



Journal of the RVW Society

No. 7 October 1996

EDITOR

Stephen Connock
(See address below)

Editorial Assistant
Simon Crutchley

In this issue...

- **Reminiscences of VW**
by Roy Henderson
- page 2
- **Vaughan Williams and the value of nostalgia**
by James Koehne
- page 10
- **Hubert Foss: Vaughan Williams' Jaeger?**
by Duncan Hinnells
- page 12
- **Two Whitman Duets**
A Sea Symphony sketches
by Andrew Herbert
- page 18

plus news and reviews

CHAIRMAN

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

SECRETARY

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

TREASURER

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

A YEAR OF ACHIEVEMENT

The RVW Society is in excellent shape. This was the view of the Trustees as reported at the second AGM of the Society held on Saturday 5th October 1996 at St. Giles Church in the Barbican.

Stephen Connock, Chairman, said that membership had doubled in the last year and that the financial position of the Society was secure. New books had been published, including *A Discography* and *A Bibliography* and the Society were proud to be launching *The Collected Poems of Ursula Vaughan Williams*. He told members about the planning which had been undertaken on the Vaughan Williams Festival to be held in London in the Autumn of 1997. The Festival would include performances of *A Cotswold Romance*, *Sir John in Love*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Riders to the Sea* and excerpts from *The Poisoned Kiss*. The Society had appealed for funding to record these operas, and a reply from the Foundation for Sports and the Arts was awaited.

The Chairman paid tribute to the contribution of John Bishop and Tony Fuller who had retired during the year. He welcomed three new Trustees, Simon Crutchley, Robin Wells and Dominique Vaughan Williams, who is a great niece of Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Membership drive

Robin Barber, Secretary, reported that membership had grown to 400, with 80% of membership in the UK. Membership continued to grow, and he urged each member to find one new member over the next three months. This would take us to 800 members in 1996-97, almost on our target of 1,000 members. A new membership form had been designed to support this drive (enclosed in the Journal). The

Secretary added that the Society would need to be equipped to cope with this response, including more sophisticated computer facilities to track membership and provide high quality services to it.

Finance

Richard Mason, Treasurer, said "My end of term report would be: healthy, maintaining good growth, but in need of sustenance and further development." Two major donations in the last year had evened out the cash flow, enabling the Society to return to renewals on the anniversary of members joining - a much fairer system to everyone. Richard also provided details on receiving covenants from members.

A new Constitution

Finally, Stephen Connock introduced the Society's new Constitution. This had taken on board comments from members, and had simplified the previous arrangements. Following the introduction, members voted unanimously to accept the new Constitution.

The AGM concluded in fine style with a stimulating presentation by Professor Wilfrid Mellers on "Vaughan Williams, Britain and Europe". Professor Mellers had lost none of his wit and verve, and presented the music of Vaughan Williams in a European context with numerous real insights. The Society also launched Ursula Vaughan Williams' new book of *Collected Poetry*. Ursula has been thrilled by the book and many copies were signed by her especially for members attending the AGM.

A memorable AGM, and an exciting prelude to 1997 - Vaughan Williams' 125th anniversary year.

RVW REMEMBERED

In the first of a series of personal reminiscences of Vaughan Williams, the great baritone Roy Henderson talks to Stephen Connock.

SLC When did you first meet Ralph?

RH This must have been in 1925 when

it, he let you know it. He became an ordinary friend to you. He was 27 years older than me, but it didn't seem to matter. We had fun together. I remember once singing in Cambridge - it was during the war - and I was doing the *Five Mystical Songs* and a new work by Patrick Hadley was being performed called

out "I didn't notice that." That was the sort of man he was, so kindly.

SLC Some say he had a quick temper. Did you experience that?

RH I never saw it. If you knew his work well, and I used to sing it by heart, there was no problem. I learnt all his works off by heart, although sometimes I would have a score so as not to expose the other soloists. Once after *A Sea Symphony*, he wrote:

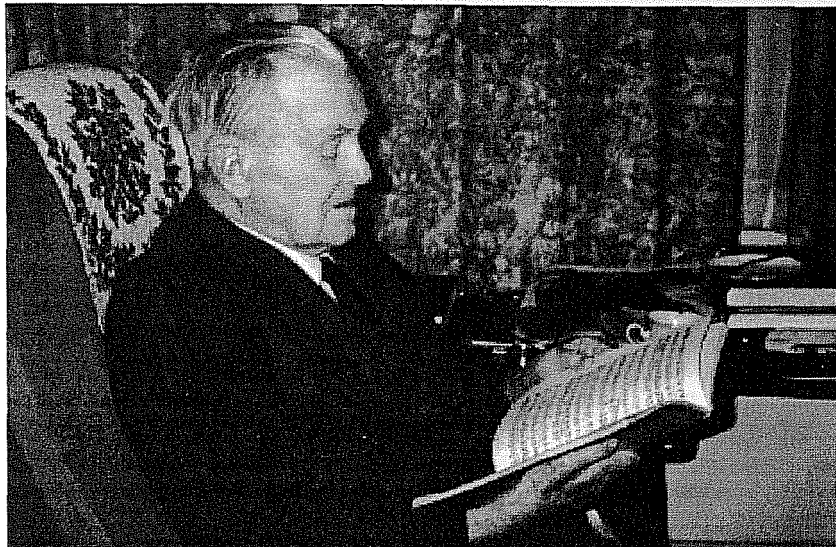
"Dear Roy

I have never heard you sing my tunes so magnificently. *O Soul thou pleaseth me* will remain in my memory forever."

He was so grateful if you did a good performance. The orchestra loved him. I have never heard a bad word about Vaughan Williams from anyone, ever.

SLC Was he a fine conductor?

RH In his own works he always knew what he wanted, and he got it. He wasn't in the same conducting class as Wood, Beecham or Harty. They were doing it all the time, and he wasn't. He was, fortunately, writing



Photograph of Roy Henderson by Stephen Connock

he was still conducting the Bach Choir. I was engaged to sing something there - I can't remember what - but it was at the Queen's Hall. I was listening to the choir and orchestra, with Vaughan Williams conducting, and after about a minute he stopped suddenly, threw his hands up in the air and with a great push of his hands upwards said "sopranos, disgusting noise!" That was the first thing I ever heard him say! I thought "I'd better watch myself too!" Yet when I got onto the platform, I found him a most delightful person. The more I got to know him, the more fond of him I became. He really was an artists' friend. He said, he depended on us; no-one hears his music unless we perform it, he would say, and he was most grateful for a good performance.

SLC What do you remember most about his character?

RH He was a most loveable man. Other people you might admire, or something like that, yet Vaughan Williams had a heart, and he showed

The trees they go so high. We walked across the fields to one of the colleges. Vaughan Williams had got hold of a bottle of whisky, which was quite difficult during the war. The old man and Patrick Hadley polished off the bottle - I didn't drink whisky! Afterwards, we had to go up a winding staircase to our rooms, with Patrick pulling him up and me pushing from behind! Anyway, we managed to get him up - he thoroughly enjoyed himself that night! He was that kind of man - I couldn't imagine doing this with Elgar! Elgar was rather aloof, but Vaughan Williams was a real friend to everybody. He was so kind to his artists.

There was another occasion when we were doing *Sancta Civitas* at the Three Choirs. The poor tenor was a student up from the RCM. One phrase from the singer at the end, and he started this a minor third too low! Vaughan Williams never said a word. He said, when it was pointed



Photograph of Roy Henderson by Stephen Connock

music. I remember going to see him at his house in Dorking one day, and I could hardly put my feet down on the floor without stepping on bits of music scattered all over the place. It wasn't a question of 'however did you write that?' as much as 'how did you find it?' This was before he married Ursula. She managed to tidy up his music and brush his hair!

SLC In the 1920s, the works were more austere. In the 1930s, there was more ferocity - e.g. the *Fourth Symphony*. How do you explain this development?

RH Well, Vaughan Williams often used to write bits of music, which he would leave and go onto something else. About five years later he would find it, and say 'I must finish this.' The war must have had an influence, take *Beat, beat drums of Dona Nobis Pacem*. I had the good fortune of not only singing in this, but also conducting it.

He was capable of writing such lyrical music for example, *My Pretty Bess* from *Five Tudor Portraits*. But it is hard to say his style had changed since he might have written this in 1905, and only finished it in the 1930s.

His symphonies changed: this is where the change is most noticeable.

SLC Forgive the question, but what do you regard as your favourite work?

RH The one I like best is *A Sea Symphony*. Behold the sea itself - what a tremendous start! I love the second movement - *On the beach at night alone*. Then that wonderful ending - a difficult one to sing with those F sharps. When I got to 45, it was really hard. Once I was completely out of breath, I could hardly say 'ships!' The core of the work is *Bathe me, O God in thee*: it has such flow.

SLC Come on to the works for which you gave the first performance. *Five Tudor Portraits* was one, 60 years ago. What were your first impressions when you first heard it?

RH Well, I learnt the notes and tried to understand what the words meant. It was singable, this was the great thing, and full of character. *My Pretty Bess* and *Like a rutter Hoyda* are very different! *My Pretty Bess* is so light. You can image Bess in Elizabethan costume, tripping along. For me, he composes just at the right tessitura for my voice. Astra Desmond was on her best form in this first performance. She looked

marvellous, the best dressed female singer in my time and sang it with such character and so artistically. It was the hit of the evening. It is a great work.

SLC How do you recollect Vaughan Williams now?

RH Sir Edward Elgar was "Sir Edward". Vaughan Williams was "Uncle Ralph". This is the difference. Sir Henry Wood would call everyone "Mr" so-and-so, whereas Ralph was always friendlier with a warm, warm heart. I remember him as a big man with a big heart. He was a great composer and a great man.

(Editor's note: *Myself and Robin Ivison are compiling a book on RVW Remembered which will include a full-length version of this interview.*)

REVIEW OF PUBLISHED MUSIC

Birthday Gifts:

Three short pieces for piano by Ralph Vaughan Williams London, Stainer & Bell

© Copyright 1994 Ursula
Vaughan Williams

Here is a group of hitherto unpublished piano pieces of only moderate difficulty which were composed in 1904, 1905 and 1943. Ursula Vaughan Williams' introductory note states that each piece was a birthday gift: the two earliest, for Adeline Vaughan Williams and the latest, for their friend, Genia Hornstein, whose identity is more fully disclosed in the above mentioned note. All three pieces are examples of tonal subtlety and each one offers interesting contrasts with the others.

The first piece, *A Birthday Gift* (1904) is listed in Michael Kennedy's *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams as Andante Sostenuto*, where he notes the inscription "'For your birthday' (Adeline Vaughan Williams)". This piece of thirty bars has a rich harmonic texture with frequent seventh-chords and three surprising, but convincing shifts from its tonic key of E-flat major. The piece ends, however, on a C major (sub-median) triad.

The second piece composed in 1943, *A Winter Piece For Genia* (Molto lento), is the most tonally complex of the three. The A-minor tonality is only suggested most of the time and is treated in the composer's personal manner by shifting to the mediant keys of C-minor and F-minor, and slipping a couple of times down a semitone to A-flat minor. The bass and treble registers of the piano are isolated at times in four-voice chords and the middle section contrasts with the economy of two-voice texture. The rhythm fluctuates between triple and duple patterns, sometimes appearing against each other. This sombre, but attractive miniature might remind one of the composer's chromaticism in his piano piece, *The Lake in the Mountains* (1947) or of his tonal ambiguity found at times in his *Symphony No. 5 in D Major*.

The third piece, *Pezzo Ostinato* (1905), is the most disciplined with respect to harmonic structure in which a motive of four notes occupying two inner voices in parallel sixths is repeated eighty-six and one-half times. An expansive treble melody and bass line surround this ostinato in all but the first measure. This piece's three sections are clearly defined by two distinct modes: mixolydian on d for the outer sections, and aeolian on b in the middle section, "coloured" at times by mild chromaticism. The ostinato's pitches are common to both modes. This piece concludes with the harmony initiated in bar two, but with augmented note values. The final sonority, a d-seventh chord in third inversion would seem very inconclusive from a conventional view point of G-major, but in its truly modal context, it actually sounds like the inevitable final chord it is.

The order of the three pieces provides a very natural continuity from the final chord of one, to the first chord of the following piece, realised when one plays them as a suite. They appear in an attractive cover with a photograph of Cheyne Walk where Vaughan Williams lived from 1905 until 1929. How fortunate it is that many pianists can now enjoy playing these colourful miniatures!

**John Barr
Bridgewater
Virginia, USA**



Concert Reviews

REIGATE SUMMER MUSIC '96 - the concerts

Reigate Summer Music (RSM) was launched as recently as 1994 - the brainchild of Leslie Olive, a former pupil at Reigate Grammar School, sometime professional music director at Reigate Parish Church (and BBC Radio 4's *Daily Service*), and founder of what has become the Reigate-based English Arts Chorale, under whose banner the festival is presented. Notwithstanding the enthusiastic and hard-working support of a host of volunteers, it is clear that the very ambitious programme staged in July could not have been achieved without financial backing from a number of locally-based commercial sponsors, the local Borough Council and the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. The range of events embraced by RSM '96 was very wide, stretching from talks to organised rambles and including a varied daytime programme of music-related activities for young people and children. At the heart of the festival, however, was a series of mid-day recitals and evening concerts, mainly held in the parish church of St Mary's - and, of course, the all-day RVW Symposium under the chairmanship of Lewis Foreman (see separate report). Picking up from the Symposium, the festival's 'theme' composer was Ralph Vaughan Williams, although the only *all*-RVW concert was on the evening of the Symposium itself.

The 70 or so young musicians (average age, 21) who made up the RSM International Youth Orchestra were drawn from many countries. For an all-too-brief 10 days, players from Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Russia and the Ukraine joined with others from different parts of the United Kingdom in some splendid music-making. Their first concert was on Saturday 20th July - a mere two days after they had come together for the very first time, although those were two days of intensive rehearsals during the course of which they had received some expert grooming from members of the London Mozart Players.

The following comments necessarily confine themselves to those evening concerts which I was able to attend and which included works by Vaughan Williams.

20th July - Parry, Anthem *I was Glad*; Beethoven, *Violin Concerto*; Vaughan Williams, *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*; Richard Strauss, *Four Last Songs*

Any initial anxieties one might have had that the short period that the forces assembled within the chancel of St Mary's

church had had to work together might lead to a lack of crispness in execution were soon dispelled by the confident and uplifting performance of Hubert Parry's rousing anthem, in which the orchestra, under the direction of Leslie Olive, was joined by the English Arts Chorale itself, augmented by other choral groups forming the RSM Festival Chorus. Similarly, when it came to the *Tallis Fantasia*, I quickly forgot my advance fears that the overseas players in the orchestra might not respond to the Vaughan Williams idiom and the peculiarly English mysticism of the piece. The opening chords brought a genuine shiver of anticipatory pleasure which was not to be disappointed. Nevertheless, putting aside all partisan prejudice, I felt that the evening properly belonged to Priya Mitchell, the steely young soloist in the Beethoven concerto, and to the soprano Elizabeth Lane, who gave a very moving account of the Strauss songs.

22nd July - All Vaughan Williams programme: *The Lark Ascending*; *The Piano Concerto*; and *A London Symphony*.

For this concert, the RSM orchestra was conducted by Grant Llewellyn, while Mark Wilson, its leader for other concerts, was the soloist in *The Lark*. The audience was warmly appreciative, but I suspect that the tension of the occasion had (quite understandably) got to the young player and the 'silver chain of sound' glinted a shade less brightly than it was wont to do.

Although there are three recordings of the single-piano version of the concerto now available, it is not yet a work with which possibly even most RVW *aficionados* are well acquainted - and one sensed that, for many in the audience, it still had the power to jolt notions of what Vaughan Williams *ought* to sound like. Soloist Andrew West made a powerful advocate, and he was given admirable backing. In the first movement, admittedly, the church acoustic and its architecture were something of a hindrance: for the audience, who were seated in the nave, clarification of the thick textures of the declamatory opening pages was certainly not helped by the fact that the orchestra was, necessarily, seated behind the chancel screen (albeit a reasonably open one) while the piano was, equally necessarily, placed in front of it - but that was a passing irritation, and one could only marvel again how music that is so very different from what one 'expects' from RVW could, at the same time, plainly be by nobody else.

