Blackwell: Oxford	1948
Wandering Pilgrimage		
Poems in Pamphlet X by Ursula Wood	The Hand and Flower Press	1952
Silence and Music	Hutchinson	1959
Aspects	Autolycus Publications	1984
by Ursula Vaughan Williams		

## Novels:

Metamorphoses	Duckworth	1966
Set to Partners	Duckworth	1968
The Yellow Dress	The Kensal Press	1984
Fall of Leaf	Unpublished	

## Biography:

RVW	Oxford University Press	1964
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## Two unpublished poems of Ursula Vaughan Williams.

For the first time, *Autumnal* and *Letter from a Stranger*, are published with the permission of the poet.

### Autumnal

Winter will dress me soon in snow, in fear, in stillness,  
I turn from that cold glass to find another crystal,  
retrace the way I chose to time I choose.  
It lies in secret, hidden under days;  
long drifts of coloured leaves or coloured hours  
blow down the paths, blow down the corridors,  
footsteps are heartbeat echoes of my thoughts,  
my thoughts remake an image of the house.

Who sleeps there now?  
Who sits waiting, waiting?  
For what stranger does the light break in  
announcing morning?  
I have slept here and woken to new days,  
I have danced here, I can see  
tall shadows moving in a patterned maze,  
a waft of silk, a shimmering of dawn,  
a long soliloquy of happiness.

Mirage, mirage... was this once my truth?  
Vanish, vanish... do not form again,  
outline no hope, define no tear, recall no touch,  
I am beyond your reach,  
no longer waiting, no longer with the dancers.

My hands were pale and smooth,  
now bent and brown, now many-ringed with gold,  
they loose their skills, release my hoarded joy.

Broken windows of a roofless house  
let in moonlight, moonlight unmasks the shadows  
where drifting snow lies heaped in silence, silence.

### Letter from a Stranger

If I'd stooped to the tide mark on the sand,  
by winter sea, and wrack stained, dull, there lay  
a small glass bottle waiting to be found  
I'd guess it held light words scribbled some summer day  
- not now a cry from some wrecked castaway -  
then saw my name, a crumpled paper fold  
a message from the distance of the dead.  
What should I do? What say?  
This is the story that a stranger told,  
words streamed unguided from his pen, for me,  
a letter, intimate, informed and strange  
with promises of long held hope and love.  
I, who dared not look beyond death's change,  
stare wondering at this paper in my hand  
asking in doubt and hope if it can prove  
time is the tide-washed shore beside my winter sea?

# Focus on Down Ampney

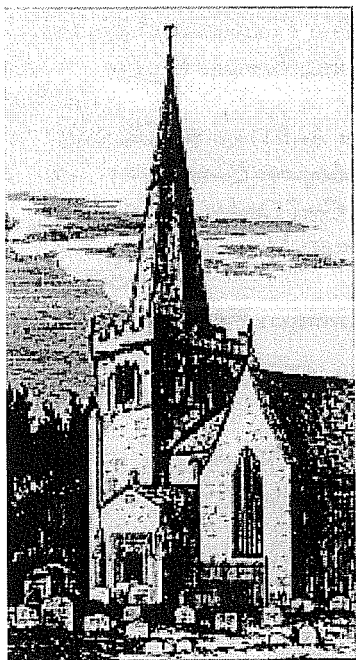
Ralph Vaughan Williams was born at The Old Vicarage, in the centre of the village of Down Ampney on October 12th 1872 while his father was Vicar at the 13th century All Saints Church. The entry of his baptism is still to be seen in the Register. His father died just 3 years later, and he is buried in the churchyard beside the South Transept.

Trustees of the RVW Society will be visiting the church and The Old Vicarage on April 20th - 21st 1996, and will give their impressions in the July issue of the Journal.

John Barr, from Bridgewater, Virginia gave us his impression of an earlier visit.

## A Vaughan Williams Pilgrimage by John Barr

I am very grateful for the opportunity to write about my visit to Down Ampney and other places where Vaughan Williams is commemorated. I live in Bridgewater, Virginia with my wife Ann, where I teach organ, piano and music theory at Bridgewater College. I began to know some of Vaughan Williams's music when I was a college student in the late fifties, but it was in the early eighties that I began in earnest collecting recordings of his music, reading the literature about him and doing some research on his hymn tunes, as well as his organ and piano music.



All Saints Church, Down Ampney

It wasn't until 1993, when our daughter and son became independent, that Ann and I decided to plan our trip to England. I had already corresponded with Mrs Vaughan Williams in 1986 to gain permission to obtain microfilm copies of some manuscripts of Vaughan Williams's early compositions from the British Library. When planning our trip, Ann persuaded me to write to Mrs Vaughan Williams for suggestions on places to visit and to inquire

if I might visit with her briefly. Mrs Vaughan Williams replied to my letter and kindly invited me to phone her once we arrived in London. Besides calling attention to places of general interest, she mentioned the church in Down Ampney and suggested writing to the Department of Manuscripts in the British Library in order to examine some of Vaughan Williams's compositions in manuscript. A letter of admittance came the morning of the day we left for England.



Birthplace of Ralph Vaughan Williams - 12th October, 1872  
The Old Vicarage, Down Ampney.

### *Invitation to take tea*

On Monday May 9th 1994, Ann and I drove the two hour trip from our home to Dulles International Airport where we took the evening flight to London arriving early the next morning. Upon phoning Mrs Vaughan Williams, she graciously invited me to 4 p.m. tea. As I lifted the latch of her gate that afternoon, a feeling of disbelief came over me briefly, but within a minute, Mrs Vaughan Williams cordially invited me into the entry hall and on back to the kitchen where she was preparing tea. She said, "I thought we might have tea in the garden, but it's a little cold today". She mentioned her enjoyment of flower gardening and how "Rafe" liked to do vegetable gardening. Soon we were in the upstairs sitting room with a tray of tea and cookies complemented by Sir Jacob Epstein's bust of RVW and a quiet cat giving me the "once over", as if to ensure that I was not an imposter. I had no agenda for this conversation with Mrs Vaughan Williams, but our talking drifted around the history and sights of England, her childhood view of British history and aspects of RVW which resolved some of my questions about him. I look back with deep gratitude to Mrs Vaughan Williams for her cordial and generous hospitality.

