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SPECIAL 125TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

A personal message from Ursula Vaughan Williams:-

I am very interested to know that Ralph's operas are being performed in the *Vision of Albion* Festival to celebrate Ralph's anniversary. Ralph was fascinated by opera, and he hoped that this would be taken as a serious aspect of his work. It was often given to young amateurs in the College of Music - a good idea, but it did not work easily. However, it taught him to realise to use his ideas and he found it to be exciting.

He loved Hugh because of his fight. With *Sir John in Love*, he found the magic in the

awful jokes and we remade them, leading to the music rightly chosen.

And *Pilgrim*? That grew for nearly a lifetime. When he had the chance given by a performance, he searched for a director and the task was given to Dennis Arundell - he, as an actor, a musician and a brilliant producer made the work marvellous. It was a satisfaction that gave Ralph comfort and pleasure.

After all this - what can I say about Ralph's life? He gave everything to do all the things he wanted to do and felt that he did it - from the beginning to the end of his life he lived like Shakespeare, he enjoyed the world that all men truly know.



*Ralph and Ursula in 1954
courtesy of Ursula Vaughan Williams*

character of Shakespeare's friend, and composed music to feel and to inspire the singers. In the Synge play he made the music for the girls, for the son and for the mother. Her cry was Synge's understanding of her children's death. In *The Poisoned Kiss* he rewrote the libretto to remove the

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VAUGHAN WILLIAMS AND FINZI

The RVW Society is publishing a new book of essays edited by Lewis Foreman called *Vaughan Williams in Perspective*. One of the papers is by Stephen Banfield, and is reprinted here in full....

WHEN RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS RETURNED FROM the First World War to find himself, along with Holst, the musical man of the moment, projected through one of those sudden culture shifts into a position of seniority and authority, he could expect to attract disciples. He soon did, and the young Gerald Finzi, thirty years his junior and tied to the apron-strings of a widowed Jewish mother in Harrogate, was a model one. From this beginning a rather remarkable relationship developed, and I should like to chart its course more or less chronologically, and follow that with a number of general points.

Picture, by way of comparison, the young Brittenite after the Second World War; the SPNM groupie rallying to the cry of 'Maxwell Davies' in the mid-1960s; or the schoolboy or -girl subscribing to NMC records and following the progress of Weir, Martland, MacMillan and Turnage today. We need such flawed analogies if they can shock us into grasping that, in attaching himself to the pastoral school of Vaughan Williams in the early 1920s, Finzi felt sure he was getting straight to the iconoclastic heart of British contemporary music. 'By the way', he wrote to an older, cosmopolitan friend, Vera Somerfield, in 1923,¹ 'it was most amusing to see a Nation & Athenaeum critic saying "I distrust romantic rustics, folk songs, folk dancing, madrigals..."!! I distrust the theatre, I distrust sonatas, I distrust symphonies.' He bludgeoned her repeatedly with his artistic manifesto. A nationalist credo above all, its Bible was the new periodical *Music and Letters* which began in 1920, its saviours Holst and Vaughan Williams, its high priests and their learning the other constituencies that appeared in those early issues of the journal - Cecil Sharp and folksong, Plunket Green

and English art song, R O Morris and Tudor counterpoint, Violet Gordon Woodhouse and early keyboard instruments. 'Now that Holst is recognised,' Finzi told Somerfield:

I expect you'll find many people wanting to make him out German. In 'Music & Letters' (no 3 July 1920) there's an article on Holst... by Vaughan Williams. This is what he says: you may as well learn it by heart.

'and it may be well to add here that "in spite of all temptations" which his name may suggest, Holst "remains an Englishman" [...] on his mother's and grandmother's side he is pure English; on his father's side there is Swedish blood, but the Holst family came to England from Russia, where they had long been settled, more than a hundred years ago. There is a good deal of unclear thinking prevalent on the subject of race and nationality. Everyone is to a certain extent of mixed race' etc etc.

So you see Holst is no more German than Grieg was Scotch (His Grandfather was a Scotsman) [...] Please propagate [*sic*] 'Music & Letters' as I'm told it's in a bad way.

Finzi was virulently on his guard against accusations of either degeneracy or parochialism that might attach to this new religion of British music. Buttonholing Somerfield again, he wrote:

...your eyesight failed you in the vision of young students from the RCM - spectacled & weedy. What about those who are so like other people that you don't know that they are students? Musicians have a tremendous record. When your athletes are slipping into the grave at 40 with ruined hearts, Parry gets well over 70. Stanford & Elgar are nearly there: (R.V.W. will get to 80). Verdi & Byrd were nearly 90. Wagner, Tallis, Gluck, Handel, Cherubini, to take a few at random, all over 70. True, Schubert, Chopin, Weber, Purcell, died of consumption but what about the thousands who are dying of it every day - Tennis players included!

Holst, for instance, composes in the summer holidays! The rest of his time is a rush between St Paul's Girls School and Morley College. The R.C.M. & private teaching, half a dozen district choirs & lectures at the most insignificant schools all over England. This from a constitutionally delicate man.

I don't think you have the least conception as to what Art is. Art is ordinary conversation & like

speech is to bring affinities into spiritual contact. This is quite straight forward.³

He was still only twenty-one when he wrote this, and while lacking anything much in the way of a professional portfolio - no formal education, but a training of sorts under Bairstow and Ernest Farrar - if he could muster such passionate articulation at that age, it was not surprising that in time he should become a special friend of his hero.

Farrar had set him up, telling fifteen-year-old adolescent pupil about the fresh young composer on the London scene remembered from his own RCM days. Farrar had got to know Vaughan Williams personally at that time, and Vaughan Williams was to see the connection come full circle nearly half a century later when he was staying with the Finzis at Ashmansworth after the first public performance of his *Oxford Elegy*. On that occasion Joy Finzi, Gerald's wife, wrote in her journal:

G referred to [the] fact that he had used a quotation from the Matthew Arnold poem in a very early orchestral work *Harnham Down* (now a bungalow village!). VW seemed amazed that G knew about this work which had been discarded nearly 40 years ago. He had incorporated some of its material into the new work. Later he posted G the early MS of *Harnham Down* for G to look at. G found it all rather touching, & remembered Ernest Farrar's enthusiasm for it round about 1916. Then VW was the rising young composer & the order of the day was 'out-of-door' music, Whitman, Norfolk jackets, pastoral impressions. It all seems so far away & though the beauty of these musical counterparts of the English water colour school will one day be re-felt, for the present it is a turned page. *Harnham Down* has something of the VW we know in it, but has a good deal of amorphous impressionistic harmony which has long ago been discarded from his vocabulary.⁴

Finzi took his mother to see Vaughan Williams's birthplace at Down Ampney while they were on holiday in the Cotswolds in March 1921, prior to moving to the region the following year. 'His father had the living about 40 years ago,' he explained to Somerfield:

¹ Gerald Finzi, letter to Vera Somerfield, September 1923. Most of Finzi's surviving correspondence is in the Bodleian Library and exists only in photocopy, the original letters having been destroyed by fire.

² Gerald Finzi, letter to Vera Somerfield, 24 November 1920.

³ Gerald Finzi, letter to Vera Somerfield, 22 January 1923.

⁴ Joy Finzi, journal entry, 19 July 1952. Joy Finzi's journals are in the possession of Christopher Finzi.

so we rang the vicarage bell & delighted the vicar by telling him that the house was the birthplace of a celebrity. (He hadn't even heard of RVW!) Mother had tea with a dear little aged hunchback aunt who kept house for her nephew, while I was shown over the house from top to bottom so that there c^d be no chance of missing the room where our hero was born! Many will make the pilgrimage but we are the first!⁵

This seems fairly precocious for a young man not yet out of his teens, and must surely have been partly an extension of hero-worship of Farrar, killed in action in 1918.

As for Vaughan Williams's music, there is plenty of internal evidence of its assimilation by Finzi at this time, probably score by score as they were issued, and I shall say a little about that at the end, though this paper is more about the friendship of the two men. But how many Vaughan Williams's performances he managed to hear before his move to London in 1926 at the age of twenty-four is difficult to determine. He may have gone to one of the first of the *Pastoral Symphony* in London early in 1922, and his much later description, in an article on Howells, of the 'pastoral whatnots by younger composers' that followed in its wake was probably meant to include himself. He knew the *London Symphony* before he was twenty,⁶ and said it belonged to Vaughan Williams's 'great period.'⁷ And he went to most of the Three Choirs Festivals in the first half of the 1920s, finding Vaughan Williams 'as glorious as usual' at Worcester in 1923.⁸

This reference may have been to the man rather than his music, since the only Vaughan Williams performed that year was *Lord, thou hast been our refuge*, but what he meant by it, and whether or when he met Vaughan Williams during this time, is unclear. A letter he wrote the older composer in November 1923, makes no acknowledgement of previous contact, yet somehow he elicited his criticism of a song he had composed in January 1923, a setting of Hardy's *Only a man harrowing clods* that later became the third movement of his *Requiem da camera*. We know this because he annotated an alteration on the manuscript as being Vaughan Williams's suggestion. The letter was about permission to quote the

folksong *The truth sent from above* in his Christmas anthem *The brightness of this day*, basically a three-verse harmonisation of it. Vaughan Williams and Mrs Leather of Weobley had collected the tune in Herefordshire, and as so often in Finzi's life, there was a sequel many years later when he and Joy and Ralph and Ursula Wood drove out to see Weobley during the 1949 Hereford Festival.⁹

To what extent Vaughan Williams took note of the name and the man Finzi at this early stage is another unknown. He certainly did him a good turn, however, for he was one of the adjudicators of the 1924 Carnegie music awards, along with Hugh Allen and Dan Godfrey, and marked Finzi's *Severn Rhapsody* 'A-, well worth doing'.¹⁰ It got published and performed, and Ursula Vaughan Williams in her biography implies that her husband's knowledge of Finzi began with this submission.¹¹

Speculation ends as we reach the second phase of the relationship. Finzi undertook a course of study with R O Morris in London in mid-1925 and moved to the capital the following January, continuing to consult Morris as an informal pupil, junior colleague and friend for several years afterwards; Morris was in fact the hub of his professional circle, which soon included Howard Ferguson, Arthur and Trudy Bliss, Edmund Rubbra, Robin Milford and others. Morris and Vaughan Williams, as is well known, had married two sisters of the formidable Fisher family and even lived in the same house, 13 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. Finzi ensconced himself not far away, near Sloane Square, and there was a good deal of trafficking in cats (and their photographs) as well as scores between the two abodes.

In November 1927, perhaps at Morris's prompting, Vaughan Williams asked to take a second look at the score of Finzi's *Violin Concerto*, his first major work completed in London. Written for Sybil Eaton, it had had an incomplete and unsatisfactory performance, conducted by Sargent, in May 1927, before which Finzi had consulted Vaughan Williams, who now decided he wanted to conduct it at a Bach Choir concert in Queen's Hall in February 1928. (He performed Milford's *Double Fugue for orchestra* on the same occasion, though this was not a première). It was potentially Finzi's big break, though it led to as much agonising and constipation as empowerment, for the composer was not happy with the work and withdrew it. However, there can be little doubt that

Vaughan Williams had faith in Finzi's potential and was not 'just being kind', perhaps unlike Morris who, for all his support and friendship, according to Howard Ferguson¹² did wonder whether Finzi, never a musician with natural fluency and in no sense an executant, would make the grade. At the last rehearsal of the concerto, as Eaton related to Finzi's mother, Vaughan Williams:

made a speech to the orchestra saying that he very much wanted the work to go well, for although the composer from youth & inexperience had miscalculated his effects in places he liked the work, & believed that he (G.) w^d do great things some day.¹³

'Was'nt [*sic*] that nice?' she added.

Finzi was still in awe of Vaughan Williams, who towered above him in physical as well as artistic stature. Shortly before going into a sanatorium (which he dubbed 'The Caliphate') for several months with suspected tuberculosis in the spring of 1928, he wrote to Ferguson:

Perhaps I shall just manage to do a two part invention in *The Caliphate*, for as V.W. said the other day, we can all compose away from a piano, but it sounds quite different when we play it! I told him, by the way, and he asked rather significantly if I sh^d be allowed visitors. But that is too much to hope for.¹⁴

It was too much to hope for, though Morris and the Blisses did visit him there. Nevertheless, an important friendship gradually matured and equalised, probably with ambition and determination on Finzi's part behind his diffidence. The diffidence in any case may not have been apparent, for he was an urgent and lively conversationalist in sympathetic company, though against this must be weighed Adeline Vaughan Williams's rather severe and remote presence, which probably inhibited him until Joy came on the scene.

For Finzi, Vaughan Williams's music would always remain a vital fixed point, probably the most important of all on his compositional horizon insofar as it was contemporary, as the following comments in a letter to Ferguson as late as 1939 testify:

I listened in to the Bloch [*Violin Concerto*] and liked it v. much. It's easy to imagine posterity finding a style of the age & giving V.W. & Bloch as examples, whereas you c^d never find it say, between Bax & V.W. Bloch's music always (no, not always) strikes me as being extraordinarily English! The slow mvt of the *Concerto Grosso*, the 4tet, the sacred service, this work, might almost be written by VW's brother. (Musical brother, not blood!) & if one find, probably by

⁵ Gerald Finzi, letter to Vera Somerfield, 4 April 1921.

⁶ At least, he said he did. This could have been by repute only, for he and his mother were not in Harrogate at the time of its early performance there [see Lloyd in this book?]. However, the symphony was published in 1920, by which time it had received several further performances, in London and Bournemouth.

⁷ Gerald Finzi, letter to Vera Somerfield, 24 November 1920

⁸ Gerald Finzi, letter to Vera Somerfield 7 September 1923.

⁹ U Vaughan Williams: *RVW: a biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams*. Oxford University Press, 1964 p 294.

¹⁰ Carnegie UK Trust Archives, Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh.

¹¹ U Vaughan Williams, *op cit* p 196.

¹² Conversation with the author, 28 March 1991.

¹³ Sybil Eaton, letter to Lizzie Finzi, 6 February 1928.

¹⁴ Gerald Finzi, letter to Howard Ferguson, probably 9 or 10 April 1928.

brother, not blood!) & if one find, probably by suggestion, slight oriental turns, what c^d be more oriental than *Flos Campi*. Of course, biblical is the word, not oriental, but you'll know what I mean.¹⁵

He kept closely abreast of Vaughan Williams's later development, for he not only went to virtually every first performance but was very soon among the select few invited to the celebrated piano and two-piano run-throughs of new works, and over the years probably heard more of these than any other person except the composer. At the same time, while never less than fully committed to the older man and his music, he became critical and discriminating in his reactions. When he heard an early playthrough of *Job* and portions of *Sir John in Love* at Morley College in 1928 he felt that the latter contained 'the worst music VW has ever written,' though the former was 'quite another matter... the beginning and the end... as lovely as the loveliest parts of *Flos Campi*,' as he told Ferguson.¹⁶ He profoundly admired the *Fourth Symphony*, whose two-piano run-through at St Paul's Girls' School on 6 January 1932 must have been a red-letter day for him. As for the *Piano Concerto*, which he had first heard in similar fashion a few months earlier, he was more charitable about it than some of his friends, including Rubbra, when he wrote to Ferguson in August 1933:

I listened-in to VW's *piano con*: & still felt the same about it. The middle of the slow mvt is as lovely as ever & the chromatic fugue [*sic*] magnificent, though much too short (however, he says he's going to lengthen it) but the shape of the last mvt & the material of the first, most unsatisfactory. The chief thing about it is a certain royalty which is in a lot of *Job* & the *Sym*. (Which he's now scoring).¹⁷

Particularly interesting is Finzi's reaction, in a letter to Ferguson, to an early run-through of the *Fifth Symphony* on 16 December 1941:

I had one of VW's characteristic little notes to say that there was a run-through of his new *Sym*: on two pianos at Trinity college, with Foss & Alan Richardson playing, 'to see whether he liked it well enough to go on with it. Your criticism w^d be valued'!!! There was no one else there, beyond Colles & the two pianists' wives, & needless to say the 'sketch' which he mentioned in his letter proved to be the finished work, scored & all. It's got both heavenly & magnificent stuff in it, though on the whole, I sh^d not say that it was quite up to the *Pastoral* or *No 4*. It's a much more reasonable work. After all, the excessive contemplation of the *Pastoral* or the Royal fury of *No 4* does not make for a

reasonable work in either case. This one is better balanced from that aspect, but possibly loses from the defects of its virtues. 4 mvts, a prelude, Romance, Scherzo & passacaglia. Dedicated, in a rather flowery dedication (which I do hope he'll scrap) to Sibelius. The scherzo is very much like the scherzo of *No 4* & some of the tunes in the work are taken from an unfinished opera *The Pilgrim's Progress*. That sounds interesting. I find it difficult to imagine what is left of *The Pilgrim's Progress* after the Shepherds episode has been taken out.¹⁸

The better-chronicled run-through was not until just over a year later, so what was Vaughan Williams doing with the symphony in the meanwhile?

On his part, Vaughan Williams began strongly to admire the younger man's music, particularly his word-setting. After hearing a broadcast of the Hardy cycle *A Young Man's Exhortation* he told Finzi, in an undated letter:

I want to give a lecture one day on the English song - showing how you & Gurney & Robin & one or two others have at last found the musical equivalent of English poetry [-] only what w^d mean an intensive study of all your songs which my natural laziness boggles at[.]