But, for me, the high point of this concert - and indeed the high point of all the music I

heard at Reigate that week - was the freshest and most committed live performance of the *London Symphony* that I can remember. For many of the overseas players, of course, it may well have been 'new music', but - if so - they plainly relished the work's unique combination of delicate impressionism and brash rumbustiousness.

25th July - Bax, *Tintagel*; Elgar, *Cello Concerto*; Vaughan Williams, *Sinfonia Antartica*

The *Sinfonia Antartica* made a very fitting end to the day for those of us in the audience who had earlier heard John Huntley talk about RVW's film music and had seen the screening of *Scott of the Antarctic* (see separate report). I simply do not understand the critical urge to treat this work as 'pure music' which can somehow be wholly divorced from its cinematic origins. The very title is surely a denial that it should simply be regarded as 'Symphony No. 7'. - I was amused to note that the two percussion players took it in turns to operate the wind machine, and reflected yet again on how frequently this device - about which RVW himself evidently had some doubts - sounds too much like a machine and not sufficiently like the wind. (Maybe the anonymous player on the genuinely chilling Eminence RLPO/Vernon Handley recording could be persuaded to give master classes). It must be admitted that, at Reigate, there was also some insecurity somewhere in the brass section - which had earlier made itself felt in the atmospheric Bax concert overture. But I imagine that most of the audience had come primarily to hear Robert Cohen's heartfelt interpretation of the Elgar *Cello Concerto*, and they would surely have gone home well contented.

27th July - Open-air concert in Reigate Priory Park: Holst, *The Planets*; Vaughan Williams, *A Sea Symphony*

A somewhat damp evening meant that the audience for the final concert by the main RSM forces was, unhappily, thinner than might otherwise have been expected, and most of those who did turn up adjourned to the protection of the 'hospitality' tents (open on one side) on the perimeter of the concert area, where they heard the music transmitted through mid-field amplifiers. Listening under these far-from-ideal conditions, I would not presume to pass judgement on the Holst. (Other considerations apart, I doubt that the sound equipment paid the music any great favours). With the drizzle easing off however, I moved forward to a seat much nearer the performers' covered platform for RVW's *Sea Symphony*. With Amler Gunson (mezzo-soprano) and Steven Page (baritone) joining the RSM Festival Chorus and International Youth Orchestra, this was a thoroughly rounded and stimulating performance. So far as I was concerned, it made a very satisfying conclusion to the

week's events - although I do know that on the following evening there was a more celebratory finale, with fireworks, in the company of the New City Jazzmen, followed by the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra (but no Vaughan Williams).

Charles Long



Now best known as a film historian and archivist, John Huntley was at one time an assistant to Muir Mathieson - whose name will be familiar to most older filmgoers as musical director to a long succession of classic British movies from the late 1930s onwards. In an engrossing talk at the Reigate Summer Music '96 festival in July, Mr Huntley spoke about Ralph Vaughan Williams' induction to the world of film music in the early days of World War 2, and recalled his own encounters with the composer. This acted as a curtain-raiser to a showing of *Scott of the Antarctic* - for which, of course, RVW wrote the music that was later to be developed into the *Sinfonia Antartica*.

Originally employed by Sir Arthur Korda at Denham Studios, and later part of the wartime Crown Film Unit team, Mathieson was determined that British films should exploit the talents of Britain's leading composers. Nevertheless, that RVW should have expressed his willingness to enter this field as his contribution to the war effort was a brave move, said Mr Huntley. Until comparatively recently, most critics looked down their noses at the writers of film music and, over the years, the reputations of such talented figures as Arthur Benjamin, Benjamin Frankel and William Alwyn have undoubtedly suffered in consequence (although, on the other side of the coin, the standing of a handful of composers with a well-established track record in the concert hall, notably Arthur Bliss and William Walton, was not damaged by their excursions into the cinema).

When Mathieson went to call on Vaughan Williams at Dorking one Friday in 1940, he found the composer already 'doing his bit', having just returned home with a handcart filled with scrap metal he had collected locally for the munitions drive. (While this was a popular morale booster at the time, it is unlikely that any old saucepans actually went into the production of a single

Spitfire). On the strength of this visit, RVW was commissioned to produce music for the propaganda drama *49th Parallel* 'by next Wednesday.'¹ For the most part this was scene-setting mood music, RVW insisting that he was too long in the tooth to start learning how to write 'Mickey Mouse stuff' - by which he meant music timed to the last split second to match specific actions in the screenplay (a supreme example being Walton's yet-to-be-written Agincourt battle music, for Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* - pacing the steady *accelerando* of 'the hoofbeats of each horse' in the charge of the French knights, interspersed with the whiplash volleys of arrows from the English archers).

Mr Huntley commented that the most striking thing about RVW, when he came to visit the film studio, was his humility. While a number of contemporary 'art' musicians scarcely made any secret of their underlying disdain for what they saw as the basically rather tawdry world of the cinema, England's greatest living composer treated the film people (right down to the clapper-boy) with respect as professionals doing a professional job in a world with which he was totally unfamiliar - and he *wanted* to learn as much as he could about it in order to do *his* job more effectively. He was 'a lovely man', said Mr Huntley.

A clip from the opening of *49th Parallel* revealed that 'Music by Dr. R. Vaughan Williams' was given equal pre-title billing with the stars of the film, who included Laurence Olivier, Eric Portman, Raymond Massey and Anton Walbrook. By comparison with the *Prelude* recently recorded by Marco Polo, the music on the soundtrack was extended to incorporate a section accompanying the opening action sequences depicting a German U-boat sinking a tanker and surfacing near the coast of Newfoundland. RVW had been requested to splice this on to his title music at a fairly late stage in the cutting of the film, but it was to prove prophetic, since there was to be another U-boat sequence in his second film, *Coastal Command*, which was a (scripted) documentary, featuring genuine Royal Air Force and Royal Navy personnel. Sadly, the Sunderland flying-boat 'T for Tommy', with most of the aircrew featured in the film, perished later in the war.

In showing sequences from this film, Mr Huntley drew particular attention to the 'battle' scenes - in which, first, a Catalina flying-boat, which relieves 'T for Tommy' on convoy patrol duty, sinks the marauding U-boat with depth charges and, later, British Beaufighters shoot down a Junkers Ju 88

¹ Michael Kennedy's version is slightly different. He says that Mathieson phoned RVW on a Saturday evening.

aircraft,² one of a flight that has jumped the Sunderland on its way home. He suggested that, unusually for such music at such a time, Vaughan Williams' accompanying score at these points was far more valedictory than triumphalist in tone, acting as a counter to the rather gung-ho comments of the spectator flying-boat crews. Could it be that RVW was quietly saluting the unsought suffering and courage of *all* men who die in battle - no matter what their nation or creed?

Suffering and courage were certainly central to the story of Captain Scott's ill-fated expedition to the South Pole in 1911-12, a subject which strongly appealed to Vaughan Williams. Even before he had seen any rushes of *Scott of the Antarctic* - he produced an extended icy scene-setting piece, complete with a woman's wordless chorus, for use as the title music. This was in fact too long for what the film-makers had originally had in mind, but they were so taken with it that, most unusually, they decided to assemble a number of landscape scenes that had been left on the cutting room floor into a sequence long enough to front the music. Mr Huntley told his audience that, seen on their own *without* music, these images indeed appear overlong and very boring.

Nevertheless, watching the film again, one was struck by how *little* music there is overall, although all the main themes were subsequently picked up and expanded in the *Sinfonia Antartica*. Mr Huntley pointed out that, while RVW had no more than a few weeks to produce his score for the film, it was to be three years before he sublimated his ideas into a form that he considered to be worthy of the concert hall.

Charles Long

An Oxford Elegy in Bournemouth

An Oxford Elegy is one of Vaughan Williams' least-known compositions. The unusual combination of narrator, chorus and orchestra will always make it difficult to programme, an 'occasional' piece which will require an imaginative approach to bring it before the public in a live performance.

(continued overleaf)

² I had always assumed that genuine combat footage had been cut into the film at this point, but Mr Huntley told me that a captured Ju 88, restored to its *Luftwaffe* markings, had been used for the main sequences. Close scrutiny of the film reveals that at least one of the other 'Ju 88s' is, in fact, a Bristol Blenheim - underlining a common real-life misidentification that led to a number of tragic 'friendly fire' incidents at the beginning of World War 2.

(continued from previous page)

ance. And that is precisely what the Bournemouth Festival achieved in May, when a first half containing Walton's *Façade* with Timothy West and his wife Prunella Scales, enabled the *Elegy* to be featured after the interval. The concert also paired two other fine works which are awkward to programme: Constant Lambert's *The Rio Grande* and Beethoven's *Choral Fantasia*.

Vaughan Williams had an enduring love of English literature and poetry, and along with John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the poems of Matthew Arnold held a lifelong fascination for him, a fascination which brought forth a creative response in *An Oxford Elegy*, which was written during the winter of 1947-48. There was initially a private performance, but the public premiere took place later, in Oxford in June 1952.

Some fifty years before, in 1901 to be precise, Vaughan Williams had spoken of his ambition to turn Arnold's *The Scholar Gypsy* into an opera. Now he opted for an approach in which a narrator is employed alongside an ensemble of small orchestra with chorus, who sing verses as well as frequently providing a wordless, beautifully evocative addition to the texture. The work therefore has a rare and lyrical beauty, as well as generating a certain nostalgia which is unusual in the composer's output. Perhaps the process of writing music to these long-known words brought with it the remembrance of youth and of long-lost friends, George Butterworth and Gustav Holst.

Timothy West clearly held the work in special affection, and his rendition of the text was superbly timed. Along with the excellent balance between chorus and orchestra, this was the strongest feature of the performance. There was no doubt which was the weakest. The decision to amplify the voice through the public address system was ill considered; it had wrecked *Façade* before the interval, when Prunella Scales was practically inaudible, and in *An Oxford Elegy* it robbed West's diction of focus and clarity, even though his words could clearly be heard. An impersonal quality rather than the intended involvement was the result, and what should have been a special occasion now lingers rather frustratingly in the memory as a missed opportunity.

Terry Barfoot
Portsmouth

Symposium on RVW and the background to *Sinfonia Antartica*

At an afternoon symposium on 22nd March, sponsored by the BBC at the Royal Festival Hall, (before the evening performance of *Sinfonia Antartica*), Professor Wilfrid

Mellers discussed RVW's symphonies before a large well-informed audience.

In his introduction, Professor Mellers contrasted RVW's family background - on his mother's side Darwin/Wedgwood, the humanely scientific - on his father's, the Celtic strain leading to the law and the church. He quoted Sir Stuart Wilson on VW as a Christian agnostic, dwelt at some length, with illustrations, on the doubleness of false relation as the most crucial feature of VW's musical language and the impact of Walt Whitman on his development.

Professor Mellers developed and illustrated his thesis with passages from *Tallis* and various symphonies, both at the piano and with CDs before turning to a more detailed consideration of the *Antartica*.

He played Maurya's wonderful *Arioso from Riders to the Sea* - *They are all gone now* - before playing the last movement of the *Sixth Symphony* in order to demonstrate how VW's mind had continued to dwell on the theme and to develop it further in the slow movement of the *Antartica*.

It was a fascinating lecture much appreciated by the audience as was evidenced by the lively discussion which followed. In answer to my question as to the place of VW as a 20th century symphonist, Professor Mellers' considered view was "right up there with Shostakovich."

Of course a brief review cannot hope to encapsulate the width and depth of Professor Mellers' discussion but it served to return me to his thought-provoking book, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, which I again found unputdownable.

The evening performance by the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Andrew Davis was a very fine one.

Robin Ivison
London

The Thames Singers - Dulwich Picture Gallery 2nd May 1996

Not everyone may be aware that RVW taught for a few months in 1903-04 at James Allen's Girls' School at Dulwich where he was succeeded by his great friend Gustav Holst, there starting Holst on a long and distinguished teaching career. It was a splendid idea therefore to celebrate 'Dulwich - The Musical Connection' by a concert given by The Thames Singers in the lovely Dulwich Picture Gallery before a large and enthusiastic audience. Part songs arranged from Warlock and by Holst and Gordon Jacob were interlaced by the centrepiece, VW's superb *Three Shakespeare Songs* of 1951, while the second half was devoted to musical settings by Kern and Andrew Lloyd Webber of Old

Alleynian PG Wodehouse's ingenious verses. A most enjoyable evening.

Robin Ivison
London

VW in Brentwood

The Aurelian Ensemble and Brentwood Cathedral Choir and Singers conducted by Andrew Wright performed an all-Vaughan Williams concert on Saturday, 15th June 1996 in Brentwood Cathedral.

VW, of course, first visited Brentwood in 1903. The concert included *In the Fen Country*, *Five Mystical Songs*, *Serenade to Music* and the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*.

Most successful was the *Five Mystical Songs* with Jeremy Huw Williams, a most expressive and moving baritone soloist. It was wonderful to hear *In the Fen Country* which was performed with a gentle wistfulness. The *Tallis Fantasia* should not have been included, however, since the orchestra showed signs of lack of rehearsal. Ensemble playing was poor and the intonation of the first violin shaky throughout.

The evening ended, appropriately enough with *Bushes and Briars*. Vaughan Williams had discovered this folk-song in nearby Ingrave in 1903. It was a moving end to an inspired concert.

Stephen Connock

Two Reviews of the *Fifth* and *Ninth*

Review number 1

RVW Invitation Concert at Bournemouth Wednesday 11th September 1996

As part of their recording of the RVW Symphonies for the NAXOS bargain label, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, under Kees Bakels gave two Invitation Concerts in the Winter Gardens in September. On the 5th September, they played the *Seventh* and *Eighth*. I was fortunate to be able to attend the concert on the 11th, when they played the *Fifth* and the *Ninth*.

My previous experiences of the *Fifth* 'live' were Previn in Edinburgh and Hickox in Bournemouth. In comparison with these, Bakel's version stood up quite well: nothing was rushed, the balances were good, and his pacing and dynamics were informed by a purposeful feeling for climax. The elements of unease which contrast the serenity of the first and third movements were rather played down - but then they usually are. The cello solo in the Romanza

(continued on page 11)

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

by Paul Sarcich

Being a 2nd trombonist in an outer suburban New Zealand high school in the 1960s was not the most catholic of music educations - our staple diet as I remember was "Hawkes School Series" charts - I have dim memories of endless "worthy but dull" pieces by the likes of Charles Woodhouse and Frederick Cowan, and our end-of-year productions were *always* G+S. However, I clearly remember the music mistress putting up something called *Folk Song Suite* one day. To someone whose musical experience and listening had to that date consisted largely of jazz and dance band styles, this music sounded very strange, there seemed to be wrong notes in it (only later did I learn about modes, flattened sevenths and the like!). RVW, until the end of high school, remained someone whose name appeared in the hymn book.

I was however developing an interest in orchestration and arranging, and about the age of 18 something induced me to explore "classical" music. I bought an LP of Holst's *Planets*, which was the proverbial bombshell - I had never heard sounds like them, and pored over a score to find out how he got them. Naturally, I hastened to explore other music by this composer and read up on his life, which one could not of course do without encountering RVW in a major way.

About the same time, Ken Russell's film on Delius was shown on TV, and as one discovery followed another I was irresistibly drawn into the world of early 20th Century English music. To my mind, it became clear that RVW and Holst stood as twin peaks of the renaissance of English music in this period, and it was RVW who, by virtue of a long life as well as prodigious genius, was the man to carry the beacon into the second half of the century.

I gradually collected all the major works and many of the minor ones, read up on RVW's life and works, and rapidly came to the conclusion that this was a composer not given the credit he deserves (an opinion I still hold as firmly 30 years later!). RVW's own comments about coming across music you felt you have always known but in fact haven't ("Like meeting an old friend"), have applied to me so often during my discovery of his works. I would love to rattle on about my personal favourites, but will confine myself to nominating *Job*, the *Pastoral*, the *Antartica*, the *Fifth*, the *Tallis Fantasia*, *Lark Ascending* and *On Wenlock Edge* as reasons to continue living.