On Thursday May 12th, Ann and I took a bus to Oxford where we met our friend, Miss Dorothy Evans who had been a

years earlier. After some tea at Dorothy's home in Old Marsten, we set out in her car in the early afternoon seeing the lovely countryside and in about an hour, drove into the village of Down Ampney. We stopped at the Down Ampney Primary School to enquire about the location and accessibility of All Saints Church. Dorothy talked to the school's principal who was most helpful by calling Mrs Sheila Burgess, one of the Church Wardens. Mrs Burgess met us at the church and took us inside showing us various things of interest including the window depicting the Resurrection Scene in memory of Rev. Arthur Vaughan Williams who was vicar from 1868 to his death in 1875, the thirteenth century red cinquefoil flowers which remind us of various plagues including the Black Death, and the brightly coloured kneelers to complement the intricate wood carvings.

### *Hymn tune*

I was drawn to the choir area where the tracker organ of one manual and pedal board was situated. A placard inscription informs us that "This organ installed in 1874 was restored, improved and enlarged in 1974 to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1872 - 1958". Mrs Burgess graciously allowed me to play the organ so I had the rare privilege of playing one of the composer's most beautiful hymn tunes, DOWN AMPNEY and while Mrs Burgess and Dorothy sang

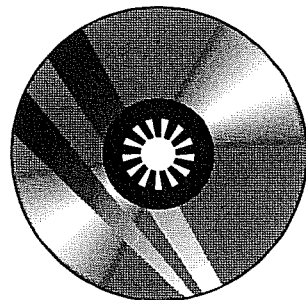
along, Ann continued to explore the interests of the lovely church interior. Had I played in one or more cathedrals, I think playing DOWN AMPNEY in Down Ampney's All Saints parish church would still stand out as one of the most uniquely meaningful experiences of my life. After looking at the RVW exhibit, largely provided by Mrs Ursula Vaughan Williams, we stepped out again into the afternoon sunshine, looked around the churchyard, bade Mrs Burgess a grateful goodbye, and drove on to take a glimpse of the old vicarage.

The following week Ann and I spent a few more days in London and it was on Tuesday May 17th that I went to the Manuscripts Room in the British Library. With Michael Kennedy's *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* in hand, I filled out some forms with several catalogue numbers which made available to me the MSS of *Household Music*, *Lord, Thou Hast Been Our Refuge*, *The Robin's Nest* and *Two Organ Preludes founded on Welsh Folk Songs*. It was, however, the unbound MS for the *Hymn Tune Prelude on 'Song 13' by Orlando Gibbons*, for pianoforte, that yielded a bit of interesting information to me. On my personal copy of the piece published by Oxford University Press, a dedication, "To Harriet Cohen" is found above the title of the composition. On the MS there was no dedication above the title, but as I looked through the piece and came to the back page at the bottom, the composer's hand written note was there for me to read as follows: "To Harriet Cohen (but only if she likes it, if not return to me and delete your name. I shan't be huffy) from R. Vaughan Williams". As I copied this down in my notes in the quietness of that room, I enjoyed that small revelation of Vaughan Williams's personality which reinforced what I had already read in the writings of Michael Kennedy and Roy Douglas about his integrity and generosity of spirit.

As I remember this wonderful trip, which included a number of other enjoyable happenings, I remain very grateful to those, both named and unnamed, who made these visits possible. They have brought me closer to the physical world of Ralph Vaughan Williams, but Ursula Vaughan Williams in her Introduction to *Ralph Vaughan Williams - A Pictorial Biography*, reminds us that "... the essence of Ralph Vaughan Williams's being is in the music that was the work of his life". How fortunate we are to hear so much of his music in recorded and live performances and how exciting it is that his music is being furthered by the efforts of the RVW Society.

John Barr

# Record Reviews



## **SYMPHONIES No. 4 in F Minor and No. 8 in D Major\***

**BBC Symphony Orchestra/Sir Malcolm Sargent/Leopold Stokowski\***

**BBC Classics 15656 91312.  
(61'39" bargain price)**

Live performances from the Proms of 1963 and 1964 respectively that give a fascinating insight into the interpretation of RVW by two disparate conductors.

Sargent's 4th is white hot from beginning to end, indeed his tempi in the first movement are quicker even than those of the composer himself in his famous recording. Thereafter he takes the other movements at a more leisurely pace than RVW but without for a moment easing up on the tremendous forward momentum that a good performance of this landmark symphony always generates. Judging by the enthusiastic applause the audience of the time clearly appreciated this very well played and energetic account.

The 8th Symphony is a gem in the late 20th century English orchestral repertoire, though succinct, it is a highly original, thought provoking, at times nostalgic but above all, hugely enjoyable work that neatly encapsulates the genius of VW's art in the last creative phase of his life. Stokowski, an early champion of the work in the U.S.A. (where it was very well received in 1956) here conducts an idiosyncratic performance. Slower tempi than I have ever heard before in the first and third movements are surprisingly effective and give the music a very expansive feel, particularly in those glistening chords that open the symphony and throughout the beautiful *Cavatina*. The *Scherzo alla Marcia* for woodwinds is barely 3 minutes long and a bit too breathless for comfort, no such reservations concern the exciting finale which ends in a paean of joyful sound.

To summarise then, these are, I believe, historically important interpretations from two leading conductors of the century, who in their own individual ways shed new light on these two important works. The digital re-mastering is good with audience noise not

too intrusive, at bargain price, this disc is highly recommended.