He loved *Dies Natalis* too: 'the nuisance was that it set me thinking of all my sins of omission,' he wrote after an early broadcast of it in December 1943.¹⁹

Ralph and Adeline had gradually adopted Finzi, no doubt responding to a combination of his patrician warmth and energy and his constant potential for becoming a lost soul in London if not watered and nurtured appropriately (for he came close to a nervous breakdown more than once during his bachelor years). He shared their box in the theatre at *Job* in London in 1931, by which time he had for some while been going down to Dorking to play tennis at The White Gates and stay overnight as an escape from the city. He also house- and cat-sat for them there for the same reason for a week at a time in May 1931 and 1932. By 1932 he had met the love of his life, Joy, and seems to have been eager for them to meet her, which they did in March 1933 while he was staying with her in Sussex, not too far from Dorking, in a kind of trial cohabitation before they agreed to get married. Perhaps her sister Mags went too, as chaperone, or just as companion, for Ursula states that by the time of the wedding Ralph had met the two girls 'often' and enjoyed playing tennis with them.²⁰ Joy was a highly charismatic character, and she must have broken any remaining ice where Adeline was concerned: the Vaughan Williamses agreed to be the witnesses - sole witnesses except for Mags -

at the Finzis' wedding on 16 September 1933, which took place at the Dorking registry office. It was not the first time Finzi had elevated an adoptive family above his biological one, and Joy seems to have been happy enough to go along with the principle.

Would Vaughan Williams have done this for any one of his younger associates to whom he was by now irredeemably 'Uncle Ralph'? Or was his friendship with Finzi already unique? I am inclined to the latter view, though it has to be remembered that none of Finzi's mature compositions had yet appeared and it is not even certain that Vaughan Williams preferred them to his early ones when they did. Whatever the truth, Vaughan Williams certainly enjoyed the avuncular role as the wedding approached, though an accident threatened to upset the arrangements, as the following letter indicates:

The White Gates,
Westcott Road,
Dorking,
July 7

Dictated

Dear Gerald

The following facts are true -

- (a) I fell into the brook.
- (b) I broke my ankle [*sic*]
- (c) I mayn't put my foot to the ground for a month.

But -

- (a) I have no pain
- (b) I am quite well
- (c) I was not drunk at the time.

Don't wait to examine those registry steps till my foot is well - but come over one day - both of you - and see us.

I find that Ellen has reported about the steps as follows - there are none.

Mayn't I play the harmonium?

Ys RVW

Ursula's account of the wedding, which took place while The White Gates was being extended, cannot be bettered:

Both [Ralph] and Adeline had become very fond of Gerald, they admired his music, his great knowledge of English poetry, and his love of the countryside, and Joy with her many talents seemed a perfect companion for him. So they welcomed the idea of the wedding as one they could wholeheartedly approve. On their side, the 'young people' as Ralph always called them, felt that 'Uncle Ralph and Aunt Adeline' were the friends they would like to have at their marriage. They did not know how amused Ralph and Adeline were when Joy, given her marriage lines by the Registrar, said matter-of-factly that she would put it away with her dog licence. They all sat among the dust sheets for coffee and cakes, then went their respective ways. But Ralph and Adeline were greatly touched when two little maple trees arrived for the garden as a present from the young marrieds to the long married.²¹

²¹ U Vaughan Williams, *op cit* pp 196-7.

¹⁵ Gerald Finzi, letter to Howard Ferguson, 10 March 1939.

¹⁶ Gerald Finzi. Letter to Howard Ferguson, probably 9 or 10 April 1928.

¹⁷ Gerald Finzi, letter to Howard Ferguson, 23 August 1933.

¹⁸ Gerald Finzi, letter to Howard Ferguson, 23 December 1941.

¹⁹ Ralph Vaughan Williams, letter to Gerald Finzi, 23 December 1943.

²⁰ U Vaughan Williams, *op cit* p 196.

The dog licence story was not Joy's only piece of dotty behaviour that day. She herself said that when the Registrar asked 'Who is the bride?' she looked around the room for her.²²

Ralph was always candid and blunt in his comments, often with a calculated frisson of unorthodoxy. ('It is delightful to hear of VW's remark about not being able to tell whether a movement ended in the same key. That is really encouraging!' William Busch wrote to Finzi in October 1940).²³ Some of this comes through in Ralph's letters to Finzi (the other side of the correspondence does not survive). That is, it does once they can be deciphered - one has a vivid mental picture of the whole family sitting around the breakfast table excitedly trying to do so, for his handwriting was the worst ever. But his laconic brevity tended to cancel out the plain speaking in terms of real self-revelation. What are we to make of this cryptic request in a letter of 25 July 1937?

Now another subject

Could you send me a complete list of all gramophone records, pftc duet or solo arr of Sibelius symphonies
I want these

- (a) because, as you know, I can't read a full score
- (b) because, being no longer able to compose, and having by my mode of life unfitted myself for any useful occupation I think it is time I learnt something about music[.]

we passed through Aldbourne the other day where

- (a) Hon: bought an ice
 - (b) we failed to spot your house
- My love to Joyce

Against this apparent openness, and reminded by his comment about passing through Aldbourne, one has to remember that Adeline's personality and severely arthritic condition put a strict limit on equality and reciprocity of hospitality between the two couples. I do not think she ever visited the Finzis, though they often visited her, which means that Dr and Mrs (first) Vaughan Williams must have been just about the only couple among their close friends not to have stayed in the guest room at Ashmansworth, which Ralph, who did stay there on his own and later, many times, with Ursula, used to say had the best view in the world along with Mycenae. Joy kept the geographical lines of communication open by sending Adeline cowslips from Aldbourne with monotonous regularity. Ralph advised Gerald on all matters to do with his amateur orchestra, the Newbury String Players (founded in 1940), from how to get around petrol rationing to how to

acquire and benefit from a professional leader, and was eventually persuaded to come and conduct them and the massed choirs in the Newbury Festival of 1945. He was impressed, and perhaps not only by the musical standards Gerald had managed to squeeze out of them - they performed his *Tallis Fantasia*, against his initial advice - for he wrote a few months later: 'I enter a strong protest against your excellent orchestra which includes several young & lovely women (including your own wife) being described as "old ladies"'.²⁴ In 1936, Gerald had sent Ralph a copy of his newly published set of Hardy songs, *Earth and Air and Rain*, with justified pride and the resolve that from now on there would be 'no more songs' for a while. 'What is it going to be[?]' Vaughan Williams asked, adding: 'You must remember what was said about Madame d'Arblay [:] "that she must

serious work on his magnum opus, the setting of Wordsworth's 'Immortality' Ode for tenor, chorus and orchestra. He meant to dedicate this to Vaughan Williams, proof enough of the strength of feeling in the relationship and importance of the older composer's influence, and may already have planned it for Vaughan Williams's 70th birthday in 1942. But the Second World War and other circumstances intervened and Finzi, disappointed, had to settle for offering him a Shakespeare song cycle, *Let Us Garlands Bring*, instead. Adeline kept careful tabs on the affair by persuading Finzi to remove the word '70th' from the dedicatory title page. Finzi sketched the beginnings of a setting of 'Crabbed age and youth' which may have been intended for this cycle; perhaps it was as well that it never got anywhere, with its refrain line of 'Age, I do abhor thee'. *Let Us Garlands*



*Finzi and VW at the Three Choirs Festival, Gloucester 1953
courtesy of Oxford University Press*

see that the works of art kept pace with the works of nature[.]"²⁵ Finzi had every intention of making the works of art keep pace with the works of nature - his two newborn sons - and was knuckling down to

Bring was performed by Robert Irwin and Howard Ferguson at a National Gallery lunchtime concert devoted to Vaughan Williams, and rather set the seal on the pre-eminence of Finzi amongst Vaughan Williams's composer friends, since he was the only one to share the platform with him at this focal event and it was Joy and Gerald who threw the lunch party afterwards - a lavish gesture in wartime. There was a BBC

²² Joy Finzi, conversation with the author, 30 October 1990.

²³ William Busch, letter to Gerald Finzi, 15 October 1940.

²⁴ Ralph Vaughan Williams, letter to Gerald Finzi, 3 August 1945.

²⁵ Ralph Vaughan Williams, letter to Gerald Finzi, 23 November 1936.

concert of brief tributes by others in the afternoon, but Finzi's cycle stayed in the forefront with its own broadcast, with strings, a few days later.

After this, the dedication of *Intimations of Immortality* was deflected to Adeline, who survived long enough to hear it broadcast in 1950 but died the following year. In the meantime Ursula Wood, a poet, had become a friend of both Vaughan Williams and, through him, of the Finzis, whom she first met at the 70th birthday concert shortly after the sudden death of her first husband. For the rest of her life Joy was particularly close to Ursula. Gerald introduced her to Gilmour Jenkins, his boss at the Ministry of War Transport (where he worked as a civil servant during the war), and since this made for a tight circle of friendship almost without Vaughan Williams, it is easy to see why after Adeline's death a wonderful new lease of life was enjoyed by all parties, with Ralph growing younger by the day at its centre. He eventually married Ursula, of course, and then at last the two couples could get out and about together, staying at each other's houses - the Vaughan Williamses exchanging the increasingly dowdy and unloved White Gates for an extremely smart flat in Regent's Park - and partaking of huge, lively house parties, organised with characteristic grace and efficiency by Joy, at the Three Choirs Festival, which became a focus for their social life after the war. Photos of Gerald and Ralph together at these festivals really do make of their friendship something to celebrate, and there survives a particularly good back view of them marching off somewhere conspiratorially, Gerald brisk, lively and short as ever, Ralph shambling along with walking stick and hearing aid. The story is well known of how the Finzis took the Vaughan Williamses up Chosen Hill, to see the setting of one of Gerald's pieces and youthful experiences, during the 1956 Three Choirs Festival (which was their last one as well as the Finzis'): he caught his death there from the sexton's children in the form of chicken pox, from which Hodgkin's Disease had destroyed his immunity, and died only three weeks later, by which time Ralph and Ursula were on holiday in Majorca. Rather than dwell on this, perhaps the best way to savour the great flowering of conviviality that all four of them enjoyed in the 1950s is to quote from Joy's journal entry for 7 December 1951:

to Oxford for the 1st performance of Wellesches [sic] opera *Incognito* [...] Met V.W. & Ursula for dinner before. Dent was there also. Long opera over 11.30 - home [to Ashmansworth] by 12.30. Ovaltine & bread & cheese in the kitchen warmth & then sat over the wood fire talking. Cats perched on V.W. - at 3.30 he said 'I hope I am not keeping you young people up' [...] He was first up next morning & walking out to see the day while I made breakfast. Went home after lunch.

So much for the chronicle; now for the general points. I have five. The first is that the influence of Vaughan Williams's music on Finzi's is so obvious that I have not thought it necessary to dwell on it. It can, I believe, be expounded chapter and verse in many instances, from Finzi's earliest compositions onwards; but in those early works it is perhaps Holst whose idiom stands out the more and proves a more flexible tool with which he can work. Nor is it necessarily the whole of Vaughan Williams's style that one notices in Finzi: the rapt diatonicism, slow of pace, heavy of texture, lucid and sometimes austere in effect, is what gets taken up most pervasively. It is the Bachian side of both composers with which we are dealing here, very much a specific residue of the mid-1920s (Vaughan Williams's *Concerto Accademico* was a particular influence on Finzi, coming at the time of the young man's own *Violin Concerto*). And that diatonicism, with its modal tendencies, is only a part of Finzi's style, just as it is only a part of Vaughan Williams's, though it is often taken for the whole in both cases. They are very much farther apart when they move beyond it, which Finzi had to do - in my view, with the help of Bliss and the continental romantics rather than more pastoral models - in order to mature, though I think he did take in the furious chromaticism of Vaughan Williams's *Job* and *Fourth Symphony*, for it is given out again occasionally.

This leads to the second observation, which is that they gave and received mutual advice and criticism but it was not always to the point. Vaughan Williams seems to have responded to the musical personality of the young Finzi but did not necessarily understand the older Finzi's stylistic imperatives. He didn't like the *Grand Fantasia*, whose passionate, romantic use of minor-key chromatics represents probably the biggest single breakthrough in Finzi's idiom. Nor was he particularly enthusiastic about the *Oboe Interlude*, Finzi's first mature publication. 'I went right through it twice yesterday - I like it[.] Rather different perhaps from your style as I know it - but all you all the same (including some "wrong notes"!)' he commented in August 1936 on receiving the score.²⁶ Other technical points made on receipt of Finzi's scores rarely strike one as going to the heart of the matter, either in appreciation or censure. Nor am I quite sure why he felt Finzi needed the lecture he gave him in March 1945 when he was sent the score of *Farewell to Arms*. 'Don't call it "small beer",' he wrote:

because it isn't & you know it isn't. If you did think so you ought not to have published it[.] But I hope you have a pride in your own work - which is quite a different thing from the modesty

²⁶ Ralph Vaughan Williams, letter to Gerald Finzi, 16 August 1936.

which sees the vast difference between the final result & what we all feel of our work it might have been - so don't denigrate your own work[.]²⁷

On the other side, Finzi knew perfectly well that Vaughan Williams used to court his friends' criticism at the new works' playthroughs only to ignore it entirely. Here is Joy's journal account of that of the *Eighth Symphony* in April 1955:

Lovely spring day[.] Up to London to hear first private, run through of VW's new symphony[.] He has been working on this about a year, but has kept it secret tho' we have known about it most of the time. He had asked Howells, Bliss (Arthur & Trudy) Rubbra, Frank Howes, Scott Goddard (these two personally not as representatives of the press) Alan Frank & ourselves. Roy Douglas, who had done the vetting & copying played it through twice. V.W. in fine form and playing his usual little game of pretending that he wanted our criticism. He said he didn't know whether it was the product of intellect & without any real impulse behind it, but it is quite clear that the only criticism in which he is interested is that which co-incides with his own doubts. There was one section [of] the 1st mov which E.R., A.B., H.H. & G.F. all independently agreed was a dead patch. It turned out to be a passage which he had only recently re-written. We asked to hear the earlier version & all agreed that it was better than the last. V.W. agreed that he might re-write it. But when all the others had gone he seemed to suggest that he wdnt alter it at all.²⁸

Nevertheless, Finzi must have felt flattered when Vaughan Williams asked him to go through *The Pilgrim's Progress* libretto, which he did, responding with detailed support and criticisms in November 1945 (he strongly disliked Bunyan's reappearance in the Epilogue, and feared 'Something of the same effect if, after the end of "Neptune", you heard "Chocolates & Cigarettes"').²⁹ It was not the only time Vaughan Williams solicited written criticism from him, the most dramatic - and touching - coming after the failure (which they both acknowledged) of *The Sons of Light* (1951) and probably precipitated by thoughts or discussion of retirement at the age of 80, which he had just reached. He wrote to Finzi: 'I want you, and my other friends, to tell me, like the policeman did to Mrs Sheldon Amos at Piccadilly Circus, when I ought to go home as being too old for this job. This probably will not prevent me going on writing but I can keep it all confidential.'³⁰ Now it was Finzi's turn to administer a lecture:

²⁷ Ralph Vaughan Williams, letter to Gerald Finzi, 13 March 1945.

²⁸ Joy Finzi, journal entry, 11 April 1955.

²⁹ Gerald Finzi, letter to Ralph Vaughan Williams, 5 November 1945, quoted in Joy Finzi's journal.

³⁰ Ralph Vaughan Williams, letter to Gerald Finzi, 19 October 1952.

Strictly speaking you never wrote a bad work (once you got started) whilst you had to struggle to write, though [you] wrote immature works. After 1920 or thereabouts, when your technique began to get working, you wrote quite a number of unmemorable works. *King Cole*, for instance and *The Poisoned Kiss*, isn't really one of your best works; yet, these were works written amongst your major works... and you would hardly have asked at the time 'shall I stop writing.'

Anyhow, it's a good job you didn't!

S.O.L. will take its place with *Old King Cole* and a few other things, to be looked at by the more curious and enterprising minds of the future who want to know something more about you than the obvious. I should leave it at that and get on with the next work.³¹

One has to read between the lines of this exchange. Gerald, who had a puritanical side, was rather disapproving of Ralph's second creative youth with Ursula (who had written *The Sons of Light* libretto), and perhaps unconsciously jealous of it, for he knew that he himself would never reach that age. He was extremely reluctant to admit the virtues of Ralph's compositions of the 1950s; and there were certainly tensions between Gerald and Ursula.

My third point is that Finzi probably remained slightly overawed by Vaughan Williams not just throughout his journeyman career but throughout his life, regarding him as an object of intimate affection but also 'one about whom most of us feel as Morley felt about Byrd, "never to be named without reverence" (or words to that effect),' as he wrote to Bliss as late as 1942.³² It was not always a matter of respectfulness, since on the occasion just discussed this was the one thing not wanted. But it was also that relations between individuals, and married couples as well, were more formal in those days, at least with older people (those of a 19th-century generation), so it is difficult to tell exactly how to judge their modes of address, though one should try, because they were carefully selected. Vaughan Williams only went from heading his letters 'Dear Mr Finzi' to heading them 'Dear Gerald' when Finzi announced his engagement, after which Adeline, who had also addressed him as 'Dear Mr Finzi', wrote to 'Dear Joyce' instead. He signed off, as a colleague, 'Yrs/RVW', only using his 'Uncle Ralph' designation when writing to Joy as well - that is, until *The Sons of Light* soul-baring, when he became 'Uncle Ralph' in a letter to Gerald alone (unless this was because he was now engaged to Ursula). Touchingly and uncannily, only in his very last letter to Gerald, dating from June 1956, did he sign himself simply 'Ralph'. Almost none of Finzi's letters to Vaughan Williams survive,

but we do know that he was addressing him as 'Dear Uncle Ralph' by 1935.