Regretfully, live performances are few and far between at present in this part of the world. RVW is one of those composers not currently in fashion, so how wonderful it was to be in England for the RVW cycle at the Barbican, and how infuriating to not be able to be at the RVW Symposium day at Reigate!

Incidentally, I for one would be very interested if the RVW Society was able to run any articles dealing with the extraordinary relationship between Holst and RVW. Their influence on each other was obviously deep and lasting (I wonder how many other listeners hear as much Holst as I do in the *Sixth Symphony*, for example. I can't help thinking that the real "meaning" of this symphony was that it was RVW's ultimate valediction to his friend).

The joy at being able to visit the Holst Birthplace Museum in Cheltenham during my recent residence in England was only tempered by the sadness that there is no equivalent for RVW, so it was heartening to read the proposals outlined in Journal No. 6 for the Old Vicarage at Down Ampney. Happily though, during a previous period of residence in England some 15 years ago, I lived in Leatherhead, and thus was able to imbibe some of the atmosphere of RVW-associated places such as Leith Hill, Dorking and Charterhouse. A highlight of that period was playing in the orchestra for a Leith Hill Festival under William Llewellyn - *Dona Nobis Pacem* was the "big" piece as I remember.

A number of your contributors to this column have made much of RVW's mysticism as part of his appeal to them. This cannot be denied of course, but for me this is always contrasted and counter-balanced by the "peasant" side of his nature (and I use the word "peasant" in the most laudatory sense: one who is in harmony with and deeply appreciative of the environment from which he has sprung). I have always sensed in RVW's music that the composer simultaneously has his head in the clouds and his feet embedded in the mud of his native land. Few other composers give such a sense - Janacek, Sibelius and Mussorgsky spring most readily to mind - all of them manifest the idea that great statements of the universal have their well-springs in the local.

Naturally, my great love of RVW's music carries into my teaching, and I freely confess I'm always trying to "put in a word" for him by playing his music to a generation of students who have not been much exposed to it. Earlier this year during a conducting workshop, I played a tape of excerpts of the music of various composers to the students, in the dark - they were to listen to the music the first time round, then while relistening, were to begin moving their bodies as the emotional content of the music demanded.

The tape finished with Elihu's *Dance of Youth and Beauty* from *Job*, a transcendental RVW violin solo. One of the students confessed later that she couldn't finish the exercise, she was too close to tears! A major RVW revival is perhaps not so far off after all!

*Paul Sarcich, Lecturer in Music Craft
School of Music, Victorian College of the
Arts, Melbourne, Australia*

MASTERMIND

Test your VW Knowledge!

In a recent Mastermind episode, Stephen Pearson, Librarian, answered questions on the life and music of Ralph Vaughan Williams. He scored a remarkable 18 points. Here is your chance to test your VW knowledge. Answers are on page 23.

1. What name did VW give his Dorking home where he lived from 1929?
2. Which opera did VW write because he wanted to set a prize fight to music?
3. What was the name of VW's first composition - a piano piece written at the age of six?
4. What was VW's principle subject of study when he went to Cambridge University in 1892?
5. With whom did VW begin a friendship after hearing the other man read from Sheridan's *The Critic*?
6. With whom did VW have composition lessons from 1897 in Berlin?
7. What was the name of the music magazine in which VW's *Linden Lea* was published in 1902?
8. In which village did VW first hear the song *Bushes and Briars* which encouraged him to begin to collect folksongs from 1903?
9. Who was the tenor in the first performance of *On Wenlock Edge* in 1909?
10. In the incidental music to which play did VW require one of the orchestral players to shake a bag of Wedgwood china?
11. Which composer first suggested to Vaughan Williams that he should write a symphony?
12. Which work of Vaughan Williams was first performed at Oxford during the General Strike of 1926?
13. Which Victorian politician's words were quoted in the text of *Dona Nobis Pacem*?
14. In the opera *Riders to the Sea*, where was Barclay going when he was drowned?
15. In 1940, Vaughan Williams withdrew from a BBC commission in protest after which composer's work was banned on political grounds?
16. Which was the first film for which Vaughan Williams composed the music?
17. Which novel formed the inspiration behind Vaughan Williams' *Ninth Symphony*?
18. Who was the subject of the work left unfinished at the time of Vaughan Williams' death in 1958?
19. Which Austrian composer did Vaughan Williams describe as 'a tolerable imitation of a composer'?
20. Which work by Vaughan Williams had its first performance on television in 1953?

Trying to 'Get In' to Vaughan Williams

by Mark Asquith

For those brought up in the age of rock music, you were what your albums were. At fifteen, prestige rested on the records held under your arm in the old style Virgin Records bag. In those days, the album charts and the top 40 were entirely discontinuous and the more commercial the LP, for example the Osmonds and David Cassidy, the greater the ridicule for the bearer.

However, Classical LP's, like the batting of Jack Hobbs, were quite outside criticism. This was a sinister world that no one really understood. The names were familiar, Britten and Beethoven, Stravinsky and Bach, but the music may just as easily have been played on a Combine Harvester for all we knew about it. Some were foolish enough to 'claim' a knowledge that lifted them to the condition of an intellectual superman. But in reality, the only real similarity between these boffins and Clark Kent was that they mingled in the realm of fiction.

However, a friend of mine called Harwood spent his pocket money at, of all places the local supermarket, on several RCA Camden Classics at 79p a throw. To outwit him I bought four records from the charity shop for £1 and I have them still.

Two of them were difficult. They were Britten's *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid*, a 45rpm (ARC13) and the Argo recording of Britten's *String Quartet* with its beautiful last movement, and the oblivion bound one by P. R. Fricker (ZRG 5375). The other two

were more successful. One was Thurston Dart's *Masters of Early English Keyboard Music IV* which was played to extinction and the other was the WRC pressing of the *Ninth Symphony* by RVW under Boult (T144).

I struggled with this disc like an opening batsman who can't get a run off any bowling but is kept in the eleven out of spite. Looking back, I suppose one gets into a state of consciousness about things. Althusser might have called it 'false consciousness' and Dickens 'affectation'. Other friends at school battled for kudos with copies of 'Crime and Punishment' and 'The Magus' which they read at the rate of a page a week, and often the same page on succeeding weeks. My particular 'Kampf' was with VW's *Ninth* and I was not won over for some time. In fact, I bought the old Decca 'World of...' tape and got to grips with *The Lark Ascending* first although my version appeared to have been recorded by the ASMIF during a stop-off at the local chip shop. The favourite track, the entry point if you like, proved to be *Linden Lea*.

I think the realisation that I actually liked the music took me back to the *Ninth* with greater confidence and I think my simultaneous interest in jazz caused me to take hold of the flugelhorn solo at the start of the second movement and what I always considered to be an 'oriental' section representing the end of empire (I was probably trying to read the 'Movement' poets at that time), followed by the realisation of a new world thereafter.

With great good fortune I found the Boult record of the *Tallis Fantasia*, *Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1*, *Greensleeves* and *Folksong Suite* on Nixa (NLP 905) with its informative note by Burnett James and evocative cover. I still find that this *Tallis* has a strength, as well as appreciation, of nature and mysticism lacking in many other recordings.

Curiously, in the next ten years I bought only two other recordings. The Barenboim collection on DG I accidentally scratched and then knelt on within a week of purchase (at full-price), so that the *Oboe Concerto* remained 'elusive' until I got hold of the London CD when it first emerged in the late eighties. The other was a tatty LP copy of the *First Quartet* on Summit coupled with the Elgar which I still have somewhere, if not to hand, whilst writing this article!

From the advent of CD I went into RVW overload and probably have too many discs to admit to. Whilst members of the Society will have their own favourites I would like to make a case for the *Phantasy Quintet* which seems to encapsulate VW's art in miniature.

As for the *Ninth*, well, I have a preference for Previn nowadays though I would take Boult in the *London* (Belart), the *Sixth* (EMI Great Recordings) and in his collection on EMI (CDM7 64022-2).

Mark Asquith
Liverpool

Nice Symphony, shame about the lino!

A personal view of some recordings of VW's *Seventh*
by Rob Furneaux

There's no doubt that the *Seventh Symphony* of Vaughan Williams is one of his greatest. Compared with earlier, more conventionally scored symphonies however; it presents a considerable challenge to the record producer. The use of such diverse instruments as organ, piano and wind machine seem in some cases to turn the exercise of recording into a nightmare.

Take three recordings for example: Bernard Haitink's (EMI) Bryden Thomson's (Chandos) and André Previn's (RCA).

I was enthralled by Haitink's thrilling and much acclaimed recording of the symphony, but for me there was a very large flaw - the wind machine. Now, I know that it's a mechanical device meant to produce a ghostly wailing sound; but to me, Haitink's

wind machine sounds far too much like a brush being frantically rubbed on a bit of old lino and no matter how much I try to disregard the notion, it won't go away. Perhaps the wind machine was an ageing model well due for an M.O.T. or perhaps it had been modified for use in a 1950s style science fiction film; but whatever the cause I cannot find it convincing. Am I the only one to call for the use of real wind (non-human) in such recordings? After all, such a technique works well in Respighi's *Pines of Rome*, where recorded bird song is used - no use of breath operated duck calls there.

With slight exasperation I turned to the Bryden Thomson version. This was more like it I thought: convincing wind machine, excellent recording, superb playing. But oh no, what happened to the organ? The

mighty explosion of sound in the third movement was little more than a whimper and almost entirely drowned out by the accompanying trombones. The sight of a mighty cathedral organ regally bellowing a clarion call was replaced in my thoughts by an octogenarian Sunday School teacher trying to keep up on an ageing harmonium.

In increasing desperation I turned to André Previn's re-issued version of the Symphony. I settled down to listen, but almost fell out of my chair when I was confronted not by the austere notes of the opening passage but by a voice saying:

"To suffer woes which hope thinks infinite,
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night..."

Well, I for one wasn't too willing to forgive the wrongs. I was considerably peeved that each movement was interrupted by spoken prefaces. To me, it seemed rather like watching a film and having to endure

adverts for Walls' Cornetto every fifteen minutes.

Eventually, I gave up in despair and turned instead to the 'Jack May', version of *An Oxford Elegy* in the knowledge that

recording disasters don't come much worse than this!

*Rob Furneaux
Devon*

NEW FINANCIAL SERVICE TO AMERICAN MEMBERS

The Treasurer writes:

It has been a great pleasure to see the increasing number of new members joining the Society who are based in the United States of America. It is very encouraging indeed to see such interest in the music of Vaughan Williams, but not only in the USA, also in Australia and Europe too, though we have yet to see new members in Japan, where I am sure there is a thriving interest in English music.

The Trustees are conscious however that there are at least two disadvantages to membership overseas. Number one must be the inevitably slow postal service and consequent late delivery of the Journal. Postal costs are also higher than we would like to see. The membership fee of £12.50 or \$25.00 was set initially to make the burden of overseas postage bearable for the Society in keeping overheads down. The second major disadvantage of overseas membership and related to this issue of costs - is the hassle of paying subscription fees in sterling or dollars: there is usually either a charge to the member (to pay in sterling) or to the Society (if we receive a dollar cheque). Typically, we are finding that we are losing about £3.00 per member on overseas fees in bank charges.

This seems to leave the Trustees with two options: increase the charge for overseas members to take account of these bank fees, or to insist on payment in sterling only.

I hope that you will be pleased to hear that I have found another solution!

Simple as it sounds:- I have opened a USA checking account into which new and continuing USA members can pay their subscription fees directly. The idea is that when a new member signs up, their fee is paid into this account, (which for complicated reasons, has had to be opened in my own name): I will then pay the fee in sterling, thus avoiding bank charges at this end, exchange rate variations, and also the hassle of otherwise arranging for a UK sterling cheque.

The details of this operation:

New members and any existing USA member wishing to take advantage of this service should pay their fee to:

Mark Twain Bank
1630 S. Lindbergh
St. Louis, MO 63131
Account number: 3612047124
Routing number: 081003408
Account name: Richard Mason

Please send me a copy of your cheque at the same time; on receipt, I will pay your subscription (plus any donation) into The RVW Society UK account. Members with e-mail access can also contact me directly at: MASONR@OUP.CO.UK

Other financial services available:

Members may not realise that we are able to accept standing order payment of subscriptions into our account. Ask for a form at your branch; payment should be made to **Barclays Bank, Oxford City Centre Branch, P. O. Box 333, Oxford OX1 3HS**. The sort code is **20-65-18**, account in the name **The RVW Society**, account number **50413259**. Please send a copy of your payment order to me, so that I can match up income with members!

We are also able to accept Charitable Aid Fund cheques in payment of fees. Just write out your charitable gift to The RVW Society and post to me, I will complete the paperwork.

Covenants are also acceptable, as a registered charity we are able to recover the tax that would otherwise be lost on your payment, thus increasing the value of your payment at no extra cost to yourself. If you would like more details, please write to me.

Some pension funds also offer to make a small donation to a nominated charity upon investing in their funds. One member recently kindly nominated The RVW Society - very much appreciated!

*Richard Mason
Oxford*

Vaughan Williams and the Value of Nostalgia

by James Koehne

Vaughan Williams takes us back in time. Listening to his music is a profoundly nostalgic experience: it evokes memories of a world that is pre-modern, a bygone era. We think of Vaughan Williams' music as a celebration of the past - the *English* past - and regard it, at best, with nostalgic fondness. For Australians in particular, his music evokes an old England that now seems positively exotic in its foreignness and distance from contemporary Australia.

But if that were the only value of Vaughan Williams and his music, he would be little more than a footnote to music history and an obscure interest indulged only in private listening sessions late at night. There is, in fact, much more to him than that: Vaughan Williams is rightfully ranked among the great composers of the century, a prolific and masterful creator of music which speaks passionately about things that are still of great importance - even to Australians. Vaughan Williams' significance has been obscured from us over the last couple of decades, but the attitudes which have prevailed over his reputation should no longer be allowed to conceal this great composer from our admiration and respect.

Although he was active as a composer through more than half the twentieth century, Vaughan Williams is subject to that curious time-displacement which despatches composers like Sibelius, Rachmaninov and other so-called "anachronisms" of our century to some nineteenth-century netherworld. This massive displacement of "traditionalist" composers occurred in the tumultuous decades of the 1950s and 1960s, when intellectual fashion turned innovation into the all-consuming goal of art. To attach oneself to tradition, as Vaughan Williams did, was deemed an act of creative suicide.

These times of fervent revolution brought a radical reshaping to our artistic and intellectual life. In nearly every aspect, the changes which this revolution brought into being have, piece by piece, dismantled the philosophical and æsthetic base upon which Vaughan Williams constructed the monument of his music. His triumphant humanism, his reflection of English cultural traditions, his spirituality, his continuing evocation of pastoralism - all have suffered an enormous loss of credibility.

The Englishness of Vaughan Williams' music seems to have more relevance to the Australia of Menzies than to that of Keating. At least intellectually, the idealised evocation of a green and pleasant England could easily be taken as an affront to our Australian identity or to republican sentiments. We're disposed to show some resistance towards a composer who is as

closely identified with things English as Ralph Vaughan Williams.

It wasn't always so, of course. For decades, Australian composers (at least, those of British descent) contentedly indulged their nostalgia for the "English Eden", the homeland from which they found themselves, as if cruelly, isolated. Such at least is the interpretation usually given for the substantial influence of the English pastoral style in Australian music up to the 1950s, an influence which Roger Covell in his 1967 history of Australian music described as "the overworked vein of sub-Vaughan Williams English pastoralism".

Covell noticed it nearly everywhere in our music. He referred to the influence of Vaughan Williams in the work of a substantial portion of Australia's composers during the middle of the century, including Arthur Benjamin, Clive Douglas, Dorian Le Gallienne, Malcolm Williamson and Nigel Butterley. He should also have mentioned James Penberthy and Margaret Sutherland and Peggy Glanville-Hicks, who studied with Vaughan Williams when she got her scholarship to the Royal College of Music (a seemingly essential stepping-stone for Australian composers from the 1940s through the 1960s).