Robin Barber

## **Choral Works by Holst and VW The Finzi Singers, Paul Spicer, on Chandos CHAN 9425 (full price)**

The Finzi Singers is one of the three or four small professional choral groups (21 singers on this occasion) which have greatly enriched the choral repertory on disc in recent years. The Finzis specialise in English music, and among the eight CDs they have made so far for Chandos - more are on the way - is one pairing RVW with Howells. Their new release pairs RVW with Holst and offers an attractive mixture of well-known and much less well-known repertory, sacred and secular. Several items are making a first appearance on record, the main examples being from early Holst part-songs. These are alongside the reasonably familiar *Ave Maria*, *The Evening-Watch* and the ever-exhilarating *This Have I Done For My True Love*: a particularly committed performance here of the last-named.

As for RVW, we are on the well-worn paths into *Five English Folksongs*, *Three Shakespeare Songs* and *O Taste and See*. But even the more knowledgeable of our readers may be coming to *Valiant for Truth*, *O Vos Omnes* and *The Souls of the Righteous* for the first time. The last of these, written for the dedication of the Battle of Britain Chapel at Westminster Abbey in 1947, appears to be a first recording, certainly on CD. *Valiant for Truth* didn't do much for me, but both *O Vos Omnes*, which inhabits that world of chaste polyphony we associate with the *G minor Mass* (which immediately preceded it), and *The Souls* have much to offer.

The Finzi Singers, under Paul Spicer, tackle this exacting programme with high professionalism and only an occasional slip from grace. The significance of the front-cover illustration ('*The Checked Shawl*' by Algernon Talmage) escapes me, but don't let that deter you from an attractive collection.

John Bishop



# VAUGHAN WILLIAMS DISCOVERED

by Richard Turbet

There are, I would suggest, two ways of becoming the devotee of a composer. Sometimes a certain piece will set the pulses racing. After hearing it again and investigating more of the composer's output, one can feel that this sudden revelation has a secure foundation, and that the composer in question is indeed one to admire. I experienced such a revelation when by complete chance I tuned into a broadcast of Reich's *Music for eighteen musicians*, and I have continued to admire most of his music ever since. The danger of sudden conversions is that they can pall just as suddenly: did I really like Johan Svendsen so much?

But there are other composers whose music seeps slowly but relentlessly into the pores and sinews of one's being, almost unnoticed until the realisation dawns that this music is indispensable and will be a joy forever.

## ...even Grieg was modern.

Vaughan Williams entered my musical pantheon slowly. During the 1950s, when I was still at primary school, I was taken on Saturday mornings to the Robert Meyer Children's concerts in London's Royal Festival Hall. In the light of my subsequent empathy for all things Tudor, I think I must have heard the Tallis *Fantasia*: it certainly rings a bell. What I know I heard was the overture *The Wasps*. We were warned that it was forthcoming and that it was rather modern, so I dutifully purchased a 78 rpm recording in order, having been forewarned, to be forearmed. I remember taking to it at once, but not to the extent of seeking out more of VW's music after all, I was only ten, still finding my way musically, and at that stage influenced by my excellent piano teacher, to whom even Grieg was modern.

Despite attending a public school for boys - Bancrofts, in Essex - my fellow pupils and I were able in the sixth form to join a mixed choir for which we provided the tenors and basses, and for which Loughton High School for Girls provided the sopranos and contraltos. I had recently passed grade VII for piano with distinction, so while I was still on top I gave up the pianistic régime of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, and gave myself up to Byrd: this aged fifteen! The Combined Choir had an excellent repertory, from Taverner and Fevin to Poulenc and Rubbra, and it provided my next indelible



Richard Turbet gazing at the pictorial view from Dunnydeer Hill, Inch, Aberdeenshire.

VW experience: the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* in St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London, with my old Classics master, Carl Murray, singing the solo. This was 1966, but although I had heard two pieces by VW that made profound impressions on me, I was still not ready for him, instead dipping my feet gingerly in the eternally healing music of Elgar.

In those days my school did not teach music as an academic subject - though it managed to produce Colin and David Matthews, Brian Rayner Cooke, Alan Thurlow and Roger Fisher - so I read English at University College, London, which has no department of music! Outside the Tudor period, my hero during these undergraduate days was Bax, whose piano music, along with some of the symphonies and chamber music, has retained my deep affection. There was still no special place for VW. However, perhaps there was a straw in the wind the year following graduation, where I lived in Dundee and because infatuated with Butterworth's *Rhapsody: A Shropshire Lad*. From my window I gazed out at a beautiful view down the Tay towards Perth, while Butterworth's music conjured up the Cotswolds.

Back in England for a year in Leeds, I made my first purchase of a VW symphony, the *Ninth*, but what persuaded me to buy the LP was inquisitiveness about the scoring, which includes saxophones: as a blues fan, this fascinated me! Much as I took to this symphony, it still did not provoke me into buying others by VW.

The following year saw me at the University of Calgary. Canada is a fabulously beautiful country and Canadians are among the nicest people on the planet. Nevertheless, much as I appreciated this, and was able to imbibe the excellent North American rock music with which I now became better acquainted, I wanted to listen to something of England. The University shop had a fine stock of recordings that included a selection of VW symphonies. I decided to add to my solitary *Ninth* and investigated, among others, the *Fifth*.

## Life-enhancing

At this stage in my narrative I need an equivalent of Charlotte Brontë's immortal 'Reader, I married him', such was the impact that sublime opening had upon me. Add to that the breathtaking change to the second subject plus the realisation that the *Pastoral* was just as life-enhancing, and I was at last of a mind also to appreciate the likes of the *London*, *Sixth* and *Anaëctica*, the wonderful shorter pieces for orchestra and, most of all, *An Oxford Elegy*. Before I returned from my year in Canada I gave my needle-sore discs to an appreciative friend, and wrote to my parents to ensure the Boulton boxed set of all nine symphonies was awaiting me on my return to England.

Richard Turbet

# YOUR LETTERS

*We are always pleased to receive contributions for this page*



## Plea for the Bliss concerto

Many thanks for Journal No. 4 which I found very interesting.