The fourth point must probably remain somewhat opaque. Finzi's was a confessedly minor musical talent, and his rural seclusion, small output, antiquarian and scholarly interests and general uncompetitiveness - for his avoidance of formal education was by desire, not lack of opportunity - bespeak the small man attaching himself to the great one in his dealings with Vaughan Williams. This is a curious form of power relations, for it frequently works; and in any case the larger or senior person can do nothing about it short of rejection. But it becomes a form of ambition in itself: to go round the back of normal institutional procedures and conventional relations into personal collegiality.

So was Finzi Vaughan Williams's Boswell? I don't think so, because it was surely a more equal relationship than that, as this account has shown. Perhaps the key to the equality lay in Finzi's naturally patrician outlook, for just as Vaughan Williams belonged to the network of high-achieving eighteenth- and nineteenth-century families that has been called the intellectual aristocracy, so did Finzi hail from a long and venerable line of Jews who on his father's Sephardi side had accomplished a great deal on the continent ever since the fourteenth century and, more to the point, on both sides securely rode the waves of liberalisation and assimilation in nineteenth-century Britain. This was the facet of his background that he chose, perhaps understandably, to close off, but my point is that his attitudes throughout life seem to have taken for granted, perhaps unconsciously, that he should himself be a responsible and empowered liberal citizen who helped and expected to get things done, just like Vaughan Williams. Underneath the modesty he knew who he was. Indeed, he was almost as adept as Vaughan Williams at fulminating against injustices - John Amis describes him as having looked like a kind of walking *Manchester Guardian*.³³ He wrote to newspapers, gathered signatures, helped struggling young composers (plus old ones - lobbying the powers that be to get *The Pilgrim's Progress* on - and undervalued dead ones such as Parry), told the government or the populace how it should be treating its artists, and above all stood up for the amateur in musical life. With this agenda to share they got on well and equitably enough.

But Finzi was nearly thirty years younger than Vaughan Williams, and the final point must be to ask whether he took the place of the son he and Adeline never had.

Butterworth, more like a brighter, younger brother, perhaps, had fulfilled a unique critical role in Vaughan Williams's life, one that was indefinably but strikingly different from Holst's, and insofar as anyone could replace Butterworth after his death on the Somme in 1916 Gerald Finzi probably did. His own son Christopher even became a kind of great-nephew. It would be good to know why Adeline and Ralph Vaughan Williams never had children - no-one ever seems to ask - just as it would be good to be able to trace how, when and why Vaughan Williams began to be known generally as 'Uncle Ralph', the implication being that with his so-called nieces he stopped being a real, inflammable sexual presence and became a wise and harmless, if flirtatious, elder. (He was a notoriously difficult sitter and Joy Finzi somehow worked her magic on him to accomplish two superb pencil portraits.³⁴) When did he make this generational shift? Was it painless and gradual, or agonised and precipitated? Where was Finzi at the time? The question is the more urgent because we do know that Finzi was in a precise and special sense Vaughan Williams's heir. In June 1949, a few months after the death of his brother-in-law R O Morris, Vaughan Williams wrote to Finzi as follows:

In my will which I made a few years ago I appointed Morris and Bliss as my literary executors. I should feel so happy if you could now undertake it with Arthur Bliss.

Your duties would be to look at all my unpublished manuscripts and decide what is to be done with them i.e. - either to be destroyed - kept in manuscript or published. All that you think ought to be published will be handed over to the Butterworth Trust to whom I am leaving all my copyrights and royalties.

I do hope you will do this for me.

Perhaps you will like to know also that I am leaving you Beethoven's tuning fork which was left to me by Gustav Holst to be passed on to anyone I considered worthy.³⁵

Presumably Finzi agreed to the responsibility and accepted the privilege. But the sad thing is that he died first, and thus never reaped the symbolic reward of the old man's blessing.

**Stephen Banfield
Birmingham**

³¹ Gerald Finzi, letter to Ralph Vaughan Williams, 20 October 1952.

³² Gerald Finzi, letter to Arthur Bliss, 9 October 1942. BBC Written Archives.

³³ J Amis: *A miscellany: my life, my music*. Faber 1985, p 84.

³⁴ See J Finzi: *In That Place: the portrait drawings of Joy Finzi*. Marlborough, 1987.

³⁵ Ralph Vaughan Williams, letter to Gerald Finzi, 5 June 1949.

RIDERS TO THE SEA

With a staged performance due on 19th October in Cambridge, Stephen Connock provides an introduction.

Riders to the Sea is an almost verbatim setting by Vaughan Williams of a short play by the Irishman J M Synge. Composed in 1926-27, it was first performed publicly at



J M Synge in April 1905, a drawing by John Butler Yeats

the Royal College of Music in London on 1 December 1937, conducted by Malcolm Sargent.

J M Synge (1871-1909) had visited the Aran Islands for the first time in 1898 as part of his aim to study the life and customs of the Irish people and to revive the Irish language and legends. He was deeply affected by the primitive lifestyle of the islanders, and their response to the forces of nature, the violence of the sea and the constant reality of death. Synge's impressions may have been coloured by his own circumstances: he had been diagnosed as suffering from Hodgkins disease the previous year. The fortitude of the people of Aran, particularly the women, stimulated his imagination and provided rich source material for his plays, including *The Playboy of the Western World*, *In the Shadow of Glen* and the one Act *Riders to*

the Sea, which was completed in 1901 and first performed in Dublin in 1904.

The play (and opera) is centred around Maurya, who has lost her father, husband and four sons at sea. One of her two remaining sons, Michael, has been missing for nine days. A bundle of clothes from a body found in the sea has been given to her two daughters, Cathleen and Nora, who, fearing they may have belonged to Michael, hide them in the loft away from their mother. Despite deteriorating weather, Maurya's youngest son, Bartley, is determined to leave home to take some horses across the water to Galway Fair. When watching Bartley leaving, Maurya sees an apparition of Michael on the grey mare which Bartley is leading towards the sea. She realises then that her remaining sons, Michael and Bartley will never return. As Michael's death is confirmed and his body is brought into the cottage, Maurya begins her great, final lament with "They are all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me..."

Synge had witnessed on Aran the tragic impact of the sea on the families of fishermen. It was this focus on individual fortitude and courage, in the face of the hostile and implacable forces of nature, which also appealed to Vaughan Williams. He would later be equally moved by the tragic events associated with Captain Scott's journey and death in the Antarctic, as heard in the music to the film *Scott of the Antarctic*. The haunted, sorrowful but ultimately peaceful response of Maurya to the death of all her men-folk produced from Vaughan Williams, music of remarkable concentration, subtlety and - in the final pages - an overwhelming tenderness and nobility.

The ceaseless murmur and swelling of the sea is heard at the beginning of the opera, *lento moderato*, in what is essentially a leitmotiv reoccurring as the sea is invoked

again and again. The early dialogue between Cathleen and Nora is marked *sense misura*, and is recitative in style, to semi-quavers often unaccompanied. The orchestral textures evolve and thicken as Maurya pleads with Bartley not to make the fateful journey to Galway Fair. The singing becomes more expressive as the daughters recognise Michael's clothes and realise he is drowned. The keening of the women's chorus is heard for the first time as the body of Michael is brought in. Maurya's final arioso, marked *adagio*, shows her reaching a calm acceptance as she sings, in music of unforgettable poignancy, 'No man at all can be living forever, and we must all be satisfied...'

**Stephen Connock
Colchester**

J M Synge on an incident he witnessed on the Aran Isles:

"Now a man has been washed ashore in Donegal with one pampooty on him, and a striped shirt with a purse in one of the pockets, and a box for tobacco.

For 3 days the people here have been trying to fix his identity. Some think it is the man from the island, others think that the man from the south answers the description more exactly. Tonight as we were returning from the ship we met the mother of the man who was drowned from this island, still weeping and looking out over the sea. She stopped the people who had come over from the south island to ask them with a terrified whisper what is thought over there.

Later in the evening, when I was sitting in one of the cottages, the sister of the dead man came in through the rain with her infant, and there was a long talk about the rumours that had come in. She pieced together all she could remember about his clothes, and what his purse was like, and where he got it, and the same of his tobacco box and his stockings. In the end there seemed little doubt it was her brother.

"Ah!" she said, "it's Mike sure enough, and please God they'll give him a decent burial."¹

¹ Skelton, Robin: *J.M. Synge and his world* (London, Thames & Hudson, 1971), p. 64.

Chronology - J.M. Synge

1871 16 April - born at 2 Newtown Villas, Rathfarnham, near Dublin. Father was John Hatch Synge & mother was Kathleen Synge (née Traill).

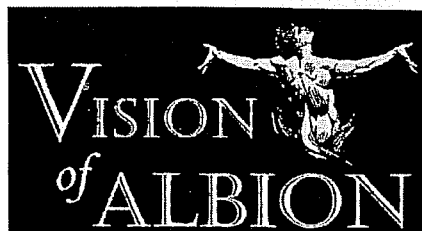
l'Univers, Paris. Proposal of marriage rejected by Cherry Matheson. Met Stephen Mackenna, W. B. Yeats and Maud Gonne. Studied at the Sorbonne.
1897 Joined L'Association Irlandaise on 1



Brigit O'Dempsey, Sara Allgood and Maire O'Neill
in the 1906 production of *Riders to the Sea*

1872 Father died of smallpox. Mrs Synge and children moved to 4 Orwell Park, Rathgar, Dublin
c. 1881 Attended Mrs Herrick's Classical & English School, Dublin.
c. 1884 Attends school at Aravon House, Bray, Co. Wicklow
1885 Reads Darwin - suffers a crisis of faith. Joins the Dublin Naturalists' Field Club.
1887 Began studying the violin with Patrick J. Griffith.
1888 Passes entrance examinations to Trinity College, Dublin.
1890 Family moved to Crosthwaite Park, Kingstown (now known as Dun Laoghaire).
1891 Awarded scholarship in counterpoint by the Royal Academy of Music, Dublin. Gains pass degree at Trinity College. Fell in love with Cherry Matheson.
1893 Studied music at Oberwerth, near Koblenz.
1895 Lodges in Paris; enrolls at the Sorbonne. Also begins lessons in Italian in Dublin.
1896 Took rooms at Hotel Corneille, Paris. Takes breaks in Rome and Florence. Becomes friends with Hope Rea. Stays at the Hotel de

January, then resigned on 6 April. Had his first operation on his neck at the Elpis Nursing Home, Dublin. Writes *Under ether*.
1898 Stays at Hotel St. Malo, Paris. Starts writing a novel. Again enrolls at the Sorbonne. First visit to the Aran Islands. Stays at Coole Park. Moves into permanent rooms in Paris and began learning Breton.
1899 Published 'Anatole Le Braz' in *Daily Express*. Visited Brittany. Second visit to Aran. Returned to Paris.
1900 Published *A Celtic Theatre* in *Freeman's Journal*. Third visit to Aran.
1901 Fourth visit to Aran.
1902 Published 'La Vieille Littérature Irlandaise' and 'Le Mouvement intellectuel Irlandais' in *L'Europeen*. Reviewed Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirtheimne* in *The Speaker*. Wrote *In the Shadow of the Glen* and *Riders to the Sea*. Began *The Tinker's Wedding*. Fifth visit to Aran.
1903 Took rooms in London and meets Yeats's London friends. Met



James Joyce. Took a break in West Kerry. *Riders to the Sea* published in *Samhain*. First performance in Dublin of *In the Shadow of the Glen*.
1904 First Dublin production of *Riders to the Sea*. He attended performance of *Shadow* and *Riders* in London. Visited Kerry and Mayo. *Shadow* published in *Samhain* and New York. *Shadow* revived in Abbey Theatre in December.
1905 Published 'An Impression of Aran' in the *Manchester Guardian*. *The Shadow* and *Riders* published by Elkin Matthews. Became director of the Abbey and toured England with the players.
1906 Translation of his plays performed in Berlin and Prague. Toured Ireland and Britain with the company.
1907 First performance of *The Playboy* in Dublin. *The Aran Islands* published. Went with Molly on holiday to Glencree. Second operation at the Elpis Nursing Home.
1908 Rented a flat in Rathmines, Dublin. Discovered his tumour is inoperable. Convalesced at the home of Annie Stephens before a break in Germany. Mrs Synge died.
1909 Died in the Elpis Nursing Home on 24 March.

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IN THE PARRY OPERA THEATRE
A PRIVATE DRESS REHEARSAL

OF
"Riders to the Sea"
(J. M. SYNGE)

Preceded by "Two Choral Preludes" for Orchestra
and

"Old King Cole"
By R. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Tuesday, 30th November, 1937, at 8-30 p.m.

Conductor: DR. MALCOLM SARGENT, F.R.C.M.

Producers:
MR. CLIVE CAREY, Hon. R.C.M., and MISS MARY SKEAPING

Music prepared under direction of
MR. HERMANN GRUNEDAUM, Hon. R.C.M.

Program of 1937 performance

HAVE YOU NOTICED...?

by Arnold Rosner

As a veteran RVW listener, and new member of the Society, I would like to share some observations and annoyances from here and there. Are these insignificant trivia or do they add up to any importance? Let's start with some recorded editing...

1. Have you noticed the most remarkable moment in the EMI classics version of *Riders to the Sea* when Cathleen asks a woman about Bartley's end? She should sing "What way was he drowned?", and I suppose soprano Margaret Price indeed so pronounced it on most of the recorded takes. However it is equally consistent to sing "What way was he found?" and apparently Ms. Price articulated that way at least once. Now listen to the CD; somehow all opening consonants are preserved loud and clear, - and we hear "FFdrown'd". Perhaps some hapless editor, hearing about curaghs that turn over, and apparitions to one Bridgedara though FFdrown'd was acceptable quasi-Gaelic, and I guess most listeners have thus accepted it, too.

2. Now in the area of omission as opposed to commission, have you noticed what's missing from the Previn *Sea Symphony* CD? The big climaxes before "Oh we can wait no longer" culminate fortissimo at 10:23 of the 4th movement, and the cathartic cymbal crash isn't there! At 10:09 there is a clear one, but that apparently spent the poor fellow's energy. Listen to the old Boult performances and all the myriad progeny following and you may confirm that passage should have the two crashes. How did Previn and the editors allow this?

3. Rob Furneaux in No. 7 of the Journal expresses strong views about the inclusion of narrated superscriptions in Maestro Previn's *Antarctica*. But have you noticed that there is a more extreme recording in this regard? The *Seventh Symphony* is forgivably the least structurally sound of the nine, - I say forgivably because of some of the great music in it, and in regard to its geological/cinematic origins. RVW wrote in the superscriptions himself, - they occur between movements rather than within them, and maybe they cover somewhat for the irregularities in the symphony's form. To the best of my knowledge Ralph did not mean them to be read aloud, but did find this acceptable as in Sir John Gielgud's rendition of them under Boult's direction. Indeed it would seem there are two equally good approaches, - include the prologues either audibly or in the concert or CD programme booklets. But the third version is put forth

we are treated to profuse additional readings from Captain Scott's journal, DURING the movements, interrupting the flow of the music seemingly countless times. This has the effect not of tightening the work but exaggerating whatever faults it has, creating something of a clumsy travelogue.

Maestro Leppard conducted the *Seventh* here in New York with the Juilliard Orchestra about two years ago, and presented it in this overly talky way. Furthermore, it seemed to me that the Avery Fisher Hall organ was weak and not equal to the third movement peroration. A player in that orchestra informed me that the conductor had told the organist to use less than full power, - to "tone it down" as they prepared it. I wonder what music Mr Leppard thinks organists should wait for before they play a real "in pleno".

4. I would like to join Stephen Connock who, in No. 8 of the Journal congratulates Ursula on her 85th birthday. He reports a commemorative concert rendition of the *Tallis Fantasia* preceded by a choral performance of the Tallis original. This is a wonderful idea but not entirely new. For some years in my chequered professorial career I taught at Wagner College, a Lutheran institution on Staten Island. The choir was the most important part of the programme and there was no shortage of hymnals in our classrooms. So just prior to spring break every year I would take my theory classes through a full sight-singing of the Tallis, - designated simply as Third Mode Melody in those hymnals. We would partially analyze it and I would then play them the Marriner recording of the RVW *Fantasia*, a new work for most of them. (Apparently new to the Vienna Philharmonic, too, according to recent reports in the Journal...).

My point here is. --- have you noticed? --- just how much of the material in the *Fantasia* actually is Tallis? RVW uses not only a phrase or two but a complete lengthy melody, - replete with rhythmic changes including that *Greensleeves*-like hint, and Tallis's phrygian-infused harmonisation. Of course, RVW does his share of creation including the sweeping passage in quintuple meter and the chordal climax it reaches.

by Raymond Leppard in his recording with the Indianapolis Orchestra. Not only do we hear the original words but

Indeed, beside its pure sensual excellence, I think the *Fantasia* may be the greatest all-time example of two compositional minds fusing as one, being much deeper and more thorough than such pairings as Brahms-Haydn, Rachmaninoff-Paganini or Mussorgsky-Ravel, which are all relatively mechanical (however ingenious) by comparison.

Of course, we should be reminded as to what we've been up against in crusading for Uncle Ralph. No less an individual than Thomas Beecham said: "Vaughan Williams made the cardinal error of not using a piece by Tallis as a basis for all his pieces."

5. Have you noticed that the whole shape of the devil's second tableau in *Job* depends on taking the score's repeat of the brassy major-minor ostinato middle part? Well, apparently Leonard Slatkin didn't notice, as his New York Philharmonic performance a



Arnold Rosner

little over a year ago left it out. And I think I was the only audience member who realised it.