Greatest Influence

On this basis alone, Vaughan Williams should really be rated among the composers of greatest influence on Australian music this century. But were these artists merely indulging their own "nostalgic fondness" or were they, in fact, responding to a profound human and musical message? The richness of the vein of musical pastoralism is suggested in works like Peggy Glanville-Hicks' *Sinfonia da Pacifica*, which genuinely transplants pastoralism's philosophical spirit to our corner of the world.

Covell himself, while seeming to resent Vaughan Williams' influence, did not fail to accord him respect. But he did emphasise a split in Vaughan Williams' musical personality, a separation between Vaughan Williams' pastoral "niceness" (of which *The Lark Ascending* is an example) and his more "important" seriousness (exemplified by the *Fourth Symphony*). Vaughan Williams was indeed a *real* composer, he seems to be saying, but we needn't pay too much attention to the inconsequential, pastoral side of his music: that, after all, is just Englishness and pleasantness, surely two of the least desirable characteristics that could be expected of modern music.

Several varieties of guilt have become attached to the evocative splendours of Vaughan Williams' music. Even if we simply allow ourselves to feel its rapture,

the associations of pastoralism and nostalgia which it evokes - or provokes - make us suspect that this is not something we can embrace. We could be excused for feeling that we should reject Vaughan Williams' music, on the grounds of its being either too English or simply bucolic. But such a choice reflects a perfunctory interpretation of Vaughan Williams' art and ideas. Whether it be from the disapproval that stems from our nationalist reasons or from our notions of what is properly "modern" and "serious", Vaughan Williams deserves rescuing from the superficial perceptions that are applied to his work.

Wilfrid Mellers, in his revisionist study *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion* (1989), draws our attention to the wide-ranging philosophical connections and content of the composer's work. Even in such evocatively pastoral pieces as *The Lark Ascending* or the *Fifth Symphony*, Mellers points to the quality of "doubleness" in RVW's music. In all of his compositions, irreconcilables tangle, their co-existence and their combat majestically and artfully transformed into music. Vaughan Williams was at once a traditionalist and a progressive; an agnostic and a believer; a socialist and a patriot; a city-dweller and a lover of nature. His sense of the co-existence of oppositions - like those of innocence and experience, or society and solitude - finds its way into the very fabric of his work, not necessarily to achieve a convenient resolution.

It is to these tensions that Vaughan Williams' music owes its particular magnificence; unless we acknowledge the two-sidedness which is ever-present in his compositions, we cannot properly appreciate them. The *separation* which Covell identified between the serious and the pastoral in Vaughan Williams is revealed by Mellers as an *interaction*. The two sides cannot be considered separately: the pastoral is given its "edge of reality" by the presence of gloom or violence, just as the expression of these negative emotions would be worthless, in Vaughan Williams' view, without the countervailing or aspirational vision of purity and beauty. Indeed, Mellers points out that it is the pastoral element in RVW's work that represents his highest achievement: the transcendence of negativity and despair.

While Vaughan Williams is often considered as a mere English "nationalist", a celebrant of his island's natural, cultural and historical glories, Mellers emphasises the philosophical substance in his discoveries of English art and culture, whether it be Bunyan, Tallis, Blake, Spenser, folk song or even cows looking over the gate. We must acknowledge the individuality and thoughtfulness of Vaughan Williams' creativity in order to appreciate him as more than a celebrant of Englishness.

Recognising the "doubleness" in Vaughan Williams allows us to find a meaningful interpretation of the composer's

pastoralism: it is "no vegetative quietude," (says Mellers) "but a state of mind attained through a passionate pilgrimage." The pilgrim-journeyer theme is constant throughout Vaughan Williams, notably in his various treatments of themes drawn from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and it receives a spectacular launching in *A Sea Symphony*. The sense of journey gives Vaughan Williams' work its constant sense of fresh discovery, lifting it above the false accusations of a cosy nostalgia.

Pastoralism and nostalgia are two notions we connect naturally. Both offend against our contemporary faith in the inexorable march of progress, our unquestioning praise of, or at the least our refusal to resist, innovation, no matter how empty or worthless it is. We harbour deep suspicions against pastoralism and its concomitant nostalgic air. After all, they don't have a *serious* purpose. They are diversions from the real and important issues. They comfort us, rather than confront us.

This connection of pastoral and nostalgia is explored by Christopher Lasch in his history of the idea of progress in Western civilisation (*The True and Only Heaven*, 1991). Lasch demonstrates the historical ascendancy of the idea of progress in modern attitudes to the point where it has become a central and ubiquitous cliché, invoked so often that it seems capable of wiping away any resistance or objection at a single stroke. You can get away with anything in the name of "progress". The questions Lasch raises make us think twice about the ways in which this notion is used: the assumption that progress is objectively "good", or that resistance to its spuriously benign force is useless.

Lasch, however, also sees a danger in the nostalgic reverie: "Nostalgia evokes the past to bury it alive," he says. "It shares with the belief in progress, to which it is only superficially opposed, an eagerness to proclaim the death of the past and to deny history's hold over the present."

Despite such reservations, it remains true that pastoralism and nostalgia can be positive forces in our lives. They share an ability to criticise the assumption that we are moving along a path which is inevitably good, or that contemporary values are necessarily better than those upheld by our ancestors. The runaway acceptance of the need for change needs to be reined in sometimes, so that we think about the actual substance of our values instead of believing in platitudes. Very much in the spirit of the *positively orientated* nostalgic force which Lasch points to, Vaughan Williams' music can be viewed as an effort to remind us not to be too obedient in following the spirit of our own times: we must remember to give ourselves a proper sense of perspective. From this point of view, nostalgia becomes far from cosy, urging us to reconsider the rightness of our beliefs and the error of our ways.

While our society has been, for most of the later part of this century, reducing its vision to the immediate and the obvious, Vaughan Williams always kept his eye, you might say, on the big picture. The importance of this capacity to encompass the grand, long-range scale is nowhere more evident than in the pastoralism of Vaughan Williams' music. With our new ecological awareness, his celebration of natural beauty becomes important again. It awakens us to the need to define and express our values, the need to conserve and to choose wisely.

Vaughan Williams' pastoralism can be embraced without guilt, for, as Mellers points out, he "did not advocate escape; he rather showed how, in a world changing with bewildering rapidity, hope may reanimate tradition, while tradition succours hope."

James Koehne

Reprinted, with permission, from Quadrant January-February 1995.

Concert Reviews

(continued from page 6)

(from bar 13) wasn't articulated as much as I would have liked; but then the difficult transitions in the *Passacaglia* were very well controlled. All in all, a coherent rather than a visionary performance of this rapturous work.

The craggy and difficult *Ninth* I thought was played too fast - at 29½ minutes; although the duration given in the score is 30 minutes. For me, the outstanding quality of this work is a sense of immensity, weight and universal tragedy, faced with courage and hope (such as I get from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*) Bakels forged ahead with a great sense of purpose, but not much of grandeur or outreach. Often in this work the music breaks suddenly, then, after about a bar of silence, moves forward again. The break should give an increased tension; if it is reduced to a singer's breath, then that tension is lost. The amazing and complex final movement seemed to me too 'risoluto', and much of its immensity and variety was lost; especially so in the otherworldly closing bars: three crescendo/diminuendos interspersed with ghostly saxophone harmonies.

Though somewhat disappointing, I was grateful to experience this moving document 'live'.

*Robert Rudd Smyth
Dublin*

Review number 2

Symphonies No's 5 and 9 - Winter Gardens Bournemouth, 11th September 1996

The Winter Gardens in Bournemouth undoubtedly has a good acoustic, but the

building itself remains a little disappointing. If you haven't yet attended a concert there, cast aside any illusions of late-Victorian grandeur as the name seems to imply, because the building itself is a mid-twentieth century brick building which reminds me of a primary school outside, and is painted just about as tastefully as a school dinner-hall inside. But at least, unlike a school dinner-hall we were not being served up a menu of stodge (even though VW was partial to stodge puddings).

The symphonies were being played as one of the BSO's invitation series. All I can say here is that either the photocopier printing out the invitations must have broken down, or the invitations were lost in the post, because the hall was barely a third full. Well, perhaps this is wishful thinking; an all-VW concert still has some way to catch up with a concert including the *1812* - which the BSO played the following Sunday (without me in attendance).

The low turn-out did not however prevent the BSO under the baton of Kees Bakels from giving a creditable performance. *Number Five* received a particularly sympathetic playing. It was clear that this symphony lay deep inside the bones of the players - especially those of the string section who produced some rapturous playing in the *Romanza*. The close of the symphony left the hall in sustained silence - not because the patrons had already rushed to the bar - but because they were obviously captivated by the BSO's playing of this most serene of symphonies.

The *Ninth* came as a considerable contrast. There's little doubt that this orchestral enigma requires a certain indefinable inspirational spark from orchestra and conductor in order to bring it off successfully. Conductors such as Leonard Slatkin seem to have grasped at least some of it in their recordings - in his case particularly in the closing pages of the first movement. The BSO and Bakels, even though they were playing deep in the heart of 'Wessex', seemed not to have fully grasped the symphony. Their performance could perhaps be best summed up as 'military matter of fact', with the conclusion of the final movement having a particularly hurried feel to it giving little scope for the poignant call of the saxophones between the final orchestral onslaughts. I felt particularly sorry for the woman on the celeste who seemed rather bored; perhaps knitting should be permitted for minor orchestral players?

*Rob Furneaux
Devon*

HUBERT FOSS: VAUGHAN WILLIAMS' JAEGER?

by DUNCAN HINNELL

Elgar asserted as early as 1898 that 'Nimrod' in the *Enigma Variations* 'characterised' Jaeger himself, and, a year after Jaeger died in 1909, Elgar extracted the movement and performed it with the LSO in a memorial concert. In a complex evolution of associations and meanings, Elgar's musical picture has subsequently gained a unique status in national life for the expression of loss and remembrance. The intervening years saw an intensely personal, and perhaps unique collaboration between the two men, and hundreds of extant letters apparently testify to their deep mutual confidence and trust. In-jokes, cartoons, nicknames and musical quotations make their letters fascinating reading, but could easily mask the seriousness of Jaeger's contribution to Elgar's most fertile decade. Elgar scholars have identified Jaeger's editorial influence in most of the major works from this period, most famously perhaps in the closing bars of *Enigma Variations* and in the climax of *The Dream of Gerontius*. Among the conventional responsibilities of a publisher, Jaeger had extensive contacts with influential critics and performers, and, perhaps because of his intimate knowledge of the composer, he also seems to have been particularly adroit in both his internal and external championship of Elgar's cause. Particularly significant, however, are Jaeger's numerous commentaries on Elgar's music, which have been regarded as having unique 'authority', and consequently they have become particularly influential in the interpretation and historiography of Elgar.

Jaeger's distinctive contributions to Elgar's music and reception clearly have a special place in the history of music, and invoking the Elgar-Jaeger relationship has considerable dangers, as it appears unique in its significance. It is perhaps one of the most famous and widely discussed of all composer-publisher relationships. The Vaughan Williams-Foss relationship offers no such parallel collection of letters so I hope my title has not raised false hopes! Despite such great dissimilarities in the way the relationship has been recorded for posterity, however, I do believe that Elgar and VW were indebted to their publishers in some strikingly similar ways, and I hope that the Elgar-Jaeger relationship may be of

some help in providing both a context and a distinctive comparison for discussing the significance of Vaughan Williams and Foss¹.

Hubert Foss, born in 1899, had joined the Education Department of Oxford University Press in 1921, and soon won the respect of Sir Humphrey Milford, Publisher to the University, with a scheme to publish 'The Heritage of Music'. This, and the success of



Hubert Foss

(by kind permission of Mrs Diana Sparkes (née Foss))

the hymnals and various educational books about music (including Hadow's six-volume *Oxford History of Music*), seem to have played a role in Milford's decision to found and entirely new Music Department in 1923, and he appointed Hubert Foss, aged only 24, as its head. Milford's own ambitions for the department are not well recorded, but it appears that he may have had in mind an extension of the music-book publishing and hymnal work, alongside a small business in sheet-music. Milford trusted Foss and gave him free reign, and Foss set about his task with astonishing zeal and clear ambitions to create distinct catalogues of scholarly works, texts for schools and further education, and popular books for general readers. Most striking of all, however, was his cultivation of British composition; within five years the department had published an astonishing array of music, including works by Vaughan Williams, Walton, Lambert, Holst, Ethel

Smythe, Rawsthorne, van Dieren and early Britten, among others.

Vaughan Williams' decision to join the department, taken around 1925, may have resulted from numerous connections with it, not least through his old friend, Oxford's Professor of Music, Hugh Allen, who acted as an advisor to Milford and the department from its earliest days. Vaughan Williams' rapport with Foss seems to have been established quickly and their surviving letters are suggestive of a happy, but very business-like practicality, an impression endorsed by Mrs Ursula Vaughan Williams' recollection of their relationship in later years.

Foss's wider role, indeed, appears to have suited Vaughan Williams in a number of ways, not least because his department's policy reflected a philosophy which was highly sympathetic to Vaughan Williams' powerful and distinctive ideology concerning music in society. Among Foss's papers is his own annotated copy, apparently dating from 1921, of Hadow's 'The Needs of Popular Musical Education' (OUP, 1919), in which Hadow argues passionately for the role of music in a liberal education, and also for the potential contribution of music, both professional and amateur, to a progressive modern society. The booklet is almost a musical-political 'manifesto' - the previous books in the series concern penal reform and the educational needs of the working class - and its Introduction was by the Right Honourable H A L Fisher, President of the Board of Education. (Fisher, Vaughan Williams' brother-in-law, was author of the famous Education Act of 1918, which raised school-leaving age and sought to open schools and further education to all, irrespective of their ability to pay). Hadow became something of a mentor to Foss, and, like Hadow, his radical and progressive political beliefs embraced a strong ideology concerning the nature and value of music in society. Vaughan Williams, of course, passionately advocated such views throughout his life, not least in his Introduction to Hadow's *English Music* (1931). The other influence on Foss's editorial ambitions, was of course, the work of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, which had sought to stimulate young British composers by publishing works which conventional publishers regarded as potentially uncommercial. The liberal culture of the Oxford Press in the 1920s, its traditions and distinctive role, made it an

ideal environment for Foss and Milford to act as patrons of works which, at least in the short-term, were unremunerative. Over twenty years earlier, Vaughan Williams had pleaded the cause of British composition, and, at last, in the new climate of the 1920s, he had found a publisher willing and able - indeed zealous - in his commitment to promote new native talent.

Vaughan Williams' informal understanding with OUP - he never actually had a contract - lasted for the rest of his career, and it enabled him to be confident of publication for any work he wrote, almost regardless of its genre or style. I believe it is no coincidence that, from the mid-1920s onwards, Vaughan Williams' work became increasingly ambitious and adventurous in style, as witnessed in such important works as the *Violin Concerto*, *Piano Concerto* and the *Fourth Symphony*, for example, all of which presented challenges for contemporary audiences and performers. Each of these works might not have appeared attractive commercially - at least initially - and yet they seem to have been of great significance in Vaughan Williams' professional development. Foss had the perspective and confidence to trust the new styles in works by 'his' composers, and during the 1930s, he began to write previews, reviews and programme notes about such works to help their reception, in a manner rather parallel to Jaeger. Always a progressive, he also harnessed the possibilities of the newly-founded, but rapidly expanding BBC, to begin a career in broadcasting with talks on *Belshazzar's Feast* and Vaughan Williams' *Piano Concerto* (in 1932 and 1933 respectively), a role which enabled him to advocate British composers, and most especially Vaughan Williams and Walton, for the remaining twenty years of his life.