May I take issue with Michael Kennedy - of all people - in respect of one point in his article on VW's *Piano Concerto*. He starts his article with a general discussion on British Piano Concertos, mentioning (of course) Ireland, Rawsthorne, Britten and even Hurlstone. But where is a reference to Arthur Bliss? Like it or not (and a lot of people don't), Bliss's concerto is a major work, surely the only "bravura" concerto (except perhaps Delius's) to stand beside Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov. OK, so I expect (hope) that this omission was a mental lapse, but I felt it should be pointed out.

*Michael Churcher*

## and again...

One of the best things about the excellent fourth issue of the Journal was Michael Kennedy's "This Concerto is a Masterpiece", which was excitingly informative and enjoyable. I'm surprised, however, that in mentioning other British piano concertos of this century - some justly and others unjustly neglected - Mr Kennedy omits any reference to Bliss's estimable contribution to the genre. Incidentally, my own nomination for the other concerto (besides the magnificent RVW two-piano one) worth consideration as a great British piano concerto is the first effort (as opposed to his second, much weaker one) by Cyril Scott. It is an amazing piece of music, showing the influence of French Impressionism in the teens of this century - around the time when RVW was first making use of it - and with its odd bits of mysticism sounding a parallel to Charles Koechlin (whose own extraordinary *Ballade for Piano and Orchestra* dates from about the same time).

*Martin Mitchell*

## Michael Kennedy on the unpublished works

In Andrew Penny's article "Pioneering Film Music Recording", in the Journal of the RVW Society, November issue, I noticed he remarks that "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 Limited, might wish only for those official

publications by OUP to be recorded - which was fair enough".

Perhaps this is a useful opportunity to inform RVW Society members about the situation regarding RVW's unpublished works, in particular those written prior to *Toward the Unknown Region* and the surviving scores to the films. Since all this music remains the sole property of the estate, Bernard Benoliel, as artistic director of RVW Ltd, answered Andrew Penny's enquiry after it had been raised with Mrs Vaughan Williams and the other directors of RVW Ltd and a corporate decision had been taken.

Bernard Benoliel is also administrator/secretary of the RVW Trust which as Andrew Penny correctly points out does not support the work of the founder in any way. This was RVW's own express wish. However, RVW Ltd has already made careful plans to ensure that the majority of these scores are published in scholarly editions that make practical use of the most advanced computer techniques.

We have begun by commissioning a new full score and parts for the complete incidental music to *The Wasps*; this will be published and recorded within the next two years. Bernard Benoliel has been appointed director of the overall project and as Chairman of RVW Ltd I will be providing introductions to each score when it is published. RVW Ltd hopes to see this complex project completed over the next decade and will be arranging for the premier performances and recordings. I hope this clarifies the situation regarding RVW's unpublished music.

*Michael Kennedy*

*Editor's note:*

*Our best wishes were passed onto Michael Kennedy and to Bernard Benoliel for this important project.*

## VW on film?

One of your contributions makes an interesting point about a film or video - I have been collecting RVW records for 25 years but cannot recall ever seeing a clip of RVW on film at all. Do we know if there is any film? I'd certainly be interested in anything, however short.

*Alastair Brown*

*Editor's note:*

*We are interested in following up this area. Any information to Stephen Connock.*

## Correspondence circle

I have a suggestion for the improvement of the Society. Since I don't live in England, it is impossible for me to attend any of the Society's activities, and therefore I don't have the opportunity to meet other RVW enthusiasts (it's not many here where I live). What I would suggest for you, is some sort of an international secretary with a responsibility to involve foreign members in the Society's activities.

I must say that I feel very much like Mr Hoares (Journal 4/page 14) from New Zealand. I do envy you who can attend these activities!

There are several things this secretary could do. One thing could be to start a correspondence circle among the members (all members, not only the foreign ones). Since we can't meet other members face to face, these would be, for me, very nice to get more involved. I am sure that many members would welcome something like this.

*Tore F Steenslid*

*Editor's note:*

*See Robin Barber's message on the back page.*

## VW Symphony Cycle

Having travelled from the Pennines to be thrilled by Sibelius's 6th and 5th symphonies in the 1992 "Tender is the North" festival at the Barbican Hall, I wondered if I dare miss the recent symphonic cycle of his English friend Vaughan Williams. When I found that the final concert would include the 9th and 2nd RVW symphonies in that order, I got myself a ticket and was not disappointed. *The Times* review (12 October) calls it "a pity that his unearthly farewell was not placed at the end"; but I don't agree. Sibelius, when asked how a particular bit of music should be played, replied that there was not a best way; and that each interpreter was free to use it as thought best. So on 9 October I wanted to hear the ninth again - the Hallé did it a couple of years ago, and I have the Everest recording - to see whether its strivings, after those of the 'Antarctica', got RVW out of the 6th's "Slough of Despond" marooning (Gwyn Parry-Jones' term in your July number), to lead us "back to normality" if not to regain Paradise. They did; and we could feast on the much-loved *London Symphony* in the heart of the city it epitomises, with its lovely slow movement and superb march in its finale. "The Ninth", says *The Times*, "may not be a great symphony" - but it may; we still don't know it well enough, and I find it harder to get to know than even Sibelius's 4th was - "but it is a darkly impressive work often underrated... an unmistakeable journey's end". RVW's symphonies are the most

*(Continued on back page)*

# A FEW REFLECTIONS ON VAUGHAN WILLIAMS, ENGLISHNESS AND THE NATIONAL CULTURE

by *Duncan Hunt*

The poster for the cycle of Vaughan Williams's symphonies given recently by Richard Hickox and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra included, as most people reading this will know, a painting. It is of a ploughman and his two horses crossing a bare, uncluttered landscape. White and grey cumulus clouds loom over them, dominating an otherwise blue sky. The absence of buildings, trees or vegetation of any sort gives the scene, which is nevertheless unmistakably Southern England, a timeless quality. It represents a place where we may still find the 'real', 'essential' England, uncorrupted by time or change. The painting is called *Fresh Air for Health* and is from one of those 1930s railway advertisements designed to encourage people to take day trips into the countryside by train. This connection is emphasised by the style of the lettering which is in keeping with the painting's origin.