6. Have you noticed an uncanny similarity between the first allegro/fortissimo phrase after the slow introduction to the first movement of the *London Symphony*, and the moment in *Phantom of the Opera* where the hero unmasked his burn-scarred face? A loud long minor triad for brass, - then eight-notes of four chromatically descending triads. RVW ties the first harmony but the Phantom music articulates it. Could the creator of Phantom have been unfamiliar with RVW-2?

7. Well, turnabout is fair play, so have you noticed an uncanny similarity where Ralph is on the "receiving end"? Referring to the opening of his *No. 6* I believe RVW himself said "The key of E Minor is established through that of F Minor." Indeed he gives us the first three notes of an F Minor scale and then brings in the

(continued on page 14)

ANNIVERSARY TRIBUTE

RVW:

PERSONAL MEMORIES

by Howard Ferguson

The first time I heard any of RVW's music was in my pre-RCM days, when, at the age of 14, I used to creep into the Parry Opera Theatre and listen to rehearsals of *Hugh the Drover*. It was immensely exciting: not only had I never been

to an opera-rehearsal before, but I was also being introduced to this lovely work. A year later, in 1925, came the first performance, which was the earliest of many of VW's that I was lucky enough to hear in subsequent years.

My first meeting with the great man was a year or so later at one of the Petersfield Festival Concerts, for which Harold Samuel had been engaged to play a Bach Concerto. Harold took me along to enjoy the occasion; but I'm afraid I remember it most clearly for Harold's dismay on discovering that his housekeeper had forgotten to pack a white waistcoat for the evening concert. The only available 'spare' belonged to VW; and though Harold was by no means svelte, VW was even less so. Eventually Harold was made more or less respectable-looking with the help of a great many safety-pins.

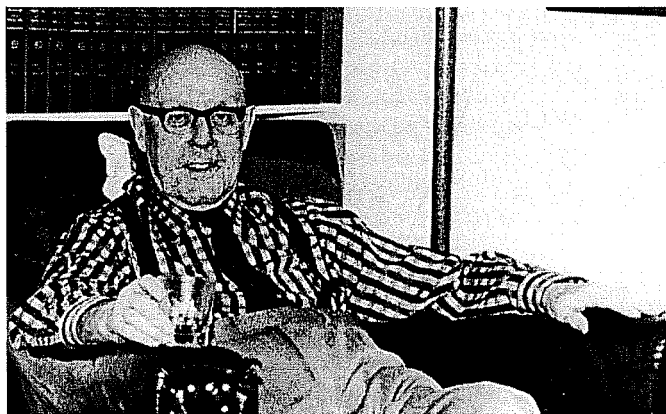
In the mid-1930s Gerald Finzi and I went to The White Gates in Dorking, to play through some thirty songs by Ivor Gurney, who by then was in an asylum, so that VW could choose twenty of them for publication. Both Herbert Howells and Marion Scott (the jealous guardian of Gurney's many MSS) were also present to give their advice. We were all happy to agree with VW's choice, and in 1938 the twenty songs were published by the O.U.P. in two volumes - but alas after Gurney's death.

For my last year at the RCM my composition teacher, R.O. Morris, was in the U.S.A. as head of the theory department of the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. In his absence, VW kindly agreed to take me on as a pupil. Much as I loved and admired him, I never found him as useful a teacher as R.O. - perhaps because I was only his temporary pupil and he was taking the place of someone else. The first thing he asked me

to do was to write a double-fugue in the style of a Handel chorus. I doubt whether the fugue was ever finished;

but he was surprisingly helpful over purely practical matters, such as whether orchestral clarinets should be written on two parts or on one.

After the Second World War, when I got to know him much better through Ursula, I used to be invited in company with other friends to the trial 'run-through' of a new work. At the end of the *6th Symphony* I



Howard Ferguson

happened to say to him, "That's a pretty grim piece." Much to my astonishment, for he was known never to reflect contemporary events in his works, he replied 'I call it The Big Three' - meaning, of course, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin.

RVW and Ravel - a PostScript

I recently borrowed, from the Barbican music library, an American study of Maurice Ravel: *A Ravel Reader: correspondence, articles, interviews*, compiled and edited by Arbie Orenstein (Columbia University Press, 1989, ISBN.0-231-04962-5). This weighty volume sheds further light on the professional relationship between the Frenchman and Ralph Vaughan Williams and, in particular, on the former's attitude to RVW's music.

While Orenstein omits one or two of Ravel's purely social letters to Ralph and Adeline Vaughan Williams - and allowing for the fact that the translations used differ in minor details - his account of the contacts between the two composers faithfully mirrors that set out in Ursula Vaughan Williams's biography *R.V.W.* citing the actual programme for the concert of 29 February

1912, at which (together with works by Fauré and Cyril Scott) *On Wenlock Edge* was first performed in France. Orenstein also confirms that the pianist was indeed Ravel himself - although the place of the Guillaume Quartet (forecast by Ravel in a letter dated 2 February) was in fact taken by the Duttenhoffer Quartet. The singer was Rodolphe Plamondon, in what, according to RVW (as reported by Michael Kennedy in *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*), was the worst performance he had ever heard, 'which was probably why the French liked it'.

In October 1923, at the invitation of Robert Mayer, Ravel was in London to conduct a concert of his own music at the Queen's Hall. During his visit he was interviewed by an anonymous reporter from *The Star*, whose account of their meeting appeared on 16 October. 'As for music in England,' Ravel is quoted as saying, 'you are developing a school of your own in a way that has not been done since Purcell. Elgar is international. Bax, Holst, Lord Berners, Arthur Bliss and Vaughan Williams - particularly Williams [*sic*] - are all doing individual and different work, but they are all helping to create a definite English style, assisted, no doubt, by French, Russian and Italian influences.' Whatever the effect of those 'influences' however, more than a year earlier, as reported in *The Morning Post* of 10 July 1922, in discussing what he perceived as a growing sense of nationalism in music - as opposed to a return to 'social internationalism' since the end of the Great War - Ravel had specifically identified Vaughan Williams as a composer 'leagues removed from the French school'.

Two later interviews by Olin Downes of the *New York Times* are also of interest. In the issue of 7 August 1927, Downes gives a snapshot summary of Ravel's generally positive views of a number of his contemporaries: Bloch, Schoenberg, Sibelius, Stravinsky and Vaughan Williams - the last of whom the Frenchman describes as 'A real artist, who only realised his richness when he learned to be English.' In the preamble to his second interview (*New York Times*, 26 February 1928), Downes further asserts: 'Ravel is the man who told the English composer Vaughan Williams that his music was not sufficiently English - this many years ago before Williams had gained his present position at the head of the English school of composition'. That remark surely provides a fascinating echo of RVW's own comment at the time he was studying with Ravel some 20 years earlier: 'As far as I know my faults, he hit on them exactly and is telling me exactly what I had felt in my mind I ought to do - but it just wanted saying.'

Charles Long
Leatherhead

¹ See article by Michael Nelson in *Journal* No 7.

Mary is captivated by Hugh. *He knows me, he a stranger* she sings in the opera. Section 4, *Love at First Sight*, contains music of remarkable warmth and expressiveness. *In the night time, I have heard you calling, calling, I have no wealth, no home, and I shall find rest, I know no shame or fear now* show Vaughan Williams's ability to write tunes with a Puccinian lyricism and tenderness.

The Best Man in England sets the scene for the prize fight. Contenders are invited to fight John the Butcher. Hugh sees his chance to fight John, and win Mary's hand. The Showman sings another ballad song, *O the Devil and Boneyparty*.

Alone and Friendless is a moment of poignant, tender reflection for Hugh. John has threatened to kill Hugh in the fight. Hugh wonders who would give his life for the prize money of twenty pounds. If he is to die, he will die for Mary - *the fairest thing in all the earth*.

The fight scene (Section 7) is conducted in a combination of rhythms with the chorus divided - Chorus A for John, and Chorus B for Hugh. Although Hugh wins, the celebrations are short-lived for he is soon accused of being a French spy. The fickle crowd turn against him and he is taken off to the stocks.

No. 8, *Hugh in the Stocks* from Act 2, is an *Allegretto* in 3/4 time beginning *Gaily I go to die*. Mary has other ideas, however, and soon lets Hugh free with her father's key to the stocks. But the villagers approach on this May morning and both Hugh and Mary hide in the stocks. They are soon discovered and her father, the Constable and John the Butcher disown Mary. Mary is defiant and, in Section 9, sings *Here, Queen uncrown'd, I stand beside my king*.

In the last section - *Freedom at Last* - Hugh has been released by the soldiers, who recognise him as their drover friend. John the Butcher has been carried off to serve in the King's army. Hugh celebrates his freedom, *Now, you are mine, and now at last your own*, but Mary is uncertain, even afraid. Hugh returns to the sturdy open-air style of Act 1 - *To do and to dare, true love lies there*. The music gains in intensity as Mary sings *Love that has set me free* before reaching a radiant duet, *O the sky shall be our roof and my arms your fire*.

After this realisation of love and faith in the open road, Hugh and Mary depart to a final farewell from their friends and family as the solo violin ascends over the poignant scene.

Stephen Connock
Colchester

Anniversary Tribute

by Michael Kennedy

Born 125 years ago, died 40 years ago next August. These anniversaries mark out Ralph Vaughan Williams as an historical figure from today's perspective, even though to those who knew him, it still seems an impossible term, too cold and clinical a way of describing so warm and vital a personality. But, on second thoughts, he was in many respects an historical figure during his lifetime, a composer who had changed the course of English music in the early years of the 20th century. The current celebration of his 125th birthday provides an opportunity for reassessment of his place in musical history, both national and international. Has it changed since 1958? At that date, one would have unhesitatingly named the four great figures of 20th century English music as Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Delius and Britten. And then perhaps added, in a codicil, Holst and Walton. I don't think I would substitute any other names today, although I might - *pace* RVW himself - feel less convinced about Holst, who has always seemed to me one of the most ambivalent and hard-to-pin-down of all our composers of any substance.

The big difference between today and 1958 is how much more British music we know now, principally thanks to the recording companies. Few writers 40 years ago had had personal experience of all the Parry and Stanford symphonies and choral works, for instance. Now they are nearly all recorded and we can place Elgar and early VW into context. It does not alter our estimate of the merits of the composers concerned, but it enables us to hear how they inter-acted, how they influenced each other. We now know much more Bax, Howells and Finzi. We know much more of the music of Frank Bridge, John Ireland and lesser figures such as J. H. Foulds, Philip Sainton and McEwen, while Rubbra has come in from the cold together with some other composers who were shunned by the fashion-formers of the BBC in the 1960s and 1970s. It has all broadened our minds, extended our horizons, but it still leaves Vaughan Williams as a towering figure. Or so I believe.

It also shows what an 'original' he was, an artist who had carved out his own path, not without toil and struggle, and had followed it to the end, refusing to be diverted from what he knew was the right way for him. In the forty years since his death, Britain has produced some fine composers but none, in my opinion, has come near to possessing the massive and prodigious individuality which marks VW as a composer apart. One might

say the same about Sibelius and Mahler, to name only two. But the music of composers with such a personal voice is often as much disliked as it is admired, and it was no surprise, therefore, to those of us who elevated Vaughan Williams into the pantheon of the undeniably great to encounter (in 1965) the verdict of Donald Mitchell, in a thoughtful and in many ways perceptive as well as provocative broadcast talk, that VW was 'a major voice in our musical culture' but that his art would prove to be minor. That, as Dr Mitchell admitted, was his own guess, and I would say a bad one, but it was made at a time when there was severe critical reaction against Vaughan Williams (and, ironically, against Britten).

The gist of Dr Mitchell's argument was that, unlike Bartók, Vaughan Williams had allowed his folk-song collecting to turn him into a parochial composer, deaf to European innovations and influences and therefore weak in musical invention. In a pungent phrase, he added: 'Musical patriotism, we may think, is not enough.' I doubt if that argument held much water in 1965 but it holds none today. The revival of interest in Vaughan Williams's music among a new generation of listeners and performers is scarcely concerned with musical nationalism and accepts him as a powerful universal voice, again comparable with Sibelius, Janáček and Shostakovich, for all of whom 'musical patriotism' went far beyond local frontiers. The influence of Ravel on Vaughan Williams, never mentioned by Dr Mitchell, seems to me today to have been more far-reaching and longer-lasting than I realised (or at any rate emphasised) when I wrote my book. Far from turning his ears away from foreign influences, VW quite obviously took just what he wanted or needed, and no more, from Debussy, Stravinsky, Hindemith, Bartók, Sibelius and Shostakovich. All these can be heard in his music by those with ears to hear. But, like Britten who also absorbed many and varied influences, he metamorphosed them into his own musical personality. The *Sixth Symphony*, to select only one work, belongs to a European community of influences if we like to 'deconstruct' it, but it remains a Vaughan Williams symphony in every bar. The biggest step forward in appreciation of his music since he died is that we hear it as *his* music, not just English music. And, if we think about it, the giants of music in this century have all gone their own stubborn way unperturbed by whether they were innovators - Debussy, Stravinsky, Strauss, Schoenberg, Britten, Berg, Janáček.

(Continued overleaf)

Another important respect in which perceptions of Vaughan Williams have changed is the abandonment of the old idea - encouraged, it must be said, by some unnecessarily self-deprecating remarks of his own - that he was a clumsy orchestrator, a weak technician. No one today hearing the symphonies could surely seriously challenge the sheer mastery with which they were composed, each one inhabiting a different sound world, each one both structurally and emotionally strictly defined. For a combination of melodic invention, picturesque orchestration and a cosmopolitan musical outlook, it is hard to beat *A London Symphony*. As I have written before (in full knowledge of the likely response from the composer himself had he lived to read it!), the *London* seems to me to be the most Mahlerian of English symphonies. Not that I am suggesting it was in any way influenced by Mahler, whose music I doubt if VW had ever heard in 1911. But it meets all Mahler's requirements that 'the symphony must embrace everything.' It draws on popular music as well as on folk-song, it invokes the sights and sounds of everyday life, and it is visionary and rapturous. I can't help thinking that Mahler would have approved of the ethos behind the Vaughan Williams symphonic canon.

What might he have thought of the music itself? Here we come to the vexed question of Vaughan Williams's standing outside his native country. I doubt if much has changed there since 1958. I am not referring to America, where there has always been a constant hard core of VW enthusiasts who respond to the grandeur and 'wide open spaces' element in many of his works (and to his settings of Whitman), or to Australia and Japan, where his music is also increasingly appreciated. But Germany, Austria, France, Russia? Obviously there are musicians there, too, who appreciate his qualities, but they are a tiny minority. No important German conductor has championed him. I have a friend in Munich who still excitedly remembers Barbiroli's performance there of the *Sixth Symphony*. But that was over 30 years ago and there has been little chance for my friend to re-live that experience except on disc. It seems to me that Vaughan Williams, with other English composers including Elgar, Britten and Walton, is as important a figure in an international context as Sibelius, Janáček and Shostakovich, but unless this view is shared by foreign executive musicians, it cannot prevail. Sibelius, we should remind ourselves, had no standing in Germany until Karajan took him up - and probably has none now that Karajan is gone. One would like to imagine a Salzburg Festival audience being treated to Vaughan Williams, but only *Job*, in 1935 under Boult, has penetrated that enclave. English composers are rare birds in Salzburg.

We can hardly complain if audiences in

Europe are essentially conservative in outlook, for what about our own? Public performances of VW in Britain have increased, but they are not as numerous as they should be, if we are honest. The significant increase in appreciation of his music has come from the record-buying public. The fact that there are several cycles of the symphonies available or in prospect testifies to the accuracy of this statement. Richard Hickox's Barbican cycle of the symphonies was a huge success but, in general, orchestral managements are still too timid, beset as they are by financial problems, and audiences are reluctant to embark on anything they call "modern", by which I fear they all too often mean anything written since about 1920.

So when I say that Vaughan Williams's stature is greater today than ever it was, yet there are not enough performances, do I contradict myself? Very well, as Walt Whitman wrote, I contradict myself. We live in a curious artistic climate in Britain. It is essentially, I fear, a philistine climate, yet the non-philistines are perhaps the most intelligent and fanatical minority of music-lovers to be found anywhere. They have a harder battle to fight than ever before. Over the past few years the decline in attitude to the arts has been catastrophic. We have a BBC, once a bastion of culture, which is so geared to the power of the market-place that it capitulates to the 'sound-bite', to the belief (alas too true) that the average concentration span is only brief and that any serious art which requires study, concentration and perhaps elucidation is therefore "elitist" and should give way to the populist. If this seems a depressing view of the situation, I think it will be widely shared. But what, you may ask, has this to do with Vaughan Williams's current historical standing? Quite a lot, for there is a paradox. At a time when more people than ever before enjoy his music, there is the alarming prospect of there being fewer opportunities for them to hear it. Success is judged by ratings, and inevitably the lowest common denominator will top the poll. Compared with the upsurge of genuine commitment to all the arts which followed the Second World War and was stimulated by the Third Programme and by the enterprise of concert promoters, the scene today is grim. If Vaughan Williams were to return, he would be shocked. However, we few, we happy few, who glory in the great music provided by RVW and his colleagues, should do all we can to support the endeavours of the RVW Society and others like it and to reverse the trend which I have - I hope too pessimistically - outlined above.

Michael Kennedy

(Have You... continued from page 10)

crashing E harmony against the Ab, (after which, in the words of the great Charles Laughton as a senator from South Carolina in the film *Advise and Consent* "The Cayenne Pepper hits the fan!"). Now, consider the opening of Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 4*, where the horns start by emphasising Ab, then provide an F Minor scale culminating on an E harmony against the entering trumpets on that same Ab, creating quite a similar E Major chord in an F Minor context. Surely Ralph knew the Tchaikovsky. I would estimate the duration in years between Tchaik-4 and RVW-6 as roughly equal to the span between RVW-2 and Phantom, by the way.