Foss was a gifted score-reader, often using live piano illustrations in his broadcasts and talks, and this ability was invaluable to his 'hands-on' approach to editorial work. Among the papers left on his death was an early autograph draft, now in the British Library, of the *Piano Concerto*, and it appears that Foss was closely involved in the revisions of the work which spanned the months preceding the first performance in 1933, right until the late revisions of the coda and arrangement for two pianos were made after the Second World War. Vaughan Williams himself acknowledged the importance he attached to Hubert Foss's editorial help and play-throughs in a letter written to Foss on hearing of his resignation in 1941.ⁱⁱ It may be that this role became particularly important after Holst's death in 1934, and, after Foss left the Press, Michael Mullinar and Roy Douglas offered similar assistance.

While Head of Music at the Press, Foss had travelled widely, setting up world-wide

distribution channels for OUP Music, and also being closely involved in ISCM Festivals across Europe. He played a major role in organising and funding the Oxford ISCM of 1931 in which Vaughan Williams' *Job* featured prominently, and all of his work in these spheres brought him into close contact with contemporary music internationally. Indeed, Foss was himself a devotee of Duke Ellington, and his own awareness of Viennese atonalism, Stravinsky, Sorabji, Bartók, Scriabin, Ravel and Mussorgsky, among others, is reflected in his work as a book editor, and may even be witnessed in the eclectic and cosmopolitan styles explored by Vaughan Williams and Walton during the 1920s and 1930s.

The slow pay-back of new music, the sheer number of publications Foss issued and the enormous costs involved, combined with the economic crash of the 1930s and nearly ruined the department. Foss and Milford struggled to protect the department, but massive retrenchment was inevitable, projects were delayed and postponed, and, his creativity effectively stifled, Foss felt forced to resign by 1941. Ironically, he had, even by then, managed to turn around the department's finances, returning a very small surplus in 1940 and 1941, and, with the wisdom of hindsight, his investments appear extremely shrewd.

The pressure of these years was immense, and manifested itself in bouts of ill-health and, like his close friend Constant Lambert, Foss struggled with depression, and with heavy smoking and drinking. Contractually unable to work for a rival music-publisher, Foss turned his immense experience of the profession to music journalism and particularly to broadcasting, and through this work, he maintained his close involvement in British music. Vaughan Williams was not least among the composers who helped Foss during these difficult years and he also continued to seek Foss's opinions on subjects ranging from film contracts to revisions of new works.

Foss broadcast frequently, covering a huge range of subjects, via all of the BBC's channels, including the Home Service, Forces Programmes, the Third Programme, Regional Networks, European Service and Empire Service. He became particularly renowned, however, for the passion and authority with which he spoke on British music, and, when the BBC presented programmes on Vaughan Williams, particularly on important occasions such as premieres of new works, performances conducted by the composer, and when celebrating his 70th, 75th and 80th birthdays, the BBC invariably turned to Foss for planning advice, as an intermediary with the composer, and as a script-writer and presenter. Foss's understanding of Vaughan Williams and his music appeared highly

authoritative and, when his study *Ralph Vaughan Williams* appeared in 1950 - the first monograph on the composer - it even included a chapter 'A Musical Autobiography' by the composer himself. Foss's correspondence suggests that he consciously targeted the book for a general readership, exploring a broadly cultural approach modelled on Quiller-Couch, thus avoiding specialist musical technicality. This, and the emphasis he placed on Vaughan Williams' cultural 'Englishness', as perceived through connections with earlier music, literature, philosophy and even landscape, I believe, has played a significant role in the reception of Vaughan Williams' work and the discourse which surrounds it.

Foss's huge responsibilities may have been one cause, among many others, which made his relationship with Vaughan Williams substantially different from that between Elgar and Jaeger. Yet Foss, with his extraordinary versatility and drive, was able to harness the resources of OUP and the BBC in the cause of British music, in an age in which war, politics and economics, combined to give musicians unprecedented influence and opportunity. The context was ripe and Foss's editorship was deeply influential in it, and it is perhaps no coincidence that Walton, Lambert and Britten were also immensely creative in these years. Vaughan Williams' work and reputation flourished in the inter-war and post-war years, and Foss's abilities as an advocate, writer and broadcaster now appear tailor-made for a composer famed for his reticence about speaking or writing about his own music. Perhaps genius is 'the right man, in the right place, at the right time'?

Duncan Hinnells
The Music Faculty
St. Aldate's, Oxford University

ⁱ I would like to thank a number of people for their generous help with this research; James Arnold Baker, Secretary to the Delegates, and the staff of Oxford University Press; Jacqueline Kavanagh and the staff of the BBC Written Archive Centre; Hubert Foss's son and daughter, Christopher Foss and Diana Sparkes; Hugh Cobbe and Mrs Ursula Vaughan Williams. I am also grateful to Diana McVeagh and those who heard an earlier version of this paper in the series 'Seminars in Musicology' in Oxford University, for their most helpful comments.

ⁱⁱ Cited in *RVW: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, Ursula Vaughan Williams, Oxford, 1964, pp. 244 - 245

YOUR LETTERS

We are always pleased to receive contributions for this page



Chester Cathedral performance

I have just received my Journal 6 - full of interest and beautifully produced. I attended the recent performance in Chester Cathedral of *A Sea Symphony*, etc. and I agree with Simon Crutchley's comments. The performance really was magnificent and thoroughly involving to the extent of making one forget the uncomfortable seating - always a sign of a good performance in the Cathedral! Acoustics are variable, depending on where you sit. Close to the performers, the front Nave seats are quite good as you hear the sound directly with minimal reverberation. (These are, needless to say, the most expensive seats!).

Allan Smith
Chester

A fine Tallis in Dublin

In Dublin on Friday, 10th May 1996, the National Symphony Orchestra conducted by Adrian Leaper, gave a really fine performance of the *Tallis Fantasia*. Part of its success, I believe, stemmed from the careful platform layout: the 2nd orchestra (9 players) was placed to the near right hand of the 1st orchestra (the main string body). This follows the instructions in the score "the 2nd orchestra should, if possible, be placed apart from the First Orchestra" (my understanding).

After 50 years of devoted record collecting, I am still hoping to get a recording that properly captures the spatial and spiritual magic of this essential separation of the 2 orchestras. In a recording (lacking the articulation of the visual) I think that the separation would need to be very strongly antiphonal - left hand opposed to right hand. The score specifies "The solo parts are to be played by the leader in each group" the dialoguing of the quartet of soloists, would be wonderfully opened up by the (stereophonic) separation.

I cannot find this spatial element adequately represented in the many recordings I have so far heard. For instance, Barbirolli's glowing account of 1963, with the Sinfonia of London and the Allegri String Quartet, features ravishingly beautiful string tone, within an ample space, but without clearly delineated antiphony; the dynamic (loud-to-soft) contrast between the two orchestras is in there, but not the so desirable apartness. Remembering what Decca could do - thirty years ago, in their

wonderful recording of J. S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* (under Munchinger), with 3 separate choirs, and a beautifully coloured Chamber Orchestra, balanced, contrasted, combined but not coalesced. In this day and age of highly developed recording know-how, surely some company can produce the *Tallis Fantasia* of my dreams.

Maybe some company already has - unbeknown to me. Can our RVW Society members help?

Robert Rudd Smyth
Dublin

RVW on film

I refer to the letter in the February 1996 Journal enquiring about RVW on film. There is a little at the National Film Archive which can be seen by making an appointment in advance, there is also a charge. They have a small piece of film of RVW conducting in a rehearsal room somewhere, but it is silent, so it's difficult to work out which piece of music is being played. I'm not sure of the date of it but RVW has his hearing aid, so I suspect late 40s early 50s. There is also a small (a few minutes only) of the Three Choirs Festival at a time when Elgar as well as RVW was present. The NFI is at 21 Stephen Street, London, W1P 1PL.

Linda Hayward
Dover

Symphonic cycles

Considering the RVW Discography referred to in Journal No. 6, I wonder whether you appreciated what you would be taking on when you started this project! Can you ever hope to catch up with yourself? What was once merely a trickle of new recordings has become - well, if not exactly a flood - at least a hearteningly steady stream. Twenty-odd years ago, I recall, I idly wondered which (if either) of the two then currently available symphony cycles, Boult or Previn, would be the one to survive, and certainly never anticipated the range of choice we are now presented with.

For myself, although there are individual performances of selected symphonies that I admire more, and I have enormous respect for the sheer no-nonsense dependability of the Eminence/Handley cycle (which gives unfailing pleasure), were I *forced* to cut back to only one set of those now available, I must admit that it would be the

RCA/Slatkin version I would retain - although this seems not to have aroused general enthusiasm. It seems to me that all the interpretations are thoughtful, clearly deeply felt and broadly consistent in approach, but three strike me as being particularly inspired. For all that, I find the attack and passion in RVW's own performance of the *Fourth* truly breathtaking, until I heard Slatkin's version I had never really previously taken to this work as *music*, and had always felt it was somehow at one remove from the rest of the canon. No longer - Slatkin is the first conductor convincingly to rival RVW's ferocity, but (so it seems to me) he keeps a firmer hold on the overall structure; the peroration is overwhelmingly powerful, and the timing - and weighting - of the final 'full point' is beautifully judged. For the first time, too, when I heard Slatkin's account of the *Eighth*, I felt it to be a much weightier work than I had previously thought, while the sounds produced by the assorted 'hitting instruments' are more successfully integrated into the general texture of the music than in any other version I know. Finally, Slatkin's interpretation of the *Ninth* seems to me to have a depth and poignancy approached only by Boult's pioneer recording made immediately following RVW's death.

Charles Long
Leatherhead

Letters from America...

I am writing in reply to Mr John Waterstone of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, who commented in a letter printed in the June



issue of the Journal that "I would appreciate an in-depth article regarding the relationship between RVW's overtly religious works... and his own religious beliefs." I have written such an article, and it will be printed in a volume of *Vaughan Williams Studies*, edited by Alain Frogley, now in preparation for publication by Cambridge University Press. I would also recommend to Mr Waterstone the excellent article on *Job* by Alison McFarland which appeared a few years ago in the 'International Journal of Musicology'.

I will comment merely that the complex question of Vaughan Williams' religious beliefs can be understood only within the context of the cultural and intellectual milieu of his formative years at Cambridge. In addition, it is clear that Vaughan Williams' beliefs evolved over the course of

a long and deeply considered life and in reaction to the turbulent events of a violent era. Like his music, Vaughan Williams' intellectual and spiritual development was dynamic rather than static; the timeless, spiritual and visionary aspects of both his work and his life were always balanced and enriched by the earthy, the sceptical and the practical.

Dr Byron Adams
Riverside
California

...continued

The article by John Birkhead, *A Voyage of Discovery* (Journal of the RVW Society No. 6), alternately struck several chords. I share his attraction to the "quality of mysticism and spirituality" of RVW's work, but it also had me baffled; to me RVW has nothing at all in common with Beethoven, whose music at best can be called heaven-storming - like Shostakovich's and Bruckner's - rather than heaven-evoking or approaching, like RVW's and at worst, is brash and portentous, as RVW never is.

Eventually, as I knew he must, he reached the point where he brought up the viola, remarking upon how many composers whose work he liked have played it. I have noticed that myself, but not favouring those John Birkhead mentioned (except Bach, of course), simply because I have absolutely no affinity for the Classical period in music (my taste jumps from the Baroque to the Romantic period), I think more of Hindemith (whose work begins to be restudied and appreciated) and an American he may not know of, Alan Hovhannes (still active, though repetitive, in his eighties). I am happy to recommend to John Birkhead his *Mysterious Mountain*, which I hope he has not heard, so I can vicariously enjoy his discovery of it. My initial hearing of it - over the first "live" television hook-up, from the Mormon Tabernacle in 1955 - was something I shall never forget, or even get over. The experience of hearing the first recording of the work, two years later, proved no disappointment, I am happy to say, because it was performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Fritz Reiner, whose renditions on early stereo recordings for RCA are yet to be surpassed.

Mysterious Mountain has that same quality of spirituality, which may be induced by a section of violas playing pentatonically to evoke the sound of a church organ. I first heard this piece around the time that I first heard RVW's *Tallis Fantasia*, which has much in common with it.

Speaking of the viola, I was surprised that the article didn't mention *Flos Campi*, one of my favourite RVW pieces - which, in the version I have (Frederick Riddle, viola, with the Bournemouth Sinfonietta conducted by Norman del Mar), always makes the hair stand up on the back of my neck. And speaking of the Bournemouth

Sinfonietta, I recently got hold of an obscure recording, made by that orchestra twenty years ago under George Hurst, that contains two RVW hymn-tune preludes (*Eventide* and *Dominus Regit Me*) of heart-rending beauty, the former containing the germ of that soaring, sublime, heavenly theme that trails off at the end of the *Fifth Symphony*.

Incidentally, I don't find RVW's music any more English than Elgar's - or, rather, I don't find Elgar's music less English than RVW's. There's nothing more English than *Pomp and Circumstance* or even sections of the two symphonies, *Dream of Gerontius*, the *Cello Concerto* and the *Enigma Variations*. But its Englishness of a different hue. Elgar expressed his Englishness (which can sound chauvinistic) with the Germanic musical vocabulary (as, later, did Walton) at his disposal, whereas RVW, with exposure to impressionism through Ravel, created a different English sound, sometimes called pastoralism. If that is what (partly) attracts John Birkhead to the music of RVW, he might also enjoy the music of E. J. Moeran, whose best work (e.g., *Sinfonietta*, *Cello Concerto*) is worthy of RVW but by no means lacking in originality.

I end by saying that I enjoyed the article very much.

Martin Mitchell
New York

Favourites

Perhaps we could ask members to vote or otherwise indicate their favourite discs. Perhaps we could all recommend a top five.

For what it's worth these are mine:

- *Phantasy Qt*, *String Qt 2* etc. MGL/Bean EMI
- *Wenlock Edge* etc. MGL/Partridge EMI
- *Symphony 4/5* Dutton
- *Serenade to Music* etc. Boulton EMI
- *Symphony 6*, *Thanksgiving* etc. Boulton EMI.

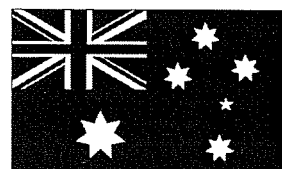
Mark Asquith
Liverpool

Letters from Australia

I have already gained a great deal of pleasure from my very new membership of the RVW Society, having received back copies of the wonderful journal and having been put in touch with many better-informed RVW fans than myself. I have only been exploring classical music, and the music of RVW, for three years but they have been rich years as I have endeavoured to track down and listen to all of RVW's major and minor pieces - thankfully, the Melbourne Conservatorium Music Library has an extensive collection of his music as well as most of the biographies, so I was to be found there for one or two days each holiday.

I had sought such a Society soon after my love of RVW's music grew and even wrote to the English Folk Dance and Song

Society about the matter, only to be informed that no such group existed - I must have missed its formation by a matter of months! Fortunately, I came across its existence through the Internet, courtesy of Jaron Collis' entries.



I am writing my first letter to the editor with a number of enquiries and a few ideas. I look forward to hearing from anyone who can assist.

Firstly, like most people under 50 now - and certainly in Australia - I did not have the opportunity to see or hear RVW personally and so I am keen to view or listen to tapes or film of his life. My only such experience to date has been his marvellous comments at the end of Boulton's version of the *Sixth Symphony* on Belart. Maybe a 'library' of such resources can be compiled or a full-length documentary incorporating such archival material ready for 1997.

On a similar matter, Malcolm Taylor at the EFDSS informed me that two documentaries on RVW have been made, one by Stanley Williamson and the other by Ken Russell. The latter was shown on ABC-TV here in 1986, which I saw but recall little of. Does anyone have a copy of either that I could arrange a copy from?

Finally, given there are very few performances of RVW's music in Australia (we hope to rectify that for 1997), I am keen to view videos of performances of his works shown in the UK. So, I will certainly be following up those persons who have indicated that they have some performances available to share. Again, would it be possible for the Society to collect a library of such recordings of performances of RVW's music? I hope this will particularly occur in 1997 when *Job* and *Pilgrim's Progress* are presented - for those of us far away who cannot get to England, this would be some compensation!

So, I wish to end by express my thanks again for this Society, for all the contributors to the Journal and for all the new RVW music, books, etc., that is becoming increasingly available, partly due to the efforts of the Society. It is an exciting time to be a new RVW fan!