## 'Chronicle of Englishness'

This visual imagery has its verbal counterpart in Norman Lebrecht's article about the series in the Daily Telegraph. In his article Lebrecht calls Vaughan Williams's symphonic cycle his 'chronicle of Englishness', and in criticizing (with some justification) 'concert bosses' of the sixties and seventies for not programming Vaughan Williams's music, he states that what they failed to see was that 'his [Vaughan Williams's] symphonies represented the very qualities for which the English are most admired in the world: emotional stability, courage in adversity, honesty, compassion and inveterate good humour'. Amazement was expressed by a number of musical commentators that this cycle of the symphonies was the first ever complete cycle. This is a surprising fact, but what is equally surprising is that in the visual images chosen to advertise the series, and in the journalistic comment engendered by it, we find repeated the same unexamined notions of the quintessential Englishness of Vaughan Williams's music which were current forty or more years ago.

These notions are not just restricted to the ephemeral statements of newspaper articles. Despite a few marginal detractors, the orthodox view of Vaughan Williams (seen as reinvigorating English music by a

rediscovery of the 'Mind of England' in folk song and Tudor music) has shown a remarkable degree of persistence. Hence we find Professor Wilfrid Mellers, in his 1989 book *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, presenting a view of English musical history from Purcell to Parry which is virtually identical to that promoted by Cecil Sharp, the folk song collector, at the turn of the century. English music, the argument runs, has been corrupted by foreign influences, such as Handel or Mendelssohn, and can only be reborn, can only become a truly 'national' music, by its rediscovery of quintessential English values. These values, although lodged deep within the national collective psyche and to be found in England's rural and pre-industrial past, have been obscured by the grime of industrialisation and the lure of material power. No awareness is shown that, as the explosion of research into nationhood and nationality is demonstrating, the

Englishness, so often lauded now, is a comparatively recent phenomenon, little more than a hundred years old. The lack of recognition that Englishness and the idea of a national culture grew up in response to historically specific socio-economic conditions also allows the representation of Vaughan Williams's nationalism as a purely cultural one, whereas, in fact, the distinction between cultural and political nationalisms is more ambiguous.

## Influences

Writing in a book on Vaughan Williams in 1953, Percy M. Young stated that, 'Music is not utilitarian from one point of view. In so far, however, that it may contribute to

social stability by obliteration of barriers whether of class or religion it is of practical value'. This raises the question: of 'practical value' to whom? It is a question which can, I think, be elaborated by an examination of a belief shared by Vaughan Williams and William Morris. Vaughan Williams was apparently influenced by William Morris. To what extent, from the published accounts of Vaughan Williams's life and music at least, it is impossible to say, although one may speculate that a certain influence might have come via Holst who was a member of Morris's Hammersmith Socialist Society in the mid-1890s. Whatever lines of influence existed, both men believed that, to use Vaughan Williams's formulation in *National Music*, the artist 'must live with his fellows and make his art an expression of the life of the whole community'. Behind a superficial agreement between the two, however, lurks a profound difference. Morris believed that

# VAUGHAN WILLIAMS



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the only way for art to become the expression of society's social life once more, as it had been in Mediæval times, was for there to be a transformation of the foundations of society: capitalism must give way to communism. This does not seem to form a part of Vaughan Williams's mature beliefs, his aim was to reconnect the artist to the community under existing social and economic conditions. The change would be a purely cultural one. Thus, from a situation where the values of an earlier epoch are used, as they are in Morris, to criticize the current state of society and suggest how things might be in a future one, we move to a situation where an invocation of times past and an aspiration for art to be once more the expression of the communal life of society can, by 'obliterating' the 'barriers of class or religion', turn over into a valorization of the current social order. There is, I think, an interesting tension between Vaughan Williams's apparently left-leaning political beliefs and, to quote Percy Young again, his musical memorialization of 'the English church, the English village, the English countryside, [and] the institutions of monarchy'.

### ***'Dunkirk Spirit'***

All this is largely speculative and provisional but it seems to me that until we have critically examined the relationship of Vaughan Williams to the concepts of Englishness and national culture we will be unable, on the one hand, to avoid the fuzziness of thought which can allow the elision of the political and the cultural demonstrated by Bernard Ingham on a recent edition of Desert Island Discs when he associated the *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* with the 'Dunkirk spirit', and on the other hand, to properly reassess Vaughan Williams's contribution as a composer. Notions of Englishness, intrinsic to the music or projected onto it by interpreters, will always be an element in listening to Vaughan Williams. Until, however, these notions are problematized and until questions are asked about when the concept of a 'national' culture emerged in its current shape, and about whose interests it served, the effort to hear the music freshly and differently will be restrained by the representations, visual or verbal, which so often accompany the music. Vaughan Williams, as was reinforced by a hearing of all the symphonies as a cycle, is a far more interesting and significant composer than is often recognized. In an effort to encourage more people to see this, it is perhaps time to save Vaughan Williams from those who would have him be a cultural spokesperson for quintessential English values and for the 'English People'.

*Duncan Hunt*

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

## *A further article in our series*

**My first encounter with RVW's music has a double significance: it remains one of my first vivid memories. At the age of four, I developed an obsession for the 'Lassie' TV series, which had Greensleeves as its signature tune, and for some reason, the music always made me cry. Rather than confuse me with the folk song origins of the music, my mother merely told me that the piece was by Vaughan Williams. With hindsight, I am not sure whether it was the tranquil, gentle nature of the music or the overt sentimentality of the programme which led to my dramatic weekly outbursts, but the name of Vaughan Williams nevertheless remained in the back of my mind for over a decade.**

### ***Shared enthusiasm***

Once a teenager, I began a new obsession: this time, for classical music itself. On a very limited budget, it was initially difficult to explore beyond the small selection of duplicate tapes and CDs my father gave me but amongst these was a CD single of the *Tallis Fantasia*, performed by William Boughton and The English String Orchestra. The power of this music was immediate and quite overwhelming; it is one of those exceptional pieces which reveals itself as a work of genius at the first hearing, yet can still surprise and delight after many years. In the first week of discovering the piece, I must have played it enough to try the patience of my parents and those friends with whom I tried to share my enthusiasm.