What is the point of all these ravings? Am I just "sweating the small stuff", making idle chatter? Partially, I suppose, yes, but I think there's a deeper point. Why do ridiculous editing gaffes go unnoticed? Why are essential repeats left out and superfluous verbiage added without any audience reaction? Why are strange coincidental similarities with works of high visibility not observed? Because Vaughan Williams is still not sufficiently "high visibility" himself. Although he is hardly obscure he is still for most listeners an acquired taste, a shaggy-dog, a nice occasional or novelty composer. By personal experience I have a fair acquaintance with the various stations of oblivion and neglect, and I submit bringing RVW to the foremost ranks of great composers is still very much an unrealised goal.

Arnold Rosner,
Brooklyn, New York, USA

Postscript: In a lighter vein, RVW nicknamed the opening tune of the second movement of the 6th "two hot sausages" and I'm sure the reason was that the rhythm of those words fits the music exactly. Try and sing it if you like. I point this out so as to make it acceptable to fit the opening theme of the prelude of the 7th to these words: "Uncle Ralph is here, have no fear, --- for Uncle Ralph is here, have no fear." Try and sing it if you like. (Slightly more phonetic with the American pronunciation of Ralfff, but Rafe will do...).

(Editor's Note:

Arnold Rosner is a composer himself, with nearly 20 works available on compact disc. He wrote his doctoral thesis on the music of Alan Hovhaness and teaches at Kingsborough Community College of the City University of New York. On that faculty his primary activities involve teaching opera, world music, and music of the 20th century).

Record Reviews



Vaughan Williams: *An Oxford Elegy/ Epithalamion*

Chorus Civitas, Chorus Civitas Chamber Orchestra, Robert Taylor conductor, Edward Scott Hendricks, baritone, Gerard Killebrew narrator. Centaur CRC 2299 (full price)

Chorus Civitas from Baton Rouge, Louisiana being an amateur choral society founded in 1993 to provide a platform for local musicians are to be congratulated in recording these two rarely heard works from VW's latter years.

The orchestra and chorus handle the mystical writing of *An Oxford Elegy* well - they convey its special limpid atmosphere of melancholy beauty and nostalgia with sensitivity but this is primarily a work for narrator and though it should make no difference to Matthew Arnold's words, Gerard Killebrew's declamatory American accent does not seem to quite suit this particular text - it seems a world away from Oxford's towers, the Cumnor Hills and Ilsley Downs. The performance does not displace the magical rendition of John Westbrook under David Willcocks and King's College choir with EMI. Further, the narrator has not been recorded well for he is too distant and at times is overwhelmed by the combined orchestra and chorus.

The problems of balance are lessened with *Epithalamion* which is given a splendid, spirited committed performance. The tempi are only a fraction slower than those adopted by David Willcocks in his 1986 EMI recording but are still brisk which is right for this work in VW's celebratory style whose only fault is that there is insufficient variety in the choral and orchestral writing. There is a similarity in the movements which serves to highlight the beauty of 'The Lover's Song, When will this long weary day have end,' for baritone and chorus - Edward Hendricks sings passionately here as he does throughout.

There are useful notes by the conductor Robert Taylor, full texts and the cover boasts a fine watercolour of 'Oxford from South Park'.

If you do not have David Willcocks's version of *Epithalamion* you will not be disappointed by this fine performance for all involved do the work justice and there is a great sense of enjoyment - "Of these glad many which for joy do sing."

K D Mitchell

Vaughan Williams - *Symphonies 1 to 8*
London Philharmonic Orchestra
Sir Adrian Boult
5 CD Box set. Belart 461 442-2

In December 1953, Boult took his orchestra, the LPO to Kingsway Hall to record for Decca the *First, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Symphonies*. He had already recorded the *London Symphony* in 1952 and the *Pastoral* earlier in the year, so with these recordings the first complete cycle - as at that date - was made. Vaughan Williams was present and made a speech thanking the orchestra at the conclusion of the sessions - this can be heard after the *Sixth Symphony*.

Sir Adrian was inspired when making these recordings. This account of the *Sea Symphony* with Dame Isobel Baillie and John Cameron glows with blazing conviction and poetic insight. The *Third* and *Fifth Symphonies* are played with a devotion and intensity which is truly memorable and the *Sixth* has a passion which has rarely been equalled - the Epilogue is truly chilling. The *Sinfonia Antartica* also receives a magnificent performance complete with narration by Sir John Gielgud which may not suit all tastes!

The *London Symphony* which Boult had first conducted in 1918 meant much to him as it did to the composer and again this forty-five year old recording is outstanding. Only the first movement of the *Fourth Symphony* may not be up to the standard of the rest but the remaining movements are well worth hearing.

The *Eighth Symphony* and *Partita* were made in stereo in 1956 and whilst this version of the symphony may not be as resplendent as its fellows it still has exuberance and wit.

Do not be perturbed by the mono engineering as the sound is remarkably vivid especially so in the *Sea Symphony*.

However many sets of the *Symphonies* you have (this does not include the *Ninth* as Boult did not record this for Decca but for Everest) this box should not be missed and at about £4.00 a disc this is a splendid bargain to boot. Writing of these magnificent performances Michael Kennedy stated that posterity 'has the benefit of all the symphonies recorded by their most sympathetic and loyal interpreter' - listen to them and marvel.

K D Mitchell

VW and Ireland

Partita for double string orchestra/Five Variants on 'Dives and Lazarus'/Fantasia on Greensleeves

John Farrer, English Sinfonia. Carlton Classics 30366 00602 (medium priced with Ireland: *Concertino Pastorale, A Downland Suite, The Holy Boy*)

It is the John Ireland music on this CD, which commands immediate attention. The opening movement of the *Concertino Pastorale* is urgent and muscular - far removed from the impression, which might be given by the title of the piece. The ensuing *threnody* opens like one of those wistful Finzi works, but soon reveals Ireland's characteristic edge: a bleaker sound world than Finzi generally creates. The *toccata* finale is equally impressive.

The two movements of *A Downland Suite* are simpler, gentler pieces, superbly performed here by John Farrer and the English Sinfonia in the arrangement of strings. The well-known carol, *The Holy Boy*, is quite delightful.

The Vaughan Williams works begin with the ravishing *Dives and Lazarus* variations. Farrer responds well to the more urgent passages, and the repeat of the melody at the climax of the work is thrillingly achieved. Fine though the performance is, it does not remove memories of Sir David Willcocks's warm-hearted recording (now on EMI CDM 7 64722-2).

The *Partita* also suits Farrer's dynamic approach, especially in the vivid *scherzo-ostinato* and in the closing *fantasia*, which is the most rewarding movement, with its suggestions of the *Fifth* and

Sixth Symphonies.

Those members who have Richard Hickox's recording of the Ireland works (Chandos CHAN 9376) and with several versions of the VW pieces, may understandably hesitate. For those who are unfamiliar with these works, this CD is strongly recommended.

Stephen Connock

VW and Parry

Songs of Travel/ Linden Lea. Robert Tear (tenor), Philip Ledger (piano). Belart 461 4932 (bargain price, with Parry *English Lyrics*).

This recording of the *Songs of Travel* is my recommended version in the *Select Discography*. Now it is available for less than £5.00 together with *Linden Lea* and twenty songs by Parry (previously on Argo ZK 44) Robert Tear and Philip Ledger are both at the peak of their art. With Christmas approaching, an ideal stocking-filler. What else is available at such quality for £4.99?

Stephen Connock

Vaughan Williams: *Job/A Masque for Dancing /The Lark Ascending*. English Northern Philharmonia. David Green (violin) David Lloyd-Jones

Vaughan Williams wrote nothing finer than *Job* (1930), which lies at the centre of his output both chronologically and stylistically. The full range of his musical personality is contained within its masterly structure, which often uses old dance forms, hence the subtitle: *A Masque for Dancing*.

The orchestra is large and the range of expression could hardly be wider. The Naxos recording serves VW adequately enough, but it requires a more than usual encouragement from the volume control. The string tone is not entirely satisfactory - I found a lack of warmth and richness - but whether this results from the recording or the orchestral playing is hard to say. Be that as it may, the result is that tuttis are not always as subtly blended and sonorously rich as in some rival performances (e.g. Davis, Hickox and Handley). This is probably also one reason why - though the puny organ is certainly another - there is an underpowered *Vision of Satan* in Scene 6. And for reasons of sound quality and phrasing, some of the slower music might feel more consoling; the *Epilogue*, for instance can communicate a more penetrating eloquence than it achieves here. That said, the wind playing is often distinguished, including a wonderfully shaped *Minuet of the Sons of Job and their Wives*.

These caveats apart, the performance is most convincing, and it abounds in dramatic power and vitality. Satan is given an appropriately menacing rhythmic attack, and the saxophones of the *Job's Comforters* are splendidly oily in tone. Lloyd-Jones maintains a clear sense of direction, of the whole experience being more than the sum of the parts. This performance, particularly at this price, therefore becomes required listening.

David Greed is an eloquent soloist in *The Lark Ascending*. The balance with the orchestra is most natural, and the central folksong interlude is nicely accommodated into the performance.

Terry Barfoot

BOOK REVIEW

To celebrate the 125th anniversary of Vaughan Williams's birth, the RVW Society is publishing a revised and enlarged edition of Wilfrid Mellers's book *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*. Professor Stephen Town reviewed the book in 1993, and this review is reproduced below.

How to order

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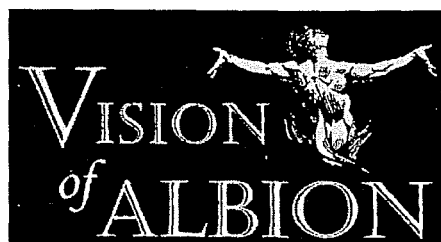
Wilfrid Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*. London, England: Pimlico, 1991 (20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA). 270 pp. 9 pounds sterling. ISBN: 0-7126-5121-7. (Softcover).

In the preface to *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, Wilfrid Mellers states that his book is not a comprehensive study of the life and works of the great composer; rather, it attempts to elucidate "Vaughan Williams's 'message' as a composer who was actively creative through more than half of our turbulent century" (p. xi) vis-à-vis "extramusical props, mostly literary: for Vaughan Williams was a highly literate composer who consciously and unconsciously found inspiration in English poetry and prose" (p. xi). Thus, Mellers's book is concerned primarily with Vaughan Williams the man (i.e. his belief system; his philosophy; his proclivities; and so on) and how the essence of the man, and the influences that made him, are reflected in his work (i.e. the "message" as Mellers perceives it).

In attempting to define who Vaughan Williams was, Mellers begins by describing the composer as being "double" (p. 2), a clever idea taken from a saying of Montaigne, which later Mellers uses to head his third chapter, "The Double Man: Tallis, the English Reformation and the *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*": "It is not possible for a man to rise above himself and his humanity.... We are, I know not how, double in ourselves, and what we believe we disbelieve, and cannot rid ourselves of what we condemn" (p. 45). In applying this idea to the composer, Mellers does not seem to mean that the composer was not an

integrated personality, but rather that within the composer may be found a number of conflicts, contradictions, dichotomies, or dualities, call it what you will, and these form the basis of his subsequent, and interesting, disquisition (e.g. Vaughan Williams was a Christian agnostic, a disillusioned theist; by birth a countryman from rural Gloucestershire, but by nurture a Londoner, a man of the city; by temperament an uncommon common man, while being to a degree socially privileged).

In expounding upon his thesis, Mellers sees "doubleness" in many of Vaughan Williams's works, as well. For example, about the *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*, he writes that "the double man is incarnate in two choirs of strings which must if possible be separated, on the analogy of the divided stalls of a cathedral choir" (p. 50) and that "the enharmony being a doubleness, [is] like a pun" (p. 53). Of the *Mass in G Minor*, he indicates that "doubleness is patent in the Mass's being scored for double choir, as was... Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on Tallis's theme*.... The parallel between the Mass and the *Fantasia* extends further: for as the latter turns doubleness into tripleness by the addition of a solo string quartet to the two string orchestras, so the Mass introduces a third dimension in the form of a quartet of vocal soloists" (pp. 68-69). The *Five Tudor Portraits*, he says, "are poised between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and owe their twentieth-century relevance to this doubleness" (p. 105). When writing about *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Mellers intimates that it is double, although he does not use the word, by calling attention to its ambiguous status (i.e. is it an opera or a church drama?), "at once sacred and secular and never sanctimonious" (p. 124). The same may be said of *Sancta Civitas* (i.e. is it an oratorio or a cantata?), but he does indicate that "doubleness is technically [its] bitonality" and that "doubleness is the essence [of the central, climactic section], for it describes the war between Heaven and Earth" (p. 138). When analyzing the *Fantasia on the Old 104th*, Mellers writes that in juxtaposing Ravenscroft's terse tune, a manifestation of English communal life, with solo piano music, "often in the form of free cadenza, Vaughan Williams offers perhaps the most extreme instance of doubleness in his work" (p. 208). A final example is offered, although several others could be cited -- Mellers's thoughts on the *Ninth Symphony*: "the newness in the finale to the *Ninth* lies in its acceptance of 'doubleness' not merely as the genesis of unity, but as itself a formal principle: for as Vaughan Williams pointed out, the finale is really two movements in one. It is a 'double' movement combining a freely fugal andante tranquillo basically in $\frac{6}{8}$ with an andante sostenuto in $\frac{4}{4}$. It is not a rondo or sonata rondo, for the two movements retain independent courses which overlap but do



not, in the manner of a sonata, argue or conflict" (p. 239).

Mellers goes much, much further than this, however, when he reaches beyond Vaughan Williams and his work to extend his thesis of "doubleness" to many things that, and people who, animated the creativity of the composer. For example, he says of Walt Whitman and John Bunyan, the first two major literary figures to haunt Vaughan Williams's imagination, that their "'doubleness' [was] inherent in... having been... involved in civil war" (p. 18). The Anglican Church was double, he writes, because it "was itself founded on schism and division" (p. 44). Thomas Tallis "was double" (p. 48), he posits, as was his work, because "beneath the apparent calm of Tallis's devotional music we may detect evidence of the religious and political dissensions he lived through" (p. 46). Skelton, a priest and scandalous poet, "was a 'double man'" (p. 94), according to Mellers, "poised... between country and town, Church and State, spirit and (often dirty) flesh" (p. 95). The author implicates Busoni, too, whose "doubleness was between Italy and Germany, between tradition and innovation, between a career as a virtuoso and a life as a composer" (p. 160). Mellers seems to suggest that William Blake, poet, painter and visionary, so important to Vaughan Williams's later creative impulses, was double, even though I cannot find a specific passage where he so labels him.

It is easy to become carried away with these sweeping statements of Mellers, because they are breathtaking and intellectually stimulating; but they suggest that the author may have been too enamoured of his thesis, applying it to examples that may have other interpretations. Still, one reads, thinks and enjoys, as one follows the many implications of his discourse.

An overview of the book's contents shows how much is attempted by Mellers. In the prelude and the first chapter, "Field and Factory, Victoria and Edward VII: The English Choral Tradition" and "The Parlour and the Open Sea: Conformity and Nonconformity in *Toward the Unknown Region* and *A Sea Symphony*", Mellers considers Vaughan Williams in relation to his background in Edwardian England, including his reaction from and against it. The following two chapters, "'The Mind of England': Conservatism and Conservation in *On Wenlock Edge*" and "The Double

Man: Tallis, the English Reformation and the *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*”, discuss his relationship to the English agrarian tradition and the Anglican Church. The succeeding two chapters, “The Ascent of the Lark: Nature and Transcendence in *The Lark Ascending* and the Mass for Double Choir” and “Solidarity and Solitude, Town and Country: The Double Man in the *London Symphony* and the *Pastoral Symphony*”, treat Vaughan Williams’s response to English Nature-mysticism, and to the threats offered to such transcendence, as well as to agrarian society, by the urban-industrial world. The remaining chapters (“The English Eden”, “A Passionate Pilgrim”, “The New Jerusalem”, “The Wages of War”, “Prayer for Peace, ‘within and without’”, “The Aftermath of War”, “Second Childhood”, and “A Double Man’s Last Harvest”) deal with the mythology of the Kingdom of God, the Celestial City and the New Jerusalem, equivalents to a superseded “pastoral Arcadia”, that informed Vaughan Williams’s later music.

Throughout the book, Mellers maintains a high level of inspiration; indeed, it is a virtuosic performance by the author. The first five chapters are the most inspired, the remainder less so; although, having said that, they are immensely profound. By themselves, chapters three and four, mentioned above, repay an investment in the book. Chapter two, “‘The Mind of England’: Conservatism and Conservation in *On Wenlock Edge*”, may be the most deeply affecting in its discussion of Thomas Hardy and A. E. Housman, whose agrarian revocations in poetry and prose sprang from anguished recognition of loss. It is, perhaps, the ring of their words, and the quoted words of other literary figures, foremost in Mellers’s imagination when he created his beautiful prose, which lend such a lyrical quality to many pages of his book. Consider the following: “What [Vaughan Williams] could share with [Elgar] was the religious ecstasy that in [his] music was linked both to his search for a faith and to his longing for the old, lost, Malvern Hills England...” (p. 12); or, “Most harmonisations of British folk songs tend to be or to become chromatic... [and] this imparts a plangent nostalgia -- not merely an awareness that the old world is gone, but also a romantic sense that the loss is a Fall from Eden” (p. 29). Many other examples could be cited, but what must be understood is that placed in their proper context, these fragments of prose become an exceedingly high level of writing which, in its finest moments combining history, poetry and musical analysis to produce synthesis, becomes incandescent.