For someone who has always been an ardent Republican with a deep love of all things Australian and with little sympathy for 'Anglophiles', it is perhaps a little out-of-character to find RVW's music so affecting. But perhaps it also says something about the universality of his music and message, especially for those seeking truth or the 'eternal' things in life. As a person for whom my Christian beliefs

(continued overleaf)

(continued from previous page)

and understanding are the focus of my life, I daily give thanks for RVW's music and the comfort and inspiration it gives me, especially those glimpses of heaven in his music.

John Waterhouse
131 Alexander Ave.
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia 3158

...ideas for the future

Further to my letter reproduced above, I'd also like to include a few ideas that may be considered for future editions of the Journal:

- A listing of relevant archival material held by the BBC.
- A listing of available film and video sources of RVW himself and performances of his works.
- An article by Stanley Williamson about his documentary on RVW.
- An article by Ken Russell on his documentary.
- An article on/by Matthew Best of Hyperion.
- An article on the Leith Hill Festival by a conductor or participant.
- An article by, or interview with Tony Kendall ("Mr. Essex").

Please continue the reviews, series of people's introductions to his music, newsbits, etc. It is a wonderful collection of ideas and information for further leads in pursuing his music.

John Waterhouse

(Editor's note: Members who would like to volunteer to take up these ideas for future editions of the Journal should contact Stephen Connock).

Sir Dan Godfrey on CD?

Have you seen the Spring 1996 edition of the International Classical Record Collector and the splendid article by Stephen Lloyd on the first recordings of RVW's *London Symphony*? He comments that the recording of it by Sir Dan Godfrey has not been issued on CD. Is this something the Society should encourage Pearl or Dutton to do? Two snags: 1, is that it is an acoustic recording and 2, there is a large cut in the 4th movement, though this may be significant as RVW made a similar cut in his revision. It is an extremely rare recording; I have not even heard of a copy in 20 years of record collecting, I only have the earlier abridged (or mutilated) version, on 2 78s! The sound is astonishingly good for acoustic recording. On both, Sir Dan conducts the LSO.

Unfortunately, Lloyd makes one mistake in saying this is the only major symphonic work Godfrey recorded; he later recorded *Mozart Symphony No. 41*. But it is the only

major British symphonic work he conducted for the gramophone.

I hope this is of some interest.

Michael Goatcher
Thaxted, Essex.

Memories of Dorking

Renée Stewart's edited article on the Leith Hill Musical Festivals at Dorking Halls (Issue 5) resurrected many happy memories.

I was a member of the Banstead Musical Society in the '50s, which was affiliated to the LHMF choirs, and of course sung in Vaughan Williams' rehearsals and performances of the *St. Matthew Passion*, sung in English. In particular, I recollect VW in 1958 - a little more frail, (although still managing wrathful outbursts!), a little more bowed, being assisted by Mrs Vaughan Williams up the stage steps, clutching his cushion, tea in saucer. This final statement as it was to be of his beloved work was, in a way, more pronounced than in previous years: his grimaces to us at 'The griefs that He for us endureth, How bitter, yet how sweet'; 'Have lightnings and thunders'; 'Loose Him! leave Him! bind Him not!' and 'Hail, hail, King'; holding his nose and glowering at 'He trusted in God', and the monumental and uniquely accentuated 'Bārrabus!', the impact of which, delivered by the expulsion of the Choirs' full lungs, was nothing short of a bomb explosion, which quite numbed

the audience and which, on an untenuated modern recording, would have firmly embedded woofers, tweeter and heart in adjacent obstructions. Conversely, there was the questioning 'Lord, is it I?', the meaning so often dismissed in others' interpretations; the magnanimous 'Truly, this was the Son of God!', the repeated 'Son of God' diminishing to pianissimo, and the reverentially whispered 'Be near me, Lord, when dying'. To quote a sentence from a tribute by Marjorie M. Cullen (a most



Photograph courtesy of Anne Nisbet

formidable lady who kept us all on our toes) in the Easter 1959 RCM Magazine, 'The wonderful inspiration he gave, lifting the performance to the highest levels, will remain with the singers forever.' Quite so, Miss Cullen. It was an enormous privilege to be, for an instant, part of 'Uncle Ralph' as we affectionately apostrophised him.

Anne Nisbet
Dundee

TOWARDS 1,000 Members!

Robin Barber writes:

All members are urged to help the Society to consolidate its financial position by finding one new member each.

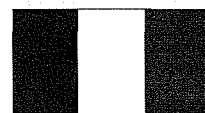
If we do this, our membership and income will double.

A membership leaflet is included with this Journal.

Thanks for your help.



A True Entente Cordiale - RVW and Ravel



by Michael Nelson

Ralph Vaughan Williams and Maurice Ravel are my two favourite composers. I revere RVW's music for the wonderful breadth and depth of its artistic vision: large-scale symphonic utterances of great strength and character standing side by side



with a veritable treasure trove of small-scale works of exceptional beauty; and in much of his output again and again that quality of rapt serenity which is, for me, a particularly striking trait of RVW's music. With Ravel, on the other hand, I admire the wit, the element - constantly recurring - of fantasy, the incomparable sense of rhythm, the marvellous command of instrumental tone colour.

Here are two composers who, from all we know of their personalities, background and outlook would seem to have had little in common - partly, one might suspect, because of the peculiar 'love-hate' relationship between the French and the English. Yet, RVW and Ravel formed a professional and personal association that

was, from much evidence, both unusual and endearing, as well as being artistically fruitful.

In her biography 'RVW' the composer's second wife, Ursula Vaughan Williams, tells us of the circumstances in which the 'restless' 35-year old composer, seeking to find a new direction in his music, asked Ravel, three years his junior, to accept him for lessons. RVW's own account of their first meeting, in 1907 - and how awkward it must have been, initially! - reflects creditably on both men and is, of course, indicative of RVW's humility in seeking the help of a younger composer:

"He was much puzzled at our first interview. When I had shown him some of my work he said that for my first lessons I had better "écrire un petit menuet dans le style de Mozart." I saw at once that it was time to act promptly, so I said in my best French, "Look here, I have given up my time, my work, my friends and my career to come here and learn from you, and I am not going to write a petit menuet dans le style de Mozart." After that we became great friends and I learned much from him."*

The mind boggles at the idea of RVW sitting down to write a minuet in the style of Mozart!

All admirers of these two great but highly dissimilar composers would surely like to have been a fly on the wall on that memorable occasion. What a physical contrast they must have made for a start: the one tall and broad-shouldered, the other diminutive. (Ravel was rejected as a soldier in the First World War for being four pounds underweight).

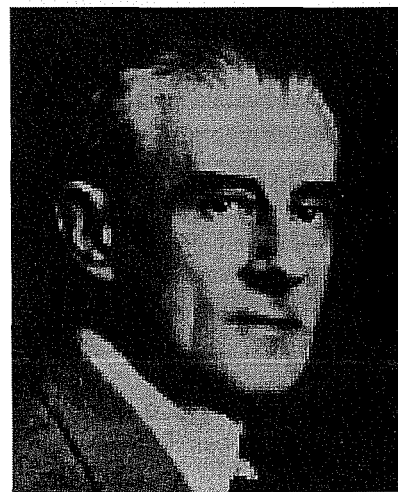
That RVW benefited from his lessons with Ravel is too well documented to bear detailed repetition but his remarks on returning home after three months in Paris are evidence enough.

"I came home with a bad attack of French fever and wrote a string quartet which caused a friend to say that I must have been having tea with Debussy, and a song cycle with several atmospheric effects, but I did not succumb to the temptation of writing a piece about a cemetery, and Ravel paid me

the compliment of telling me that I was the only pupil who "n'écrit pas de ma musique."**

On Wenlock Edge, the intensely beautiful song cycle referred to, would surely not have achieved the effect it does without the influence of Ravel.

In her biography, Ursula Vaughan Williams' references to the contents of letters Ravel wrote to RVW in later years bear eloquent testimony to the Frenchman's courtesy and consideration in his personal and professional dealings with his one-time pupil. And how very endearing, too, is the biographer's reference to Ravel's gastronomic preference when, in 1909, he came over to England to stay with RVW at



Cheyne Walk: 'it appeared that steak and kidney pudding with stout at Waterloo Station was Ravel's idea of pleasurably lunching out.'

For me, RVW and Ravel's friendship and the rapport which, against the odds, evidently existed between them is one of the most heart-warming, indeed moving, stories in the history of music. Theirs was surely a true entente cordiale.

Michael Nelson
Leeds

* Musical Autobiography

Vaughan Williams' Two Whitman Duets

- sketches for *A Sea Symphony*

by Andrew Herbert

In the summer of 1907 Vaughan Williams wrote to his cousin Ralph Wedgwood, 'I have really finished my magnum opus which I told you I was beginning years ago... when you said I wasn't to do any more Stevenson but something healthy. In fact you said "Be a man - don't be a cad."' Not alone amongst English composers, Vaughan Williams found in Whitman a new and virile masculinity: had he but known...

Written for soprano and baritone soloists, chorus and orchestra, the words of *A Sea Symphony* are taken from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman's unfettered and penetrating mode of expression held great appeal for many musicians of this period, and, for some, opened new doors. Over seven years in gestation, the genesis of *A Sea Symphony* was hesitant and arduous. Known initially to its composer as *Songs of the Sea*, this title was replaced by *Whitman Sea Songs*, and then *Ocean Symphony* before arriving at *A Sea Symphony* during 1906 or 1907. Unravelling the complex thread of numerous sketches produced by the composer during these years is an involved task. However, in addition to the prodigious sketching on *A Sea Symphony* itself, Vaughan Williams produced a number of independent works based on Whitman's poetry. These functioned, at least in part, as test-beds, allowing the composer to develop ideas within a less ambitious context; two of these, 'The Last Invocation' and 'The Love Song of the Birds' are the subjects of this article.

Vaughan Williams was taught composition by Hubert Parry (1891-92), Charles Wood (1892-95) and Charles Stanford (1895-96). Stanford and Wood both made settings of Whitman, and although Parry did not, he was clearly sympathetic to the poet. He confided to his diary, 'possibly it is the democratic tinge that fetches me in him, and the way in which he faces over human problems and speaks ruggedly himself - and such a strange, wild, at the same time hopeful self.' Charles Wood's settings included 'Darest Thou Now O Soul', 'By the Bivouac's Fitful Flame' and 'Aethiopia Saluting the Colours'. All of these were later set by Vaughan Williams, although only one, *Toward the Unknown Region* (based on 'Darest Thou Now O Soul'), was published.

Stanford had been very quick to see the musical potential in Whitman's verse, and made one of the earliest settings, *Elegiac Ode*, using the 'death carol' from 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd'. Although the music itself is not particularly adventurous, the novelty of his choice of text did not go unremarked. A reviewer of the premiere at the Norwich Festival of 1884 wrote, 'we must say that it is long since we met with anything more eccentric than the words which Dr Stanford has selected for treatment...'

Interest in the American poet did not diminish with the following generation of composers who perhaps saw in Whitman's idealism a symbol of new dawn: a possible escape route from Austro-German musical domination. Holst, quick off the mark, completed *A Whitman Overture* in 1899 and *The Mystic Trumpeter* five years later. The latter, a setting of fifty-four lines belonging to 'From Noon to Starry Sky', strongly influenced the final movement of *A Sea Symphony*. Other contemporaries included W. H. Bell, whose *Whitman Symphony* was conducted by Sir August Manns in 1900, and both Coleridge-Taylor and Cyril Scott published song settings.

Vaughan Williams himself was relatively slow to join the fray. He had been introduced to the poetry of Walt Whitman by George Bernard Shaw in 1892 whilst in his first year at Trinity College, Cambridge. In the midst of the intoxicating brew of widening social and intellectual horizons revealed to a fresh undergraduate, Whitman did not immediately stand out as potential for musical inspiration. Early (unpublished) songs deal with verse by Swinburne, Tennyson, Herrick, Browning and Shakespeare, rather than the less easily contained rhapsodic style of the American poet. Even after the turn of the century, when his contemporaries were exploring Whitman with enthusiasm, Vaughan Williams was more interested in the deliberate simplicity of Pre-Raphaelites poetry, such as D G Rossetti's *The House of Life*, together with the more youthful naïvety of Stevenson's *Songs of Travel*. However, Whitman was gradually moving into the picture. In December 1904 Vaughan Williams promoted a concert of his own and Holst's compositions: included were both *The House of Life* and *Songs of Travel* together with two Whitman settings, *The Last Invocation* and *The Love Song of the Birds*.

Designed as a pair, *The Last Invocation* and *The Love Song of the Birds* were written for soprano, baritone soloists, violin obligato with piano and optional string quartet accompaniment. 'The Last Invocation' belongs to a collection of eighteen poems entitled *Whispers of Heavenly Death*; also amongst these is 'Darest Thou Now O Soul', which Vaughan Williams later used in *Toward the Unknown Region*. One of Whitman's more concise compositions, 'The Last Invocation' is both direct and evocative.

At the last, tenderly,
From the walls of the powerful fortress'd house
From the clasp of the knitted locks, from the keep¹ of the
well-closed doors,
Let me be wafted.

¹ Keep: archaic noun referring to deep underground vaults of a dungeon or castle.

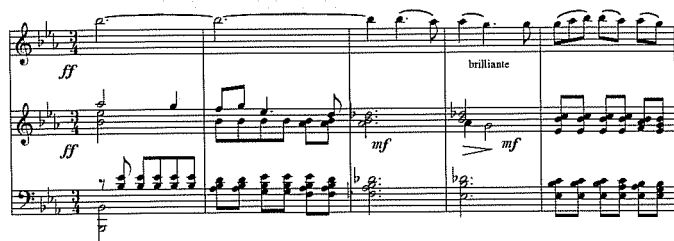
Let me glide noiselessly forth;
With the key of softness unlock the locks - with a whisper,
Set ope the doors O soul.

Tenderly - be not impatient,
(Strong is your hold O mortal flesh,
Strong is your hold O love).

Dwelling on the final moments of life, there is perhaps a hint of apprehension, but mixed with anticipation, even relief, at the forthcoming release. Vaughan Williams sets it in its entirety, choosing a solid diatonic idiom which owes much to the general style of his teachers and to Tchaikovsky.

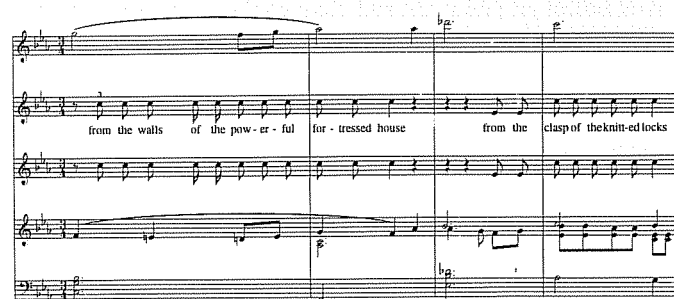
The music is through-composed and builds steadily to climax at the words, 'Set ope the doors O soul'. Like Stanford in *Elegiac Ode*, the response is not particularly idiosyncratic. Whitman does not yet inspire musical revelation, and at the climax, in an effort to express the soul's transcendence Vaughan Williams reverts to an unmistakably Wagnerian reference.

Ex. 1



If we had expected the newness of the New World poet to inspire newness in the English composer, here is disappointment: *Tristan and Isolde* had been first performed nearly forty years previously, in 1865. However, there is still a freshness in the setting which balances movingly lyrical poise with technical proficiency. Vaughan Williams carefully captures the rhythmic lilt of Whitman's words, making use of chant-like phrases in the opening section:

Ex. 2



Here the musical substance is given to the piano and violin, allowing the voices a declamatory emphasis. As the piece progresses, the voices increasingly take over, although the

balance is never quite regained. This method is exploited more thoroughly in *A Sea Symphony*, the composer indicating in his programme notes for the first performance, 'The plan of the work is symphonic rather than narrative or dramatic...'