This new-found enthusiasm was fuelled further over the following months. Sir David Willcocks performed *Dona Nobis Pacem* in Peterborough Cathedral, a suitably grand venue for such a moving work. It was at this time that I also started collecting Vernon Handley's cycle of the nine symphonies - a set that has certainly offered good, if not outstanding performances at an excellent price. Listening to the symphonies, I was immediately struck (and still am) by the high level of thematic and stylistic inventiveness in these highly original and eclectic masterpieces. The symphonies embrace such a wide range of emotions and subjects; by turns, the music can be playful or coldly serious, violent or gloriously serene and visionary. It is a shame that at a time when the Mahler

symphonies are lauded for their emphatic display of diverse emotions and techniques, the Vaughan Williams symphonies remain so seldom performed. To think that up till 1995 the symphonies had never been performed as a cycle seems quite incredible.

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**by  
Justin  
Robinson**

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Today, at the age of 21, my CD collection now numbers several hundred - with British music accounting for around 50 percent. As a poet and a student of poetry, I have come to regard Vaughan Williams not only as a great symphonist, but as one of the few twentieth-century composers who have convincingly combined great poetry with suitably great music, whether in a song cycle, symphony or choral piece. With his settings of Whitman - the poet of democracy and universal brotherhood - RVW created music which remains truly inspirational. For me, *Toward the Unknown Region* particularly stands out here. The questing spirit of the poetry, which culminates in a joyous affirmation of the human spirit, is accompanied by music perfectly adjusted and complimentary to the mood of the verse. This piece, together with the *Tallis Fantasia*, the *Fourth*, *Fifth* and *Sixth Symphonies* and the *Oboe Concerto*, stand out in my mind as some of the very finest orchestral music this country has ever produced.

### ***Reputation secured***

Overall, Vaughan Williams surely stands out as one of the great musical personalities of the century; a man able to reconcile the rhythmic drive and diversity of modernism with the lyrical characteristics of the British symphony, as developed by Parry, Stanford and Elgar. Unlike so many British composers, though, the future of RVW's musical reputation now looks far more secure - a reputation that our society has helped to bolster. This is a composer of great humanity with a great deal to say, and I, for one, certainly intend to keep listening.



# Vaughan Williams and Charterhouse

*In the first of a two-part article, Robin Wells, who is Director of Music at Charterhouse School explores the VW/Charterhouse association.*

The Vaughan Williams and Charterhouse 'connection' really begins in 1872. This year was significant firstly, for the birth on 12th October of Ralph Vaughan Williams, and secondly, six months earlier the school had moved from the London Charterhouse to its present site in Godalming, Surrey. While the significance of these two events would not have been realised at the time, then certainly one hundred years later there was cause for a double celebration at Charterhouse.

## Detention

Ralph Vaughan Williams entered Charterhouse in January 1887, five years after his brother Hervey. Initially he was placed in the Headmaster's House, but on the opening of a new Boarding House 1889 by the Organist at the time, G H Robinson, he was invited to be Robinson's first Head of House; and so he transferred for the remaining four terms until he left the school in the summer of 1890. Today it would be extremely unusual for a pupil to change houses during their time at the school. VW's days at Charterhouse have been briefly documented by himself in his book *National Music*, and by Ursula Vaughan Williams in her biography. It would appear

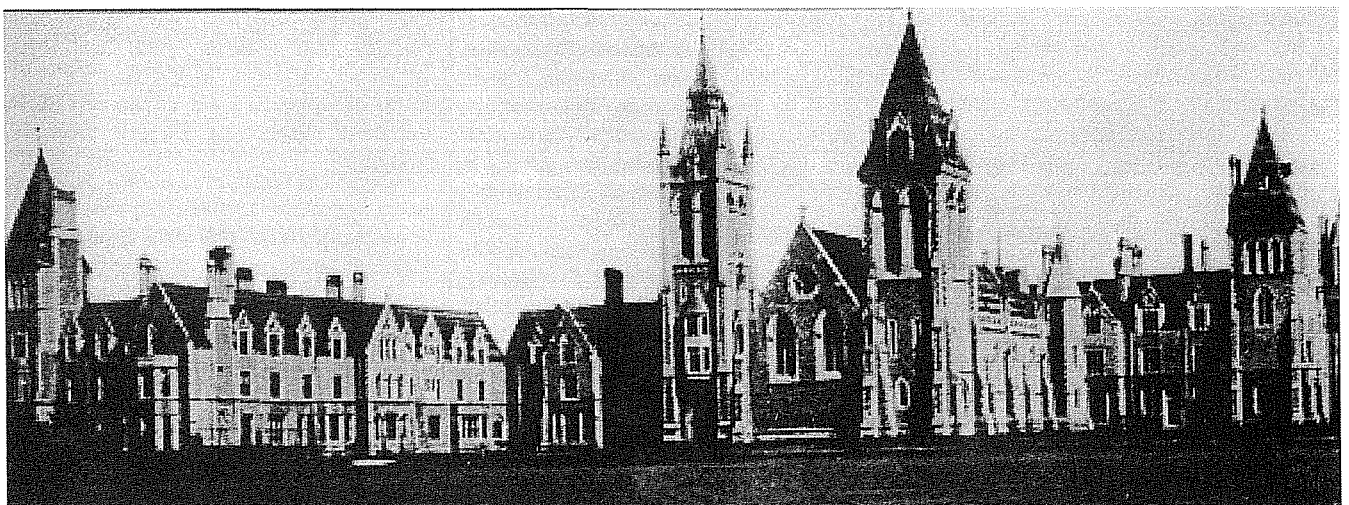
that he led a fairly normal life, taking part in games and most school activities, and music in particular. Evidence suggests that the philistine image of public schools during this period was not entirely accurate. Although classics and games were very much the order of the day, at Charterhouse, at any rate, the arts and music were mildly encouraged. A glance at the 'Extra School' book (a weekly detention) shows an entry dated 19th February 1887 "Williams R.V." for being 'noisy', sadly we do not know whether it was a musical noise or not! Max Beerbohm also appeared in the same entry for being "silly".