The choral conductor will find most useful those chapters, or sections of chapters, wherein Mellers discusses the choral music of Vaughan Williams: the preliminary chapter (pp. 1-13) considers the English Choral Tradition; chapter one, *Toward the*

Unknown Region (pp. 18-19) and *A Sea Symphony* (pp. 19-24); a part of chapter four, the *Mass in G Minor* (pp. 68-75); chapter six, *Five Tudor Portraits* (pp. 96-105), *Flos Campi* (pp. 107-110), the *Magnificat* (pp. 110-114), *The Bridal Day* (pp. 114-115) and *Serenade to Music* (pp. 115-117); a part of chapter seven, *Sancta Civitas* (pp. 131-141); chapter ten, *Dona Nobis Pacem* (pp. 171-176); chapter twelve, *Fantasia on the Old 104th* (pp. 207-209), *Hodie* (pp. 209-217) and *The Sons of Light* (pp. 218-219); and, a part of the postlude (very cleverly introduced at the last moment by Mellers), the church hymns (pp. 257-258). The most illuminating of these are the first chapter, which evaluates the importance of Handel, Mendelssohn, Parry and Stanford, Elgar and Delius, and those passages, in the fourth, sixth, tenth and twelfth chapters, which analyze the *Mass in G Minor*, *Flos Campi*, *Dona Nobis Pacem* and *Hodie*.

Perhaps most troubling to some, familiar with Vaughan Williams’s sacred music but unfamiliar with his personal biography, will be the revelation that the composer was a “Christian agnostic”. How is it, they might ask, that the composer completed a setting of the Mass as an exercise for the Doctor of Music degree, edited the *English Hymnal* and *Songs of Praise*, composed the *Mass in G Minor*, the *Dona Nobis Pacem*, a *Magnificat*, two versions of the *Te Deum*, a *Benedicite*, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Sancta Civitas*, and much more; how is it, in the face of such overwhelming musical evidence, that he responded deeply, with imagination and insight, to the implications of a Christian tradition without being a believer? Many writers (among them Michael Kennedy, Hugh Ottaway and the widow of the composer) have commented in passing upon this facet of the composer’s personality, but it becomes a central tenet, mentioned quite frequently, in Mellers’s eloquent book. Mellers’s view is that Vaughan Williams became a composer because music is the art most closely related to spiritual values (i.e. he was not Christian but naturally religious). Though his tenet appears everywhere throughout the book it receives its greatest resonance and poignancy in the final chapter: “[Vaughan Williams’s] testament is that of a man who, though he knows that he does not know, is as sensible of the numinous as he is of mortality: a man who -- in the words of [Walter] Pater... -- lived in ‘an age the intellectual powers of which tend strongly to agnosticism’ and to ‘the mechanical theory of nature’, yet who found ‘the supernatural view of things’ still credible; or if not credible, at least a necessary ballast to any tenable view of the good life” (pp. 242-243).

As perceived by Mellers, Vaughan Williams’s “message”, intertwined with his “doubleness”, is somewhat more problematic to summarize. We encounter it for the

first time in the second paragraph of the introductory chapter (called Prelude): “In the course of a long creative life... Vaughan Williams demonstrated that the human spirit, however abused by industrial materialism and bureaucratic institutionalism, lay dormant, awaiting resuscitation. His life’s work was to be, in Blake’s sense, a rebirth of the Human Imagination, in a new Vision of Albion” (p. 2). Although Mellers massages the meaning of these two sentences in the subsequent seven chapters, we have to wait until the eighth, “The New Jerusalem: Vaughan Williams, Blake and the Book of Job: *Job, A Masque for Dancing*”, headed by a quotation from Blake’s *Milton* (“Awake, Albion, awake! Reclaim thy Reasoning Spectre...”), to find them explicated in all their complexity as they relate to Blake, from whom Mellers has extrapolated his premise. According to Mellers, in Blake’s mythology the Marriage of Heaven and Hell is Jerusalem, “the city of God that Albion, or (British) mankind, had failed to find only because he had looked in the wrong place. Jerusalem is primarily a state of mind, which in an unfallen world would be Eden, or ‘England’s green and pleasant land’” (p. 146). Therefore, to paraphrase Mellers, “in creating, from the premises of English monody, organum and polyphony”, a revived English tradition, “Vaughan Williams was also saying something about the nature and quality of English Life”. He offers, through his life’s work, “a vision of Albion -- of the making of an Englishman (himself), and of the making of twentieth-century Britain” (p. 76) -- hence, the name of the book: *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*.

In the final analysis, Vaughan Williams’s message is his idiom: a synthesis of the re-creative values represented by Elgar and Delius compounded by Vaughan Williams and his fusion of the impulses inherent in New World Whitman, Christian communitical Bunyan, and apocalyptic Blake. And in a postlude to the book, “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”, Mellers considers the English tradition, which he says too readily lapsed into passivity, against Vaughan Williams’s remarkable synthesis. His immediate successors, “all tended to be regressive, as he himself was not. Their returns may be to the lost agrarian tradition, or to the Anglican Church, or to a mixture of both” (p. 245). In the former group, we find the elegists Gerald Finzi, John Ireland and Patrick Hadley; in the latter, Herbert Howells and Edmund Rubbra. The most notable of their works are briefly mentioned vis-à-vis the Vaughan Williams standard, as are the works of the following composers: George Lloyd, Havergal Brian, Robert Simpson, Michael Tippett, Benjamin Britten, Peter Maxwell Davies and, even, Harrison Birtwistle. An American connection to

(continued on page 30)

COASTAL COMMAND FILM MUSIC

by RICHARD YOUNG

Vaughan Williams's foray into the genre of composing film music is very well known in the case of his haunting and atmospheric score for the Ealing film *Scott of the Antarctic* starring John Mills (made in 1948) and later refashioned into his seventh symphony, *Sinfonia Antartica*. Vaughan Williams was searching around for some way to serve his country in World War II, and he asked about writing for films. The result was an invitation from his former pupil Muir Mathieson (musical director of London Films) to write the score for a spy adventure, *49th Parallel*. "How long can I have?" asked Vaughan Williams. "Till Wednesday" came the reply. Vaughan Williams had already "done his bit" for his country in the First World War in the Army Medical Corps on Ambulance duty, then as an officer in the Royal Garrison Artillery. The devastating loss of a whole generation and many friends during this war, including the promising young composer George Butterworth, found its way into Vaughan Williams's poignant third symphony *The Pastoral*.

Now approaching 70, Vaughan Williams enjoyed rising to the challenge of writing for this new medium. His film music for the Crown Film Unit propaganda film *Coastal Command* (1942) is an absolute "gem" of a score and contains some of his finest and moving music showing the composer still at the height of his powers and still developing.

The Crown Film Unit developed from the pre-war GPO Film Unit which was famous for the realistic pioneering documentaries of its Director, John Grierson showing Britain at Work in the 1930s. These included *The Coal Face* (1938) and *Night Mail*, music by Benjamin Britten to the poem of W.H. Auden. Grierson believed in documentary as propaganda itself extolling a vision of national identity and social cohesion. Ironically, Grierson, dismayed by the way the world was going, wished to champion a common humanity and encourage sympathies between nations in the face of the rising tide of fascism.

The GPO Film Unit employed the leading composers of the day. Vaughan Williams was a natural choice for the film director of *Coastal Command*, J.B. Holmes, as he was widely considered Britain's greatest living composer. J.B. Holmes had previously used Constant Lambert to write the music for his film *Merchant Seamen*.

The film *Coastal Command* was made to illustrate and promote to the public the unsung heroes of the command, a somewhat Cinderella outfit compared to the better known Fighter and Bomber commands celebrated in the film *Target for Tonight* showing a Wellington Bomber raid on Germany.

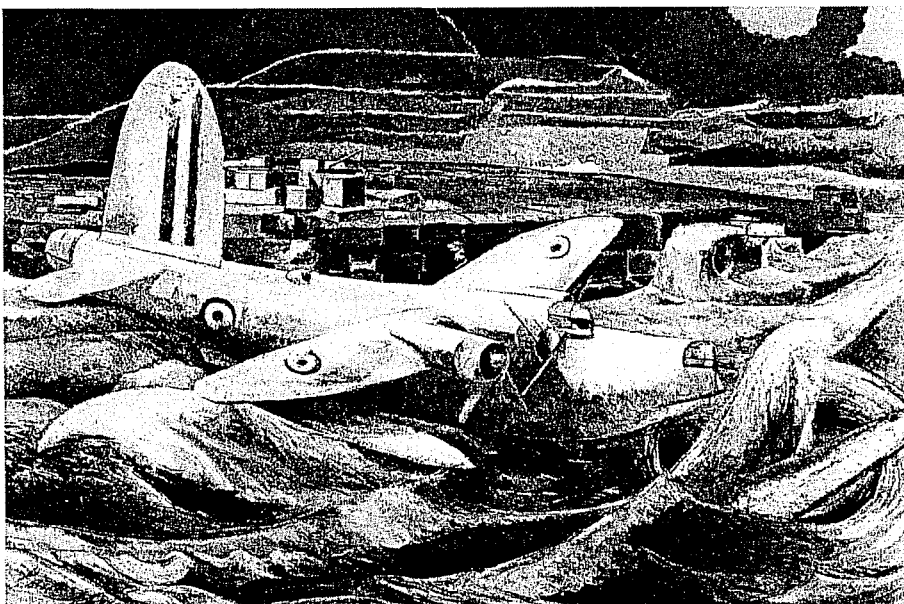
Coastal Command was formed with antiquated aircraft in 1936 and was quadrupled in World War II lasting until absorption into Strike Command in 1969. Its main task was the so-called "Battle of the Atlantic" combating the U-boat menace to convoys carrying vital cargoes of food and munitions to the British Isles. In fact, Churchill said that the U-boat peril was the only thing that really worried him during the War. The Command patrolled and guarded a huge area of ocean from the air, from the Arctic to the coast of West Africa and the Baltic to a thousand miles out into the Atlantic. Its newer capable aircraft could seek out and destroy U-boats, attack well-armed German convoys and help guard our own precious convoys. This work, flying over vast stretches of bleak lonely sea, was unceasing, patient and often humdrum with shifts up to 14 hours long with occasional violent attacks and confrontations with enemy forces. This is all brilliantly captured and evoked in Vaughan Williams's score. The aircraft used by the command included the flying boats, Short Sunderland, Catalina and Liberators, Hudson, Bristol Beaufighter, Bristol Beaufort and other aircraft.



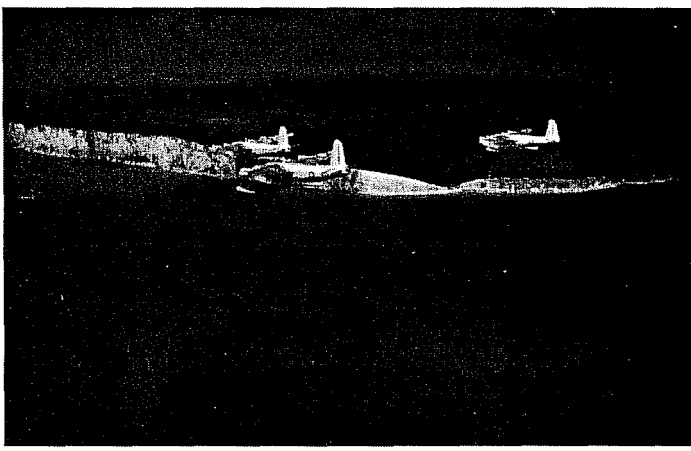
Coastal Command Crest

In the early years of the War, U-boats and Focke-Wulf FW 200 Condor aircraft using bases in Norway, were sinking around 650,000 tons of shipping a month - an unacceptable loss. In March 1943, 39 U-boats intercepted 2 convoys bound for Britain sinking 21 ships. This was the German high water mark, after this, the Battle of the Atlantic was turned in favour of the allies. This was particularly aided by two inventions - the ASV Radar to locate surfaced U-boats at night and the Leigh Light - a powerful searchlight to illuminate them for attack.

After *49th Parallel* Muir Mathieson wanted to follow up with a



Defence of Albion, 1942 by Paul Nash - an official WWII War Artist



Short Sunderlands flying over British Coast

documentary in which the music would have “more of a chance”. Vaughan Williams also wanted a “non-aggressive” war film or one in which the human qualities were predominant. When a U-boat is sunk or an enemy aircraft shot down, Vaughan Williams doesn’t glorify the moment in a jingoistic way, but writes sombre almost respectful music for the enemy going to their doom. Vaughan Williams, was thus given a free hand with the music and a witty essay *Composing for Films* written a few years after, Vaughan Williams summarised his discovery that the best way to write film music is:

“...to ignore the details and to intensify the spirit of the whole situation by a continuous stream of music. This stream can be modified (often at rehearsal!) by points of colour superimposed on the flow. For example, your music is illustrating Columbus’s voyage and you have a sombre tune symbolising the weariness of the voyage, the depression of the crew, and the doubts of Columbus. But the producer says: “I want a little bit of sunshine music for that flash on the waves.” If you are wise, you will send the



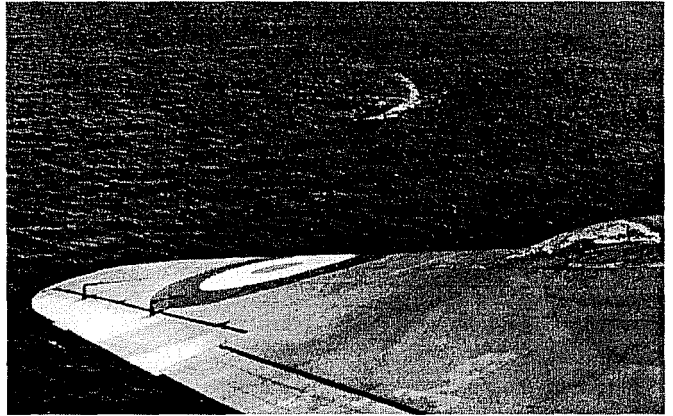
American-built Consolidated Catalina of Coastal Command on Atlantic Patrol

orchestra away for five minutes, which will delight them. Then you look at the score to find out what instruments are unemployed - say, the harp and two muted trumpets. You write in your sunlight at the appropriate second. You recall the orchestra. You then play the altered version, while the producer marvels at your skill in composing what appears to him to be an entirely new piece of music in so short a time.” Vaughan Williams was following one of his favourite sayings “The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life!”

The music produced was of such a high quality that the film was cut to fit the music not vice versa - the normal procedure. Ken Cameron the engineer on the film was speaking for the whole Crown Unit team when he wrote “We knew that here was something great, something indeed, finer and more alive than any music we had ever had before. On the rare occasions when the music was slightly too long or too short to match the existing picture, then it was the visual material which suffered the mutilation. The music for *Coastal*

Command is as Vaughan Williams composed it. It is in fact the picture.”

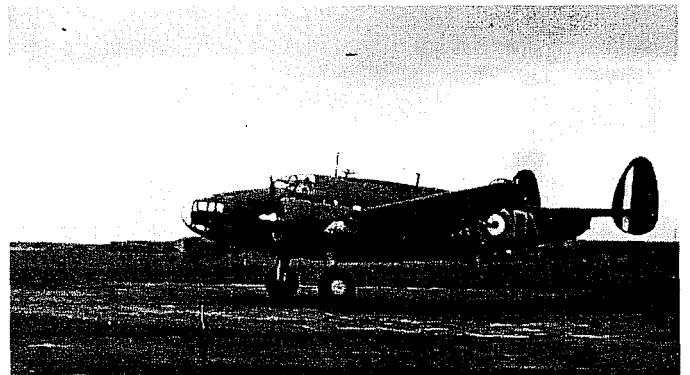
The rich score for the film has marvellous atmospheric orchestration and completely belies the charge that Vaughan Williams was a poor orchestrator - made on several occasions. There are masterly strokes of orchestral tone painting using the “impressionistic brushstroke” points of colour technique learnt from his brief study with Ravel. The music achieves an excellent integration of Vaughan Williams’s opposite and changing styles. It combines his earlier pastoral, lyrical bitter-sweet folk song style with the violent clashes of *Job* and the *4th/6th Symphonies*. It also, in my opinion, is the most successful example of Vaughan Williams’s rumbustious, rollicking style, particularly in the movement *The Hudsons take off*. Ardent Vaughan Williams admirer though I am, I find this style difficult to appreciate in one or two places in other works.



Sunderland banks to go into attack

I first dutifully listened to this music on Radio 3, and like quite a lot of Vaughan Williams’s music, it didn’t make a great impression on me at first. But of course as one gets to know the work deeper it reaches right down into the heart and psyche and whilst other “easy come, easy go” scores dull, it becomes an ever richer treasure trove. Vaughan Williams is *par excellence* the composer whose music is not the notes as written, but the music “between the notes”. There is a deep, warm and generous psychological emotional and spiritual import coming from a very deep place that informs the written notes. His music is great testimony to his teacher and mentor Parry’s dictum that “The ease with which a thing is obtained takes away the great part of the interest and what is got without pains is kept without pleasure.” This is best exemplified in the tender duet of *Dawn Patrol* which is a classic example of what the conductor André Previn described in a radio interview as “the ever so touching nature of Vaughan Williams’s music.”