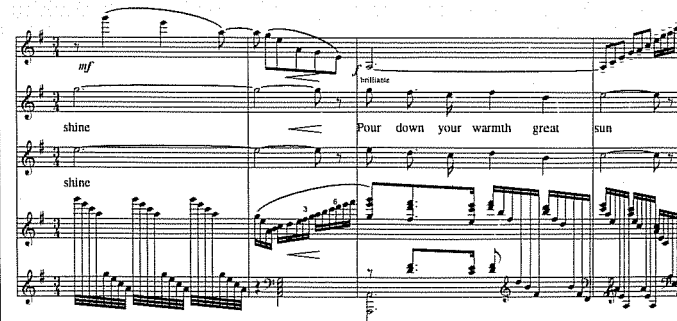
'The Love Song of the Birds' is rather different in mood. The text is taken from 'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking', one of the group of eleven poems constituting *Sea Drift*, which was also used by Delius in his well-known setting (first performed in 1906) of the same name. Vaughan Williams selected just nine lines from the total one hundred and eighty-three, and gave them his own title. However, the selection was not arbitrary. Whitman wrote the lines in italics, clearly emphasising and separating them from surrounding text. In the complete poem the poet, as a small boy, is watching two birds building a nest on the sea-shore. He admires their intimacy and eulogises with the italicised lines:

Shine! shine! shine!
Pour down your warmth, great sun!
While we bask, we two together.

Two together!
Winds blow south, or winds blow north,
Day come white, or night come black,
Home, or rivers and mountains from home,
Singing all time, minding no time,
While we two keep together.

In the poem the she-bird subsequently disappears without trace or explanation, 'maybe kill'd, unknown to her mate.' Whitman's poem, then, is rather darker than the short excerpt which Vaughan Williams chooses. The music itself is light and airy, making use of long drawn-out melodies and widely spaced arpeggiated accompaniment. The piece is in two sections, followed by a brief coda in the style of the opening. The first section eschews the diatonic harmony of *The Last Invocation* preferring instead a system of slowly shifting triads and more than a hint of modal inflexion. Even so, there is little in it that might have displeased Parry:

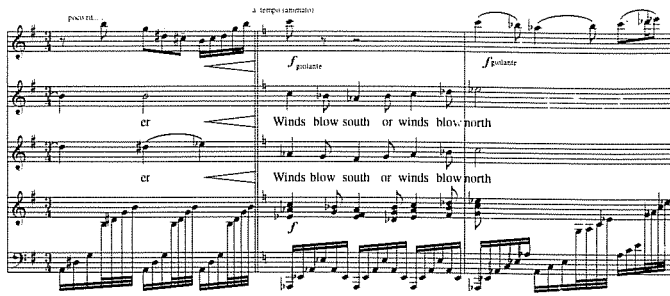
Ex. 3



(continued overleaf)

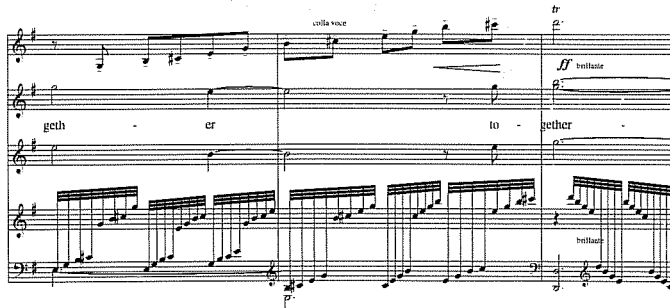
The second section takes advantage of Whitman's change of rhythm in lines 5-8, moving from simple to compound time, and emphasising this with the key change:

Ex. 4



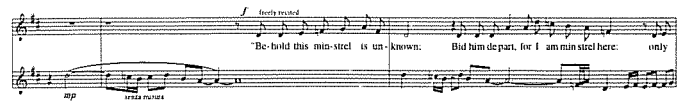
Throughout the duet, but particularly in the rapidly rising final passage, the obligato violin part gives graphic account of bird trilling; an idea developed to greater effect in a later and much more famous piece, *The Lark Ascending*:

Ex. 5



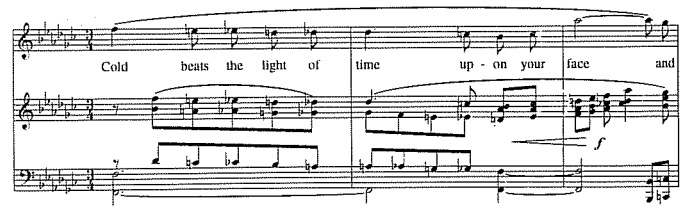
Thus neither *The Last Invocation* or *The Love Song of the Birds* is written in a particularly advanced style. Of the other works given at the concert, both the Stevenson and Rossetti song-cycles contain songs of greater originality; witness *Love's Minstrels* in *The House of Life* which was written in part as a dialogue between the piano and the voice:

Ex. 6



Both texturally and harmonically this is far in advance of either Whitman duet. Similarly, *In Dreams* from *Songs of Travel* is a great deal more adventurous, using an impressionistic, chromatic harmonic style:

Ex. 7



It is something of a puzzle that Whitman, more daring than either Stevenson or Rossetti in terms of sentiment and mode of expression, did not inspire a more adventurous response. However, both song-cycles contain songs which are a great deal more conservative than the examples quoted, and it is apparent that Vaughan Williams, even in published work, was experimenting stylistically.

Although the musical material of the Whitman duets bear little similarity with *A Sea Symphony*, the combination of soprano and baritone soloists and the use of Whitman's poetry, hints that they were of the nature of prototypes. The critical reception was not particularly favourable, and as Vaughan Williams did not publish the pieces, it is probable he himself had reservations. Ursula Vaughan Williams wrote, 'the poems of Walt Whitman... seemed to him unencumbered with some of the burdens of the Classics, an attitude unfamiliar in much English literature of the - then-recent past.' And whilst the music might not always rise to meet this challenge, these two Whitman duets are nevertheless an important and eloquent landmark on Vaughan Williams' long journey toward *A Sea Symphony*.

Andrew Herbert
University of Birmingham



EXTRACT FROM FRANK McMANUS'S BOOK OF DAYS

Tuesday, 9th July

The *Sixth Symphony* of Vaughan Williams was broadcast yesterday on Radio 3. I recall my brief letter in the *Guardian*, 29th September 1992 (see box adjacent) challenging "Centipede's" article on the century's best symphonies, and offering a recklessly-terse review of RVW's output thereof! This *Sixth* caused a sensation in 1948, coming as it did after the serene *Fifth* which brought balm during the war years. "In the furious turmoil of the first few bars", writes Wilfrid Mellers*, "Eden is indeed obliterated." Yet a "marvellous" paradisaical tune crowns the first movement, only to be followed by the Doom-Laden second with its baleful rhythms and fanfares. A quiet passage of dark beauty precedes a cataclysmic climax on drums and brass, which dies away before the jazzy noise of the third, followed only by a wispy quiet epilogue whose strange beauty requires repeated hearings before it is fully grasped. In the most sensational comment on a classical work which I have ever heard, Mellers said "It frightened the knickers off me"; and yes, the general opinion, which the composer's denials have not completely eradicated, was that it expressed the havoc of World War 2 and the desolation which followed. However, Mellers points out that "The Death of the heart may occur in many contexts, especially in our brutishly mechanised world"; and Vaughan Williams

linked the epilogue with Prospero's words (in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*):

"We are such stuff
As Dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep".

I was particularly intrigued to find that this work, which I hadn't heard for some years in its entirety because of its cacophonous third movement, didn't "get through" as in my younger days. The later works of the composer fortify one against its desolation. Many musicians regard it as Vaughan Williams' best symphony - though this verdict is far from unanimous. More widely favoured is the view that his best work of all is *The Masque for Dancing*, by Blake out of the Old Testament, *Job*. I think the *Sixth Symphony* is a magnificent work; but I do not have it on either disc or tape, for I agree with Beethoven's verdict on "furious turmoil": "O friends, not these sounds! Let us attune our voices more joyfully and more acceptably!"

All the RVW Symphonies are very precious, and I now think that No. 3 can hold its own against even Beethoven's work. Will many agree with my discerning, in the first movement of No. 7 (*Antartica*), hints of No. 5 (final phrase) and of the *Serenade to Music* (fanfare)?

Incidentally I was delighted recently when

Your omission of England's greatest symphonist, Ralph Vaughan Williams, seems either inexplicable or deliberately provocative. His No.3 may be too intimate, No. 4 too raucous, No. 6 too destructive, No. 7 a shade too programmatic, and No. 9 too tough; but his *Fifth* is a near-perfect gem, and No. 2 (his own favourite, the *London*) is what I'd take to a desert island if limited to one work, for it covers the entire spectrum of human feeling

Radio 3 broadcast the *Mayor of Casterbridge* incidental music, which I had never heard before, in its "Mining the Archives" series. I shall be requesting this item for "Your Midweek Choice" soon.

**Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, Pimlico Books, 1991.

Frank McManus
Todmorden

MUSIC YOU MIGHT LIKE

In the first of a new series, Robin Ivison explores...

Hubert Parry's *Ode on the Nativity*

Both Elgar and RVW held Parry's music in high regard - "the finest music ever to come out of these Islands" - said RVW of *Blest Pair of Sirens*. While Elgar considered Parry - "the head of our art in this country".

But for many years following Parry's death his music languished unperformed apart from *Jerusalem* and *I was Glad*. Parry was written off by successive generations of music critics, partly no doubt rebelling against perceived 19th century attitudes of academicism and complacency and partly from received opinion in the absence of performances. Even so, a sympathetic critic

such as Frank Howes did not seem to know Parry's chamber music, or fine but unpublished works such as the 4th and 5th symphonies. Criticism stemmed mainly from George Bernard Shaw's strictures on the Oratorios and his cruel, albeit witty, epitaph in response to Elgar's protestations:

"Parry was a damned nice chap.
Had he not been quite so nice
He might not have been quite so damned".

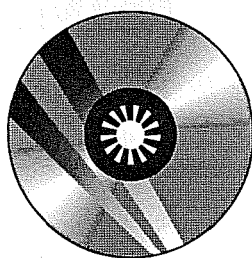
Happily, Parry has been coming into his own in recent years through the sponsorship by the Vaughan Williams Trust of recordings by Chandos records. Both RVW's *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* and Parry's *Ode on the Nativity* were first performed at the 1912 Three Choirs Festival at Hereford and the *Ode* was fittingly recorded, together with RVW's *The Sons of*

Light by Teresa Cohill, the Bach Choir and LPO under Sir David Willcocks on Lyrita SRCS 125. Of this captivating work, Michael Kennedy memorably said that it retains Parry's nobility and sense of rapture as in Finzi's *Dies Natalis*. It is an inspired setting of Dunbar's poem with the memorable refrain *Et nobis puer natus est*. A quite lovely and unknown work - do try it.

Robin Ivison
London

(The February issue will continue the series with Stephen Connock on Finzi's *In terra pax*).

Record Reviews



The Complete Organ Works of Frank Bridge and Ralph Vaughan Williams - Christopher Nickol at the Organ of Caird Hall, Dundee Priory PRCD 537

RVW: *Prelude and Fugue in C minor*; *Two Organ Preludes (founded on Welsh Folk Songs)*; *Three Pieces founded on Welsh Hymn-tunes*; *Lento (from A London Symphony)*; **Bridge:** *Six Organ Pieces*; *Three Pieces for Organ (1905)*; *Lento (from A Little Organ Book)*; *Three Pieces for Organ (1935)*

As far as organ music is concerned, RVW is a one work man. And what a beautiful piece the *Hymn-tune Prelude on 'Rhosymedre'* is, familiar to many, organists and music-lovers alike. But what of his remaining organ music? The two companion pieces to the *Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn-tunes* are not unfamiliar territory having been recorded before (most recently by Donald Hunt for Naxos: 8.550773). *Bryn Calvaria* is an appealing piece in free-fantasia style, which I have to admit preferring to the others. *Hyfrydol* I find a difficult piece to understand, probably because I don't know the original hymn tune.

In 1988 I heard the second performance of Douglas Lilburn's *Prelude and Fugue in G minor*, 'Antipodes' written in 1944. Lilburn was a pupil of RVW, and my initial impression of *Antipodes* was of a similar organ work by his mentor, and the *Prelude and Fugue in C minor* was the piece I had in mind. However, I was wrong. Lilburn's piece is nothing like RVW's big-boned, rather chordal work. Lilburn uses an eccentric 3+2, 2+3 rhythmic pattern in counterpoint (!) whereas RVW uses a more rhythmically regular form. At the first performance of the Lilburn 'Antipodes' *Prelude and Fugue* the organist of Christchurch (NZ) Cathedral stormed out of the organ loft pronouncing the work "unplayable"; it won the first prize in the Philip Neill Memorial Competition for which it was entered in 1944 regardless of the organist's reaction. What was the initial reaction in 1930 to RVW's piece; history remains enigmatically sphinx-like.

The lesser known *Two Organ Preludes on Welsh Folk Songs* are less well-known than the *Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn-tunes*, but are no less beautiful, especially the *Romanza* (on 'The White Rock'). The *Toccata* (on 'St. David's Day') is a more accessible piece than the similarly paced *Hyfrydol* and a good example of RVW's jubilatory style.

The remaining piece of RVW on the disc is Nickol's re-arrangement of Henry G. Ley's arrangement of the *Lento* from *A London Symphony*. It is beautifully played, but I feel that the eleven minutes this piece takes could have profitably been taken presenting the unpublished organ works, the *Passacaglia* on BGC from 1933, *A Wedding Canon* from 1947, or the published

Wedding Tune for Ann from 1943. Yes, the manuscripts for the unpublished pieces are in private hands, but I am sure their respective owners would kindly have provided copies for this recording.

I won't say anything about the Bridge works, except that they are all beautiful pieces played with great sensitivity, as are the RVW pieces. I, as yet, do not know enough about the organ works of Bridge to comment sufficiently, but at least I now have a chance.

This is a beautiful recording in many ways, the organ of Caird Hall is eminently suitable for the programme that Christopher Nickol has chosen.

And there are still enough arrangements of other Vaughan Williams pieces, mainly arranged by others, to fill a second disc!

Mark D. Henegar
London

A further review of this Priory CD...

The Complete Organ works of Frank Bridge and Ralph Vaughan Williams sounds rather grand. In fact neither man was particularly interested in the instrument but, of the two, Bridge was the more involved: 13 of the 20 items here are by him, including the little-known late set of three pieces dating from 1939 (not 1935, as it says on the exterior insert card). Five of the RVW items are based on Welsh folk-songs or hymn-tunes, and the sixth is the *Prelude and Fugue in C minor* later scored by the composer for full orchestra. The curiosity of the disc is the transcription made by Henry Ley, one-time Precentor of Eton College, of the slow movement from the *London Symphony*, here in a revised version by the organist, Christopher Nickol, who says he has performed this 'in the light of examining the full score.' All very lovingly done by both men, though I am not quite sure to what purpose, given the easy availability of orchestral recordings.

What one can say unequivocally is that Mr Nickol (Director of Music at the New Kilpatrick Parish Church, Glasgow) is a sensitive and commanding exponent of both composers and that the organ of Caird Hall, Dundee (a vintage Harrison from 1923 for those who like to know these things) makes some very agreeable sounds.

In 1953, RVW wrote, with a nice touch of self-depreciation:

'...the authorities decided that if I was to take up music at all... I must seek safety on the organ stool, a trade for which I was entirely unsuited; indeed, I have the distinction of being the only pupil who entirely baffled Sir Walter Parratt, though I must add, for my own credit, that later on I passed the F.R.C.O. examination. Sir Hugh Allen always insisted that I must have bribed the examiners.'

Well, bribery or no, we can enjoy such old friends as *Rhosymedre*.

John Bishop
London

Vaughan Williams: Works for Violin & Piano

Six studies in English Folk Song/The Lark Ascending/ Sonata in A major/Two pieces/Greensleeves.

Lydia Mordkovitch (violin), Julian Milford (piano).

Carlton Classics 30366 001 32 (67.44 full price)

The repertoire on this disc alone, make it a very worthwhile addition to any collection of VW's music but add playing of the very highest quality and you have, I believe, a very important release, a must for any lover of English music.