Although he is reputed not to have enjoyed his schooldays at Charterhouse, not unlike a good many other distinguished figures, in later life he became well-disposed towards his former school and spoke of it with affection. He describes in a letter to John Wilson (dated 15th October 1957) of how 'Last year, in Majorca I met Robert Graves in a restaurant - we suddenly discovered that we were both Old Carthusians whereupon we both sang the Carmen (school song) so loud that it brought on a thunderstorm!' The letter continues 'You know I learned quite a lot of music at Charterhouse, though it was supposed to be the Philistine period of Public School life, and I and a boy friend once actually gave a concert of our own compositions in the school hall with the leave of the Headmaster (Haig Brown). So I feel most friendly to Charterhouse music and Charterhouse musicians'.

## Words of Congratulation

The said concert was a significant occasion as it marked the first public performance of a work by VW, the *Piano Trio in G*. The composer said of it 'All I can remember of it is that the principal theme was distinctly reminiscent of Cesar Franck, a composer of whom I was not even aware in those days and whom I have since learned to dislike cordially'. (*A Musical Auto-biography*, National Music). After the concert the mathematics master Mr Noon offered words of congratulation - very good Williams, you must go on'. 'That is one of the few words of encouragement I have ever received'. Despite this response of VW, there is nevertheless nothing to suggest that music was not encouraged, and there were certainly enough musical people at the school during his time to inspire him to compose and pursue his instrumental playing.

In 1940 he was invited back to Charterhouse to open the new Music School. The concert which followed the opening concluded with Haydn's *Toy Symphony* in which VW was invited to play the cuckoo. *The Times* reporting the occasion on July 8th said 'Dr Ralph Vaughan Williams... was invited to open the new Music School at Charterhouse... He spoke of the great strides which music had made in the life of public schools in recent years... The programme ended in a lighter vein with Haydn's *Toy Symphony* in which



Charterhouse School, 1888



the Headmaster (Robert Birley) made his début as conductor, and Dr Vaughan Williams virtuosity as the cuckoo was such that the instrument gave out altogether'.

John Wilson, who took over as Director of Music at Charterhouse in 1947, had been a pupil of VW at the Royal College of Music in the thirties. One of his ambitions was to receive the Masque of Charterhouse which had not been performed since 1935. For the revival of this pageant John Wilson approached VW to ask if he would consent to write some solemn music involving the whole school for the final tableau - The

The Masque was duly reviewed in 1950 and on the day VW attended it rained, causing the performance to be held in the Chapel. This lent a different perspective to what should have been an outdoor occasion, and VW wrote some days later to the Headmaster, George Turner: 'It is an ill rain that blows nobody good and those 500 boys singing in the Chapel gave me a thrill that I should never have got out of doors'.

Two years later the composer attended a concert of his music which was given in the Chapel to mark his eightieth birthday. The programme included, 'Rhosymedre', 'For

## REVIEWS FROM AMERICA

(continued from page 9)

### A Première with a Bang, a Loud One

by Alex Ross

A brief première, a concerto, a big orchestral piece after intermission: Leonard Slatkin's program with the New York Philharmonic at Avery Fisher Hall on Thursday night was, in skeleton form, very much by the book. But his individual choices were not predictable ones, and they meshed to unusual effect. Above all, Vaughan Williams's semi-symphonic ballet "Job" made for a powerfully offbeat finale.

The première was Richard Danielpour's "Toward the Splendid City", a straggler from the Philharmonic's 150th-anniversary commissions. This 10-minute overture unapologetically takes off from Leonard Bernstein's musical celebrations of New York City, with leaping, swaggering Broadway themes, tartly tonal harmonies, and bumptious Cuban rhythms. There are also strong reminiscences of Stravinsky's "Sacre" in the meter changes and syncopations, even a hint of John Adams in the one-note trumpet fanfares that ride over the work's opening surge.

But the piece follows an interesting dramatic arch, very much Mr Danielpour's own: the strongest gestures come at the outset, and the piece gradually winds down toward a peaceful, gently impressionistic conclusion: exotic arabesques in the winds, deep splashes of color in the percussion. A loud bang follows for good measure. If the piece had a flaw, it was that this vivid contrast of rhythmic drive and atmospheric repose was not taken a little further.

The remarkable young violinist Sarah Chang lavished sweetness and brilliance on Lalo's creakily charming *Symphonie Espagnole*. The accompaniment sometimes seemed dull and foursquare by comparison; anyone's would. In the Vaughan Williams, Mr Slatkin guided with a steady, knowing hand; these days he is the composer's best advocate, and he coaxed an idiomatic blend of pastoral lyricism and brassy force from the Philharmonic. "Job" is a long piece with occasional longueurs, but its sinuous melodies and dusky modal harmonies cast a deep spell.

The program is to be repeated tonight and Tuesday.

Extract from the New York Times,  
January 6th, 1996

Submitted by Bill Marsh

## CHARTERHOUSE,

SUNDAY, AUGUST 5TH, 1888.