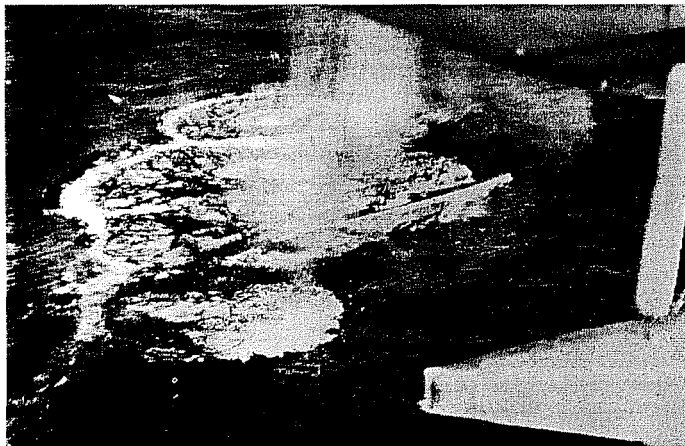
The excellent film and music stands as a great memorial and tribute to the professionalism, bravery and noble sacrifice made by all those



A Lockheed Hudson takes off

of World War II, military and civilian, who worked, toiled and sacrificed and often paid the "ultimate price" to rid the World of Nazi tyranny in what was truly Britain's "Finest Hour". If ever there was a just war this was it, to overthrow a most monstrously evil régime causing untold brutality and suffering. The faces of those newly liberated by the allied forces in the Concentration Camps showing joy, bewilderment, gratitude and hope testify to the "spiritual achievement" of the all-out National War effort.

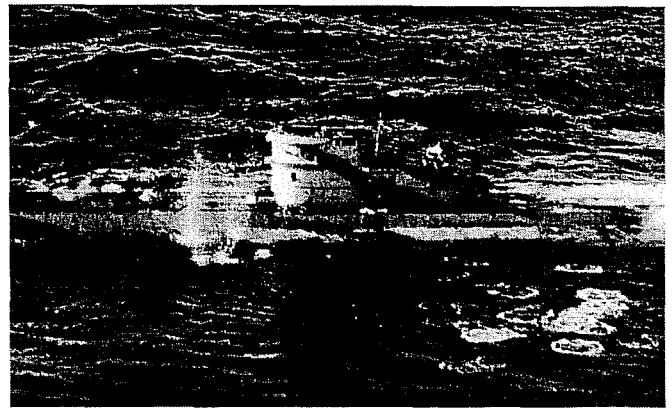
For the film (first shown back in London in 1942) the music was performed appropriately by the RAF Orchestra, conducted by Muir Mathieson. The playing seems a bit rough and ready by today's standards on the film/video but it does contain passages of extraordinary lyrical sweetness - a type of playing that has gone out of fashion and use today. Pilot commentary and other sound effects obscure the music in places on the film and it is best heard in recordings of the Concert Suite; - thought by the late Christopher Palmer to have been made by Vaughan Williams himself not by Muir Mathieson as previously thought. A suite of 6 movements only was conducted by Muir Mathieson and broadcast by the BBC on the 17th September 1942 using the BBC Northern Orchestra. The full suite consists of 8 movements, Vaughan Williams originally omitted the movement *U-boat Alert* to keep a reasonable length. The BBC Northern Orchestra recorded suitable music with "Universal War Themes" for a special BBC Music Service Catalogue. Under wartime conditions the tracks could be used by



Sunderland attacks a U-boat - depth charges dropped

all war propaganda films. The *Coastal Command* music is again used in the RAF film *The Gen* about Arnhem. John Huntley of "Huntley Film Archive" fame worked with Muir Mathieson on films though not on *Coastal Command*. He met Vaughan Williams and described him as "just a lovely man who really enjoyed the challenge of writing film music" and trusted Muir Mathieson totally.

The film is instructive and enjoyable to watch, it follows the belief of John Grieson that "a documentary should be the creative treatment of actuality." The work of *Coastal Command* is illustrated by the story of a single (fictional) operation, and of the various ground and flying personnel involved, particularly the crew of *Sunderland* 'T for Tommy'. The crew is introduced in the course of a routine convoy-escort patrol, which is uneventful for them though their relief (a *Catalina*) sinks a U-boat. The main story concerns the shadowing of a German raider (the *Düsseldorf*) and the *Coastal Command* attacks which leave it ready for a naval death-blow. The raider's attempted break-out is first spotted by a *Catalina*, which watches a torpedo attack by *Beauforts* from Iceland before turning for home. 'T for Tommy', the relief 'shadow', briefly loses the *Düsseldorf* but then guides in a *Hudson* bombing strike. Flying low to spot damage, the *Sunderland* is itself damaged by flak; returning home it is attacked by 4 Ju 88s. Rescue arrives, first with another *Sunderland*, then 4 *Beaufighters*. 'T for Tommy' gets home with 2 crew members slightly injured; a closing sequence shows its departure for duty in West Africa.



U-boat machine-gunned by Sunderland

The Combat sequences are reasonably convincing considering the technical abilities and limitations of the time. The film uses real RAF/Naval personnel instead of actors and is a bit stiff and wooden in places. However, there are charming touches of light relief and whimsy such as when the Captain of *Sunderland* 'T for Tommy' is ferried out on the RAF tender to his aircraft to the accompaniment of *The Grasshoppers Dance* by Gossec. The Captain of 'T for Tommy' has a delightful personality almost a caricature of the "splendid chappie" RAF Officer type. Look out for the amazing way he says "This is your Captain speaking." These comments are made of course with the greatest respect and affection to these heroic people from what now seems another age. The fine shots of the *Sunderland*, *Catalina* and *Hudsons* taking off from Iceland are now valuable archive film from a time when such events seemed common place.

The *Suite* prepared by Christopher Palmer consists of 8 movements:-

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. The Prelude. | 2. The Hebrides. |
| 3. U-boat Alert. | 4. Taking-off at Night. |
| 5. The Hudsons take-off from Iceland. | 6. Dawn Patrol/ Quiet Determination. |
| 7. Battle of the Beauforts. | 8. Finale. |

The score calls for a full orchestra and includes piccolo, cor anglais, triangle and 2 harps, glockenspiel and side drum. The whole suite gives about 23 minutes of music.

1. Prelude

The film opens with the *Sunderland* flying boat at its mooring at Port Ferry Bay in the Hebrides. The prelude opens in a bold, confident scintillating style with a background of tremolando strings and woodwind against which the trumpets in B^b and horns give out this assertive theme, made much use of in the suite later in various guises.



Later, there is a dotted rhythm figure played by flutes, piccolo and clarinets of a cheeky/cheerful nature recalling the "Irish music" interludes of John Ford's Western films.



The movement ends with the opening theme stated *Grandioso*.

2. The Hebrides

This short movement is marked *lento* and evocatively portrays the vast bleak lonely mysterious ocean. It was Richard Strauss the flamboyant orchestrator - who said that using the expressive tone palette of the modern symphony orchestra he could portray "A knife and fork" in music. Vaughan Williams achieves this expectant, mysterious effect using a background of muted strings playing tremolando at *pp* and cymbals (using soft sticks), harp arpeggios, and laconic abrupt interjections by the flute, clarinet and horn. There is then appropriately a lugubrious theme with melisma played and modified by various woodwind over hushed string background. This is finally taken over by the cor anglais until the movement ends in a quiet subdued manner reminiscent of Vaughan Williams's *London Symphony*.

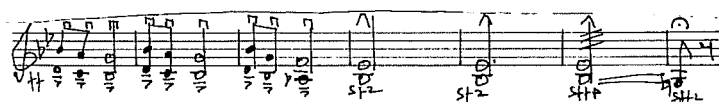


A single stoke on the side drum on the first beat of the very first bar also calls our immediate attention. Later on, there is a cantabile theme on strings over a running figure on harp and clarinet recalling Vaughan Williams's *Sea Symphony* (appropriate use for the subject depicted).



3. U-boat Alert

This movement is marked *presto* *d.=90* and is in a brisk military march style using Vaughan Williams's gallomping forward-moving style. A glockenspiel and side drum add military band colour to the scoring. The end of the movement depicts the sinking of the U-boat and broadens to *Allargando* for the last 7 bars. The 1st violin part is:-



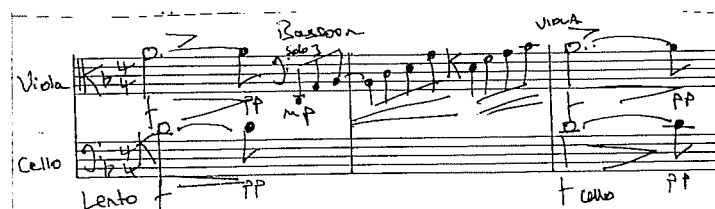
The last *sf*/*ff* bars depict the explosive demise of the U-boat attacked by the relieving Catalina to the 'T for Tommy' Sunderland.

This is made much use of later. Vaughan Williams in this film music, although powerfully dramatic, achieved a seamless flow of music which he seemed to have lost to some extent in a few of his previous works. A clarinet solo intones the *Sea Symphony* theme at the end over a ripple of water chords in the harps using harmonics. The final comments from the brass however end the movement on a more sinister final note:-



4. Taking off at Night

This very short movement is powerfully effective. An agonised cry or sigh is exclaimed by violins and cellos against syncopated triplet notes in the upper strings and woodwind.



This musically paints the vast stretches of bleak unforgiving sea the aircrew patrol for such long hours. A mournful theme played by bassoon tries to move things on, but the inhospitable seascape is again interjected by the cellos and violins. There is repetition of the very opening theme then a soulful figure on solo horn:-



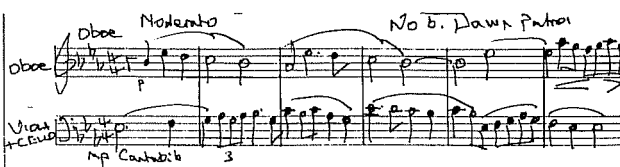
The movement ends with stark, bare sounding pizzicato notes on violin and cello a very economical but telling orchestral effect owing more to Debussy in *Pelléas et Mélisande* than the opulence of Elgar in his *Introduction and Allegro for strings*.

5. The Hudsons Take Off from Iceland

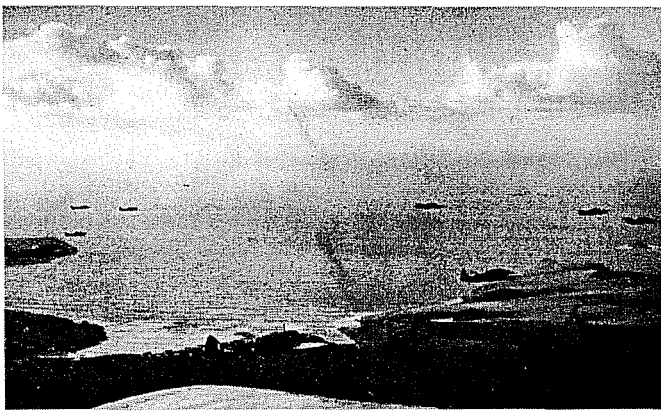
This movement very effectively marries with the film of Hudsons taking off from Iceland. Vaughan Williams portrays the raucous whirling sound of the Hudsons' engines abruptly spluttering to life using this rhythm of strings and timpani.

6. Dawn Patrol (Quiet Determination)

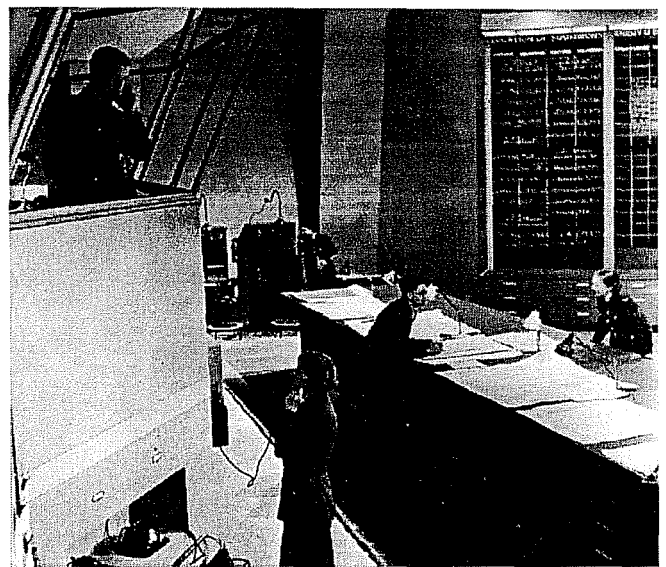
This movement honours the motto of Coastal Command's crest "Constant Endeavour". The movement marked *moderato* opens with one of Vaughan Williams's most beautiful cantabile folk song-like melodic dialogue between viola/cello and oboe/clarinets. Words cannot convey the feeling of this music and as Beethoven said of his *Missa Solemnis* "May it go from the heart to the heart." Vaughan Williams once said he couldn't be inspired to write music unless it first touched him there - as he pointed to his heart.



The violin and flutes use the theme to carry on the contrapuntal dialogue, then it's banded about the orchestra. There is a delightful cantabile rendering of the theme on strings alone presaging the *Fifth Symphony* being worked on also at the time. The movement effortlessly moves from his gentle bitter-sweet pastoral vein to a more grandiose and violent conclusion using the same basic material as if to emphasise the violation of England's "Green and Pleasant Land" during World War II. The last violent chords could have been borrowed from *The Planets Suite* by Vaughan Williams's friend and influence Gustav Holst.



Bristol Beaufort torpedo bombers on patrol



Still from film in the operations room set constructed for the film

7. The Battle of the Beauforts

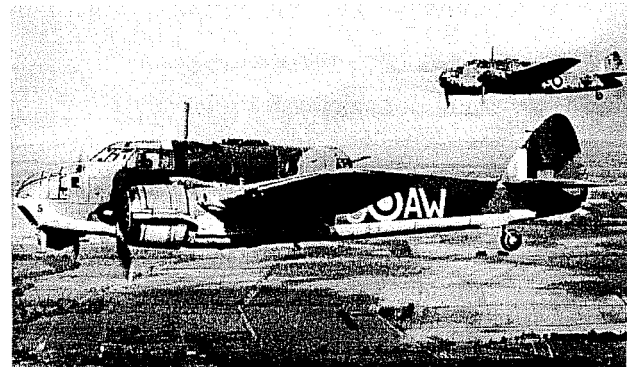
The movement opens in a terse martial style in $\frac{6}{8}$ time allegro. There is a charming swirling interlude of the *Sea Symphony* theme this time on horns over a running figure in upper strings, harp and flute. The movement becomes more menacing. The violin gives this strong imperious theme.



Off beat crashes on timpani and harps produce a sinister, sombre ending.

8. Finale

The movement opens allegro with a heavily clipped and accented use of the *Sea Symphony* theme on trumpets, trombones and tuba over rushing semiquaver figure in the strings. The music slows and quiets, the violins giving this theme.



Bristol Beaufort Mark I

There is a slow crescendo build up again using a truncated version of the *Sea Symphony* theme on brass, and amazing harp glissando flourishes to a *maestoso* section where the *Sea Symphony*-like theme is given fully *cantabile sostenuto* by the strings. This builds up to a climax with a solo horn punctuating with this impatient, imperious theme.



Film/Video/CD

1. The original film can be seen by arrangement for a small fee at the Imperial War Museum Film and Video Unit, Austral St., London SE11. Tel 0171 416 5000.

2. A video version of the film is available Code DD668 from "DD Video, Units 1-3 Tarvin Sands Industries, Barrow Lane, Tarvin, Chester, CH3 8JF. Tel 01672 542254.

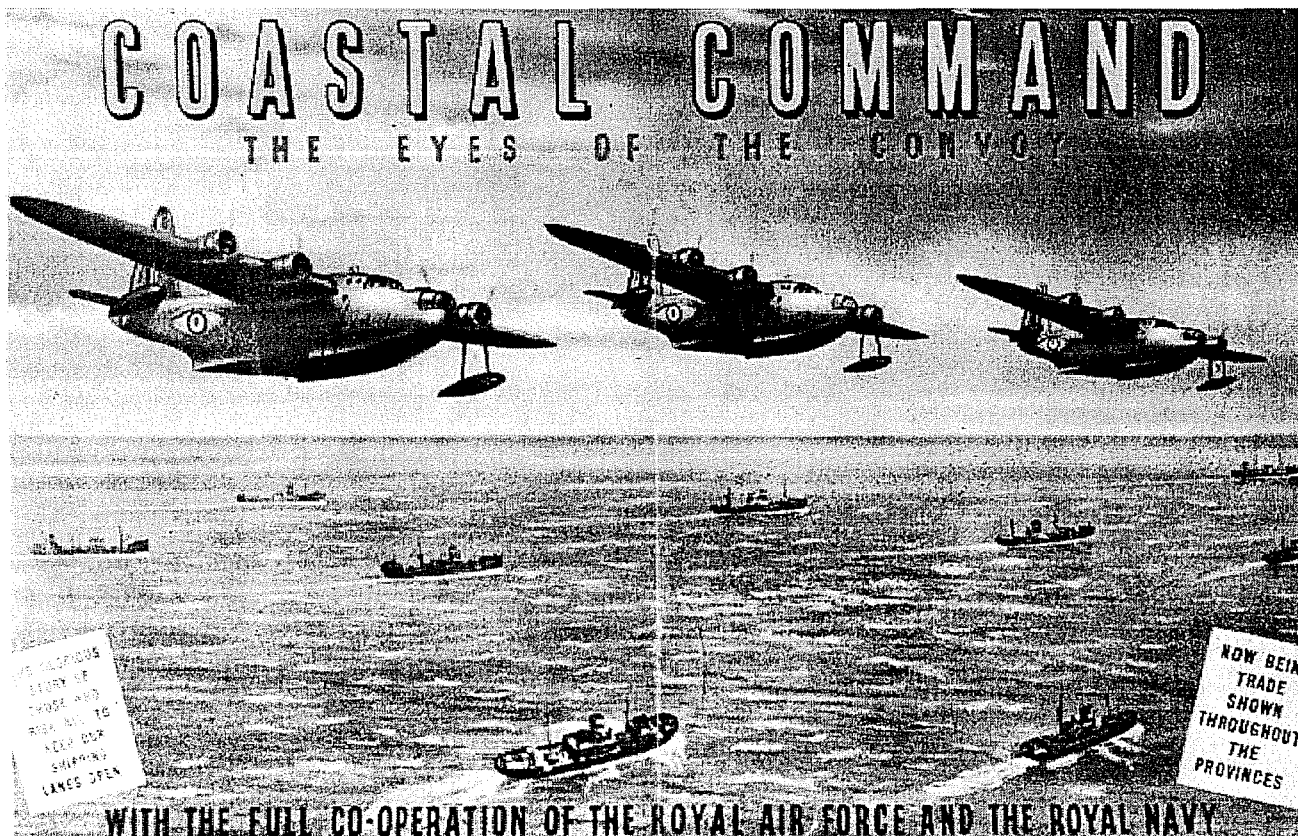
3. CDs Available:-

1. Marco Polo "Film Music Classics" 8.223665. Also includes other Vaughan Williams film music: *49th Parallel*, *Story of a Flemish Farm*, *Three Portraits from the England of Elizabeth*, RTE Concert Orchestra, conducted by Andrew Penny.
2. EMI Classics for Pleasure "Heroes of the Air" CD-CFP 4666 played by the RAF Central Band transcribed for symphonic wind band conducted by Wing Commander H.B. Hingley.