The Lark Ascending in its familiar version for violin and orchestra is of course hugely popular. It was however, the arrangement with piano that the violinist, Marie Hall used to give the first performance in 1920 and surprisingly, this version has never previously been recorded. Is the work diminished in this format, surely the subtle colouring from the orchestra which makes this such an exquisite piece, will be missed? Well, not to my ears, one only has to think of VW's evocative piano writing for works such as *On Wenlock Edge* to realise how well he could compose for the instrument. Those magical, spreading chords that open the music are just as effective on the piano and Julian Milford's sympathetic playing gives exactly the right atmosphere throughout, for the violin to emerge from and fly beguilingly away. Lydia Mordkovitch's playing is intensely beautiful, very emotional and perhaps a little heavier toned than some other soloists. In her hands the ethereal ending has just a tinge of sadness suggesting perhaps that the lark on this occasion at least, is mortal.

The *Six Studies* originally written for cello, are quintessential VW and each is a gem. They seem to me to work just as well in the violin arrangement particularly with the lyrical and rich tone that Mordkovitch realises from the instrument, a very moving performance.

The *Sonata* of 1954 inhabits a very different sound world, a tough work which rewards repeated listening, there is virtuoso, though sometimes harsh music for the violin and the piano part is often percussive, with a much thicker texture than the deft writing of the two earlier works, once again exemplary playing.

According to the comprehensive booklet with this CD, the *Two Pieces for Violin and Piano* were probably written before the First World War and immediately we are returned to that serene and lyrical pastoralism that characterised much of VW's pre-1914 composition. They are certainly rare pieces, this is the first time I have heard of them and I am not aware of any other recording. The *Romanza* (andantino) is followed by a *Pastorale* (Andante con moto) and both are delightful. The *Greensleeves Fantasia* completes this imaginative collection; well played as it is, I still prefer the orchestral version.

The sound recording, made in the spacious acoustic of Forde Abbey, Dorset captures the intimate atmosphere of these largely gentle works, my only quibble is that the piano could at times have been more strongly focused, but it is a very minor one. Don't hesitate.

Robin Barber

Listings

Simon Crutchley provides details of future Vaughan Williams concerts, and includes some performances of English music which might be of interest to members.

October

- 2 Glasgow City Hall Beamish New Commission SCO/Swenson repeated Edinburgh Queen's Hall 3rd/Aberdeen Music Hall 4th/St Andrews Younger Hall 5th 19.30 0141 287 5511
- 3 Bedford Music Club Bax's *Sonata 3*/Fingerhut 01234 354764
- 3 Barbican London - MacMillan's *Cello Concerto* 1st perf LSO/Davis Rostropovich 19.30
- 4 Bromley Music Society - Sterndale Bennet's *Trio* 0181 462 5756
- 9 Chester Town Hall NASH: Rain Graham Scott (pno) 19.30
- 9 London St Johns Smith Sq. - Grainger evening/Varcoe 19.30
- 10 RFH London - RVW's *Symphony 2* LPO/Norrington 19.30 0171 546 1666
- 10 Glasgow BBC Broadcasting House RVW *Symph. 5* BBB Scottish SO/Maksymiuk FREE TICKETS - Write to BBC B H Glasgow G12 8DG (Concert Sec.)
- 11 RFH London - RVW's *Symphony 5/Wasps* Britten's Tenor/*Horn Serenade* LPO/Norrington 19.30 Repeated Oct 18 (also in Hastings 19)
- 12 Guildford Philharmonic Hall - RVW *S6 Elgar Froissart* Walton *Viola Cto* Guildford Phil/Handley 19.30 01483 444666
- 12 Barbican London New Music Weekend - Nova, Guy, Keal, Taverner, Weir, Maxwell Davies, Burrell. All Star cast!! Don't Miss!!
- 13 RFH London BBC S.O./Davis - Walton: *Jo 'burg Ov/Belshazzar's Feast* 19.30
- 15 RFH London - RVW *Symphony 4/Elgar Cockaigne/Britten Cello Symphony* LPO/Norrington 19.30
- 17 RFH London BBCSO/Davis - Walton *Sinfonia/Façade/Symphony 2* 19.30
- 17 Birmingham Symphony Hall - Elgar *Violin Cto*/Chen/Philharmonia Orch/Menuhin 20.00
- 20 Barbican London - Arnold's *Symphony/Fantasia & Simpson's Four Temperments* LSO Brass/Desford Colliery Band 19.30
- 21 London St Johns Smith Sq. Casken *Qt 2* Lindsey Q 13.00
- 23 Liverpool Philharmonic Hall - Arnold *English Dances/Symphony 9* RLPO/Penny 19.30
- 24 Bedford School Schidlorf *Qt* - Maxwell Davies *Qt* 19.45 01234 354764

- 24 London Wigmore Hall Britten *Canticle II*, Lott/Bostridge/Lyne 19.30
- 30 and 31 Liverpool Philharmonic Hall RVW's *London Symphony* Holst *Hammersmith/St Paul's Bax Tintagel* Elgar *Sea Pics* RLPO/Handley 19.30
- 30 Birmingham Symphony Hall - CBSO/Seaman RVW's *London Symphony* Arnold *Gtr Cto* Elgar *Cockaigne* 19.30
- 30 Glasgow City Hall - Maxwell Davies *Concerto for Orch* 10 19.30 and
- Edinburgh Queen's Hall 31st 19.30
- 30 London Barbican - Britten *Requiem* LSO/Chailly (+ Mahler 10) 19.30
- 31 RFH London Elgar *Symphony 1* Philharmonia/Slatkin 19.30
- 31 London St Johns Smith Sq. - RVW *Norfolk R, Lark, Taverner Celtic Req, Bantock Celtic Symp.* Trinity Coll SO & Ch/Corp 19.30
- 31 Liverpool Philharmonic Hall - RVW's *London Symphony*/Holst *Hammersmith/St Paul's Bax Tintagel*/Elgar *Sea Pics* RLPO/Handley 19.30
- 31 Birmingham Symphony Hall - RVW *Greensleeves Fantasia/Elgar Cockaigne* Arnold *Gtr Cto* CBSO/Seaman 14.30

November

- 1 & 2 Buxton Opera House - Walton's *The Bear* - no details
- 2 Warwick Arts Centre Elgar as on 31 Oct 19.30 01203 524524
- 2 Bath Pump Room Finzi & Montgomery works & talk by Christopher Finzi Apollo Ens, New Brandon Singers. No details.
- 3 RFH London - Elgar *Geronitus* Philharmonia & Ch/Slatkin 19.30
- 4 London Wigmore Hall Nash Ens/Friend Knussen *Ophelia Dances* Matthews: *Journey, Mondnacht* 19.30
- 7 Aberystwyth Arts Centre - Mathias *Dance Ov.* BBCNOW/Otaka 20.00 01970 623232
- 8 Bangor Pritchard Jones Hall - Britten *Sea Interludes/Brahms S4* BBCNOW/Otaka 20.00 01248 351708
- 9 Wrexham William Aston Hall as 8th 20.00 01978 292015
- 9 Guildford Philharmonic Hall - Howells *Hymnus Paradisi* Guildford Phil & Ch/Backhouse Talk by Willcocks at 18.15 concert at 19.30
- 9 London St Johns Smith Square - RVW: *Sir John in Love* (concert perf)

- British Youth Orch & Ch/Dean 19.00
- 10 RFH London LPO Family Concert includes Arnold *Scottish Dances* 11.30
- 10 Rhyl Pavillion Theatre as 7th, 19.30 01745 330000
- 11 London St Johns Smith Square, *RVW 3, Shakespeare Songs, Tallis Fantasia*/Trinity Coll Music String Ens & Chmb Ch 19.30
- 13 Chester Town Hall - Arnold *Sea Shanties* London Wind Soloists 19.30
- 13 Liverpool Philharmonic Hall RLPO/Pesek Maxwell Davies *Orkney Wedding & Sunrise* 19.30
- 15 Cardiff St David's Hall - Nyman *Piano Cto* BBCNOW/Otaka 19.30
- 15 Warwick Arts Centre Woolrich: *Certain tune* CLon Sinf/Hickox 19.30
- 16 London St Johns Smith Square - RVW *Tuba Cto* Arion Orch/Elliott/Staitt 19.30
- 17 RFH London BBC S.O. & Chorus/Slatkin Premiere of Bolcom's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* 19.30
- 24 Guildford Philharmonic Hall - Elgar *Enigma* in Chinese Programme (!) Guildford Phil/En Shao 15.00
- 29 Warwick Arts Centre Elgar *Intro & Allegro* CBSO/Rattle 20.00
- 30 Liverpool Philharmonic Hall - Elgar *Introduction/Finzi For St Cecelia* Britten *St Cecelia Hymn*/Walton *Belshazzar's Feast* RLPO/Handley 19.30

December

- 2 Manchester Bridgewater Hall - MacMillan: *World's Ransoming* 10/11 ditto at Barbican/London
- 5 Glasgow FREE TICKETS for a BBC Invitation Concert Ring (in August) 0141 338 2916 - Bliss *Things to Come/Lambert Aubade*/songs by Finzi, Stanford, Parry & Gurney
- 5 Birmingham Symphony Hall - Weir: *Sederunt Principles* CBSO/Rattle 19.30
- 10 & 11 Barbican London - MacMillan *World's Ransoming* LSO/Davis 19.30
- 11 St John's Smith Sq. - RVW *Carols Fantasia* Britten St. Nicholas Eton College Ch/St John's Ch & Orch/Lubbock 19.30
- 14 Birmingham Symphony Hall - Britten *Bridge Variations*/Elgar *Cello Cto* CBSO/Harding/Clein 19.30

(continued on back page)

Answers to Mastermind Quiz (from page 7)

- | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|------------|----------|--------------|-----------------|-------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|---------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|---------------------------|
| 1. White Gates | 2. <i>Hugh the Drover</i> | 3. <i>The Robin's Nest</i> | 4. History | 5. Holst | 6. Max Bruch | 7. The Vocalion | 8. Ingerave | 9. Gervase Elwes | 10. <i>The Wasps</i> | 11. Butterworth | 12. <i>Sancia Civitas</i> | 13. John Bright | 14. Galway horsefair | 15. Alan Bush | 16. <i>49th Parallel</i> | 17. Tess of the D'Urbervilles | 18. <i>Thomas the Rhymer</i> | 19. Mahler | 20. <i>The Bridal Day</i> |
|----------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|------------|----------|--------------|-----------------|-------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|---------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|---------------------------|

Newsbriefs

- A recent castaway on BBC Radio 4's Desert Island Discs was André Previn. Clearly, time has not diminished his passion for VW's music, as one of his eight discs he chose the *5th Symphony* with an extract from the slow movement (from his first recording with the LSO). There was also an amusing anecdote about the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, whom Previn regards as the finest in the world and conducts regularly. In a recent attempt to wean them off their usual diet of Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, etc. he asked to conduct VW's *Tallis Fantasia* in some of their subscription concerts. The string section, as one would expect played it magnificently and it was very well received. The Orchestra itself were obviously very moved by rehearsal and performances of the work and Previn was asked if the composer had written anything else?... and was Thomas Tallis a friend of RVW?!
- Richard Lyttleton, President of EMI Classics, has informed us that *Sir John in Love* will be re-issued in EMI's British Composers series in February 1997. Excellent news!
- Pamela Varey, Parish Clerk at Down Ampney, writes saying that three signs commemorating the village as the birthplace of Ralph Vaughan Williams have been ordered for each entry route into the village. The RVW Society will be contributing to the costs.
- A tribute to Ella Mary Leather (1874-1928) will occur at Weobley Church at 3 p.m. on Sunday 27th October (Tel: 01544 318415).

Listings

(continued from page 23)

January

- 13 Cardiff St David's Hall - MacMillan *Veni Veni*/Britten *St Nicholas* BBC NOW/MacMillan/Glennie 19.30
- 15 Liverpool Philharmonic Hall - Elgar *Wand of Youth*/Cello *Cto/Enigma Variations* RLPO/Handley 19.30
- 16 REPEAT OF ABOVE CONCERT
- 17 Glasgow City Hall - Tippett *Corelli Fantasia* SCO/Swenson 19.30
- 23 Brighton Sallis Benney Theatre Trios by Saunders, Fox, Schultz,

Byrchmore & Musgrave Zafonia Trio 19.45 (contact Dome)

- 24 Warwick Arts Centre - Walton *Portsmouth Pt Ov*, RVW *Lark*, Holst *Planets*, Delius *Summer Garden* RPO/Handley 19.30
- 25 Vicar's Hall, Cathedral Close, Chichester - VW Day School Barfoot/Leeman
- 30 RFH London BBC S.O./Schwonwandt Diana Burrell New Commission.

February

- 4 RFH London - Elgar *Symphony 2* Philharmonia/Slatkin 19.30
- 6 RFH London - Elgar *Cello Concerto* Philharmonia/Slatkin/Isserlis 19.30
- 7 Hove Town Hall - Finzi *Clarinet Concerto* Guildhall String Ensemble/Emma Johnson 19.45 01273 709709
- 13 Bedford School - McCabe (new Comm) Raphael Qt 19.45
- 15 Brighton Dome - Grainger Songs C Lon Sinf/Hickox 19.30 01273 709709
- 21 Glasgow City Hall and
- 22 Edinburgh Queen's Hall MacMillan New Comm. SCO/Swensen
- 22 Brighton Sallis Benney Theatre Holst Singers programme tba

March

- 2 Birmingham Symphony Hall - Britten *Three Church Parables* C of B Touring Opera/Contemporary Music Group/Hasley 16.30 - 21.15
- 8 Warwick Arts Centre - Elgar *Cockaigne/Cello Cto/S2* BSO/Litton 19.30
- 8 Birmingham Symphony Hall - Britten *Req.* CBSO & Ch/Rattle 19.00
- 20 Bedford School - Howells *Q* Holywell Ensemble 19.45
- 21 Birmingham Symphony Hall - Rawsthorne *Overture* Walton *Violin Concerto* Elgar *Symphony 1* ENP/Daniel/Little 20.00
- 22 Liverpool Philharmonic Hall - Walton *Symp 1* RLPO/Leaper 19.30

April

- 11 Glasgow City Hall - Handel *Allegro/Penseroso/Cecelia Ode* SCO/Rizzi
- 19 Guildford Philharmonic Hall - Film Music by Waxman, Walton & Korngold Guildford Phil/Brigg Korngold talk at 18.15 concert at 19.30
- 25 Plymouth Pavilions - Elgar Bach *Fantasia Enigma* BSO/Moldoveanu 19.30 01752 229922

May

- 1 & 6 Birmingham Symphony Hall - Britten *Spring Symphony*, Delius *First Cuckoo* CBSO/Rattle 19.30

Peter Katin recalls recording *The Old 104th*

Yes, I recorded *The Old 104th* for EMI, it was one of those "short notice" recordings, and was actually sparked off by a remark I made at the time to Sir Adrian Boult - to the effect that I could not persuade EMI to record me: it was purely Boult's efforts that got me that recording and I did not record anything else for them.

Sir Adrian was at that time recording all the Vaughan Williams symphonies, and it was realised at a very late stage that a "filler" for the *Ninth Symphony* was required to make up the time for the LP, and that's how I got caught up in it.

My main recollection of the piece after all this time, is that the piano part was "fiendishly difficult" and "very hard to carry off", though regretfully I have not returned to the work for another assessment since those days.

I have recently been recording Schubert on a Clementi square piano of 1832. A very rewarding experience. I am rather afraid of recording all the Chopin *Études* next year, but I always wanted to do them, so I can't back out now!

MOSTLY MUSIC

Second-hand orchestral and vocal scores of operas, oratorios and songs by RVW and many other composers, for sale in Central London. Visits by appointment or postal service available.

Why not call? We may have that out-of-print work you have been looking for, for all these years...

Eva Hornstein

Tel/Fax:- 0171 723 1572

Next Edition:

February 1997

Frank Dineen on
VW's folk-songs
collected in Ingrave