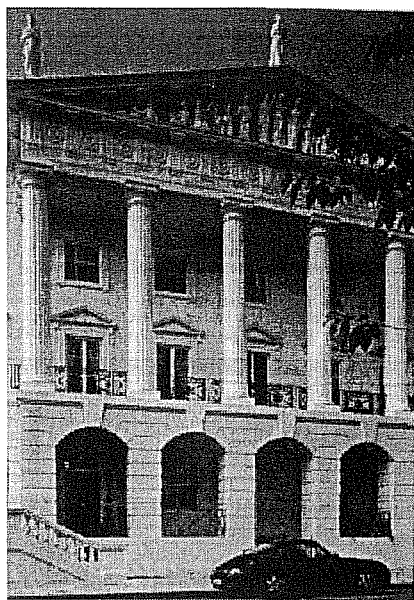
### Programme.

- PIANOFORTE { Rondo from Quartet } ... *Spohr*.  
DUET { in C minor }  
H. W. C. ERSKINE AND J. G. S. MELLOR.
- SONG ... "The Chorister" ... *Sullivan*.  
B. G. BRANSTON.
- TRIO ... in G ... *R. V. Williams*.  
H. V. HAMILTON { B. K. R. WILKINSON } S. MASSINGBERD.  
R. V. WILLIAMS }
- SONG ... "There is a green hill far away" *Gounod*.  
MR. L. MARSHALL.
- PIANOFORTE } ... Phantaisie in A ... *Bach*.  
SOLO }  
MR. ROBINSON.
- SONG ... "I dreamt I was in Heaven" *H. F. Hamilton*.  
B. G. BRANSTON.
- QUARTET ... No. 5 ... *Haydn*.  
J. E. BIDWELL, A. G. G. COWIE, T. SHAW, C. M. RAYNER.
- AIR ... From the "Creation" ... *Haydn*.  
MR. BODE.
- DUET FOR TWO } Sonata in D ... *Mozart*.  
PIANOFORTES }  
H. V. HAMILTON AND N. G. SMITH.

Eviction of the Monks. This task the composer agreed to undertake with the condition that he be permitted to include as a grand climax the school song Carmen Carthusianum. (Music originally composed by William Horsley, organist of The Charterhouse 1838-58). He found it a source of wry surprise when, to mark his 'generous service' to Charterhouse and to honour his seventy-eighth birthday, the school was given a half-holiday.

*All the Saints*, 'Let Us Now Praise Famous Men', the 'Festival Te Deum', two songs from *Pilgrim's Progress* and finish with the *Solemn Music* written for the Masque.

The second part of this article will be featured in the July edition of the *RVW Society Journal*.



No. 10, Hanover Terrace, Regent's Park, bears a plaque to Ralph Vaughan Williams who lived in the Nash terrace house for 5 years. The 54-year lease is for sale at £4.25 million through Knight Frank (0171-629 8171). It includes 3 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, 5 reception rooms, staff quarters and a mews house.

(Continued from page 15)

interrelated of any great composer, and may be appreciated *in toto*, so that the new experiences of one who has passed through the desolation of our stricken 20th century go beyond but do not destroy our earlier understandings. As Wordsworth wrote: "The form remains, the function never dies".

Incidentally, the *London Symphony* was given a warm and welcome performance by the Todmorden Orchestra in our town hall recently. It is good to find that some major works by RVW are not limited to use by the big professional orchestras. Nevertheless, all thanks must go to Richard Hickox and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra for their enterprise in giving us our long overdue complete cycle of Vaughan Williams Symphonies.

Frank McManus

Typesetting by  
Miles DTP



Tel: 01734 264071 Fax: 01734 352991

# Newsbriefs

- Carlton Classics recording of Vaughan Williams *Hymns and Carols*, conducted by Owain Arwel Hughes, will now be released on 19th August 1996.
- The coupling for Richard Hickox's forthcoming recording of the *Five Tudor Portraits* for Chandos will be *In Windsor Forest*. Stephen Connock will be providing the liner-notes on behalf of the Society.
- André Previn's new CD of the *Symphony No. 5* and *The Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* with the Symphony Orchestra of the Curtis Institute of Music has been issued in the U.S.A. on EMI CDC 7243 5 5537126. This is the first major-label CD from the Curtis Orchestra. As a student orchestra, the membership varies from year to year, yet by all accounts the playing on this recording is impressive. This is Previn's third recording of the *Fifth Symphony*.

## Message from the Secretary

Many members have requested that we publish a full list of the names and addresses of the membership as in particular this would facilitate the formation of local groups of members.

This, I intend to do in the 6th edition of the *RVWS Journal*.

If, for any reason you do not wish to have your details published, then kindly let me know before Easter.

**Robin Barber**

(address on front page)

see also letters on page 15.

This 356 page book is priced at £35.00 and will be available in 1997. Details from Scholar Press, Gower House, Croft Road, Aldershot, Hampshire, GU11 3HR (Tel. 01252 331551).

- On May 2nd 1996, the Thames Singers are putting on a concert at the Dulwich Picture Gallery which will include *Full Fathom Five*, *The Cloud Capp'd Towers* and *Over Hill, Over Dale*.
- Professor Wilfrid Mellers will be giving a talk on "Vaughan Williams and the background to the *Sinfonia Antarctica*" at the Royal Festival Hall on Friday 22nd March 1996 at 2:30 p.m. The BBCSO with Andrew Davis will be performing the *Sinfonia Antarctica* in the evening. The same orchestra and conductor will also be giving *A Pastoral Symphony* at the RFH on Tuesday 26th March 1996. The concert starts at 7:30 p.m. Booking for both concerts opens on Tuesday 6th February (phone 0171 960 4242).
- Bernard Haitink confirmed in a recent Radio 3 interview that he will continue to perform and record all the VW symphonies undertaking perhaps one every year or two. He said he was "devoted to Vaughan Williams".
- For those who missed Richard Hickox and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in *A London Symphony*, they are performing it again in the Colston Hall, Bristol on Wednesday 3rd April. Details from 0117 922 3686.

## Next Edition:

*A conductor's view of Pilgrim's Progress by Igor Kennaway.*

- Scholar Press have announced publication of *Vaughan Williams - A Source Book* by Alison McFarland.