*Richard Young
Southampton*



*Still from film inside Sunderland "T for Tommy". - Captain reviews aircraft log book.
Note effigy of Hitler hanging from roof.*



Poster for the Crown Film Unit's Coastal Command

VW DISCUSSION IN EXETER

by Rob Furneaux

On Saturday May 10th a talk was given to the joint VW and Elgar Societies at the Arts Centre in Exeter by Dr. Relf Clark.

Having not visited the Exeter Arts Centre before, I was keen to see what it was like. The 'Arts' in the South West continue to be a very poor relation to those in the South East, and it was interesting to note that 'The Arts Centre' was a converted school. The talk itself was held in 'Studio Three', but perhaps should have been called 'Class Three', and retained the trappings of pedagogy right down to the blackboard and teacher's desk. Fortunately however, we were not asked to line up outside and scolded for fidgeting before Dr Clark arrived.

Ron Bleach introduced the talk, commenting that this was the first Westcountry meeting of the Elgar and VW Societies. It was certainly notable that the 'Elgarians' were in the majority; some of them indeed seemed to bear a striking resemblance to the man himself - wearing country gentlemen suits and sporting large moustaches. Initially I had to resist the urge to rush down to the nearby cake shop in a desperate effort to put on weight in order to take on a resemblance to VW.

The talk itself lasted just over an hour; its pivotal theme suggested that both VW and Elgar's music were incorrectly titled 'English', but should instead be labelled 'European'. Elgar in particular - it must be said - took a pasting for being Wagneresque; his music being saturated in the sound world of Wagner, Brahms and Dvorak; and although much associated with Malvern and a picture of rural England Dr Clark argued that it was only because the English psyche associated his music with the landscape that the connection has arisen and endured.

VW on the other hand proved more of a moving target; it was difficult for Dr Clark to dismiss such works as *In the Fen Country*, *Norfolk Rhapsody* and *The Sea Songs* as being un-English. He made much of VW's studying with Bruch and Ravel; but of course these were very short episodes in VW's musical life. Ravel may have added a little 'French Polish', but the furniture beneath was what mattered. And after all, what's the use of the icing on the cake without a well made cake.

It certainly was a thought provoking and controversial talk, and I think that in essence the reality of the 'Englishness' situation lies somewhere between the accepted view and the European one of Dr Clark. In the last four centuries it's difficult to argue that classical music has been anything other than solely European in nature. To become a top-notch composer, any twentieth century composer

could do little else but immerse himself in the European tradition. Composers such as Elgar, and in the U.S.A., Barber, produced thoroughly mainstream European Music. Indeed, works such as *Cockaigne* and *Knoxville, Summer of 1915* aren't kidding anyone - they're mainland European in all but title. Others

like VW and Copland went further to produce their own hybrids, which although European in musical language undoubtedly took on a weighty regional accent. It's difficult to label *Rodeo*, or the *English Folk Song Suite* as mainland European. And, in the case of VW it's a language which we've come to cherish and admire.

Of course it would be churlish - on the other side of the coin - to deny that the majority of VW's symphonies have a heftier mainland European feel to them. Therefore it seems to me that a truce should be called and a compromise agreed upon.

Who knows, perhaps somewhere in the celestial firmament there's a printed index card headed, 'European composers: Vaughan Williams - with scribbled in pencil underneath, English Branch.

Dr Clark, having talked about the uncertain identity of VW and Elgar's music for over an hour concluded his talk by unwisely quipping; 'So will the real Edward Elgar take one step forward.' Needless to say I was knocked over in the rush!

Having spent last Saturday afternoon back at school I'm now handing in my homework.

Rob Furneaux
Yelverton

MUSIC YOU MIGHT LIKE

The Trees so High by Hadley

Patrick Hadley's 'Symphonic Ballad' from 1931, *The Trees so High*, was much loved by VW (his teacher at the RCM) and Holst, as good a reason as any to make this curiously affecting work mandatory listening...

The Trees so High was a widespread folksong with mysterious origins. It relates to the tragedy of a young woman forced into marrying a 'pretty lad' who dies exhausted at eighteen. There are many variations of the song, VW himself collecting several, though Hadley uses one of the dozen Cecil Sharp noted.

There are four movements, the first three purely orchestral, the last for baritone and mixed chorus. The structure is fascinating - I make no apologies for quoting Hadley's preface along with every other writer: the first

three movements 'may be said to resemble three independent brooks which flow into one stream at the beginning of the last movement' - an apt description for a nature lover. Each brook represents a fragment of the final song's melody - something that serves to make the piece feel quite literally haunted. The first movement describes an agitated, sombre landscape; an expert depiction of blustering greenery. Other composers are easily discerned, though all three orchestral movements highlight a Hadley fingerprint, that impressionistic 'organic' woodwind sound later used to notable effect in his VW tribute *One Morning in Spring*. A passionate climax at the start of the fourth movement heralds the introduction of the song. The baritone sings the first two verses solo, starting:

*All the trees they do grow high,
The leaves they are so green
The day is past and gone, my love,
That you and I have seen*

with which Housman-like sentiments the whole work is coloured. High sopranos sing the verse relating to the girl's fear of marriage, followed by the falsely reassuring men's chorus representing her father. The orchestration echoes the words quite literally, providing a key to the material heard earlier - an explicit example being the wedding/funeral bell section heard in the second movement. An air of acceptance enters the final verses, when the baritone reappears. (Incidentally, the preface suggests the baritone should stand 'behind the orchestra but apart from the chorus'. A similar direction appears in *Lonely Waters* by Hadley's friend E J Moeran, written concurrently - both composers presumably taking a cue from VW's *Pastoral Symphony*). A false ending offers a pessimistic final few bars, loaded with doubt.

The Trees so High exhibits a remarkably personal sense of grief which Hadley maybe tries to disguise in the preface: 'the moods and ideas underlying the work arose out of this ballad and its tune' he simply writes. What then, in this depiction of a 'simple country tragedy' is the listener to make of that devastating double-climax which opens the fourth movement, a heartbroken outburst almost unique in English music? The tendency to suggest Hadley's experience in the First World War as an overt 'meaning' is an easy way out: although his injuries meant daily pain, Hadley never allowed his disability to conquer him. Eric Wetherell's recommended recent book on Hadley (*Paddy*, Thames Publishing) reveals the composer to be a lonely figure, hiding behind an extrovert exterior - *The Trees so High* really is 'written from the heart'. Vernon Handley's recording is unfortunately no longer available, so rush out and buy Matthias Bamert's Chandos disc (CHAN 9181), which is Gramophone recommended.

Rolf Jordan
The Wirral

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

(a further article in our series)

by Charles Long

In my pre-teen years, during World War Two, the BBC's 'Home Service' provided the bedrock of family entertainment, culture and information. As in many households at that time, the evening 9 o'clock news was regarded as absolutely essential listening, but the items that sandwiched it - such as *Monday Night at Eight*, *ITMA*, *Saturday Night Theatre*, and (in due season) the Proms - lagged not far behind. Indeed, I imagine that, for my father at least, the last-named were rather *more* important than the news. In the early 1940s, I would have been in bed by 8pm, but I clearly remember eavesdropping on the comforting sounds of 'grown-up' activity downstairs, including the 'wireless', and I know that, unconsciously, I absorbed many of the standard classics. Over the years the melodic outlines of the major (if then, for me, wholly anonymous) works of Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann and Tchaikovsky became increasingly familiar. And then, one evening, I heard music that was somehow 'different', and more compelling than anything I had ever heard before. At that time, I would have been quite incapable of putting my reactions into words, but - thinking back - it seems to me that the spare, solemn melody expressed some timeless truth that struck an inner chord of instinctive recognition. It was not until several years later, when I had started to take some conscious pleasure in listening to music, that a second hearing reawakened that memory and I learned that this other-worldly piece was known to mere mortals as *A Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, and that it had been conjured into existence by Ralph Vaughan Williams.

That *was* a name which, by then, I did know. It was unquestionably a name that was very widely recognised in the 1940s, even among the totally unmusical. From today's pop-dominated perspective, it is difficult to appreciate quite what a revered figure RVW had by then become - indeed, I think it is fair to say that, rather like Jean Sibelius in Finland, he was seen as something of a national icon. Of course, over a period of more than half a century one's memory can play some nasty tricks, but I have retained an abiding impression from those dark days that the *Fantasia on Greensleeves* had established itself as a patriotic 'classical pop': certainly I knew it well and recall (age nine or thereabouts) nominating it as 'my favourite tune'.

Nevertheless, at a rather later date, at record club presentations at school (Westminster), I was surprised, and saddened, to find that music I found so involving - such as the *London Symphony*, the *Tallis Fantasia* and *Job* - was often dismissed as tired old tat by my more

musically literate contemporaries. As a sometime member of the school choral society however, I also recall how much more full of meaning than any other music we prepared was the previously unknown (to me) *Serenade to Music*, which we performed one term as a 16-part choral work under the plainly affectionate and committed guidance of our music director, Arnold Foster (who had studied with RVW, and had succeeded Gustav Holst at Morley College).

In the year that I left school, incidentally, the 'house' of generally uncaring young philistines to which I belonged, unprecedentedly won the annual inter-house music competition with a rendering of *Linden Lea*. The so-called 'House Choir' - supposedly comprising *every* house member

broadcast first performance from Manchester, by the Hallé Orchestra under Sir John Barbirolli, of the *Sinfonia Antartica*, on 14 January 1953 - and I was at the first London performance a short time afterwards. I have never really understood the critical expressions of horror at the idea of a pictorial or programmatic symphony and have always retained a strong affection for this work. Curiously, although I was an inveterate film-goer in my younger days, I never caught up with *Scott of the Antarctic* until a television showing a few years ago.

Since my schooldays, I have made a determined effort to explore many areas of music - through radio, records and concert-going - although none has given me such consistent pleasure as the late-19th/early-20th century late-romantic classics with which I first became familiar. Over the years, I have had a number of 'favourite composers' - at one time and another, Brahms, Bruckner, Elgar and Sibelius have each claimed my particular allegiance. (And, thanks entirely to the CD, Bax, Moeran, Parry and Stanford have also more recently won my growing admiration). But RVW has never slipped further than No 2 in my personal pantheon and, as the years roll

by, I find that his music means more and more to me. Far more often than not, it is to Vaughan Williams that I turn for company at the end of a wearing day.

Surely no other composer addresses those who care to listen in quite such direct and honest terms, investing what appears to be the simplest of chord sequences with a wealth of meaning that goes straight to the heart. In times of trouble, I know of no music that can bring so much reassurance as the sublime *5th Symphony*. Of the other symphonies, the ruminative (not ruminant) *Pastoral* and the questing *9th* are the two that I return to most frequently. The smaller-scale concertante works also provide increasing pleasure. In particular, Howard Shelley's towering performance of the *Piano Concerto* (with Bryden Thomson) is a real ear-opener!

Charles Long

- had been rigorously pruned of the totally tone-deaf and other negative elements by our dedicated 'Head of House Music' who, against the odds, managed to enthuse his remaining forces to an astonishing degree. I wonder if he remembers what must surely have been his first appearance as a conductor? His name? Roger Norrington.

The first 'new music' that I made a conscious point of listening to was the

At the other end of the spectrum, the subtleties of *On Wenlock Edge* give fresh delight at each replaying. And has any composer reflected a text more accurately or made so profound a musical statement in such a brief space as RVW in his Shakespeare setting, *The Cloud-capp'd Towers*?

Charles Long
Leatherhead



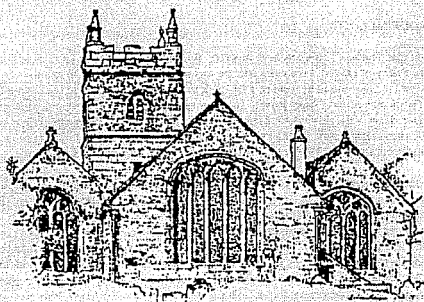
Concert Reviews

Pilgrim in Cornwall

Review of *The Pilgrim's Progress* given at the St. Endellion Festival Cornwall, August 3rd 1997.

Standing high upon the plateau of the north Cornwall coast where the trees bend their backs to North Atlantic gales stands the weather-beaten granite church of St. Endellion. This surely must be the most atmospheric location to date where *Pilgrim* has been performed.

St Endellion Festival of Music



Sunday and Monday 3rd and 4th August 1997 at 7.45pm

A Concert to Celebrate the 125th Anniversary of the Birth of
Ralph Vaughan Williams

THOMAS TALLIS

Third Mode Melody

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Pantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

The Pilgrim's Progress
A Morality in a Prologue, Four Acts and an Epilogue

singers are listed in the Synopsis before each scene in which they appear
and are shown in **bold italic** when they first sing

The St. Endellion Festival Chorus and Orchestra
Chorus Master - Frances Conke
Leader - Thomas Bowes

Associate Conductor - Mirk Forkgen

Conductor - Richard Hickox

*there will be an interval between Acts II and III of *The Pilgrim's Progress**

Program cover from St. Endellion Festival, August 1997

St. Endellion is no more than a hamlet a few miles south west of Tintagel; the church with its stout square tower is no larger than an average parish church.

I came to this place with some trepidation, wondering what sort of performance I would encounter, and half expecting a small amateur band of strolling players grappling enthusiastically but fruitlessly with this, one of VW's most cherished works.

I shouldn't have worried; a superb orchestra of around fifty players were assembled along with a choir of about seventy and a band of young opera singers headed by Roderick Williams in the role of Pilgrim. The ensemble was conducted by Richard Hickox. Indeed, the forces assembled were

so large - including full percussion section with tubular bells and gong that they filled about half the church leaving space for an audience of no more than 250. And what a memorable performance they were to experience.

The concert began with the Tallis *Third Mode Melody* and was followed by VW's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. The string section of the Festival Orchestra gave a sumptuous performance enhanced by their surroundings. Outside it was a typical English summer's day (blowing a gale). Rain squalls scudding in from the coast and beating on the windows added something intangible to an ambience already thick enough to cut with a knife.

The performance of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was a triumph; not only musically but in its

organisation. There being no stage, the singers appeared on cue along the aisles, whilst the sound of distant singers was achieved mysteriously from beneath the bell tower. I was seated beside the main entrance door, and nearly had a heart attack when the solo trumpet in the Delectable Mountain section blasted a clarion call from the porch three feet away from my right ear.

Richard Hickox's vigorous direction gave great energy to the more aggressive sections and in particular the Apollyon scene during which I was concerned in case the lead was being shaken from the roof.

Altogether it was a memorable performance and undoubtedly one of the best VW concerts I have ever attended. The impression of the pinnacle of VW's art flooding in waves of sound over the rolling Cornish landscape will long endure in my memory.

Things look good therefore, for the forthcoming performances of *Pilgrim* in London and Birmingham under the same conductor; considering the fine polish of this performance, later performances should also be superb.

I know that VW did not like the idea of *Pilgrim* being performed in a Cathedral setting - but being a church this was presumably all right (!). Seriously though, I have to disagree with the master on this one; *Pilgrim* lent itself magnificently to a church setting and lost nothing from its lack of operatic presentation; and if by being performed in this way it is brought to the attention of a wider audience then only good can come of it.

I experienced the downside of a performance in the middle of North Cornwall countryside only after the concert had finished: it took me an eternity to find my car in pitch blackness parked in a field opposite the church - but what is high art without suffering.

Rob Furneaux
Yelverton

Stephen Connock adds his thoughts on *Pilgrim* in St. Endellion.

Performances of *The Pilgrim's Progress* are rare, so a 600 mile round trip seemed worthwhile. Richard Hickox was conducting top-class soloists in what was effectively a rehearsal for the forthcoming Royal Opera staging.

The performance was to be in a church. Had not VW been very clear that the work must be staged? In 1950, Sir David Webster, then General Manager of the Royal Opera and John Denison, then Music Director of the Arts Council, had visited Vaughan Williams in White Gates. The two men had little idea of the style of the opera which was to be given its first performance as part of the Festival of Britain in 1951. Over tea, VW repeated his view that the work must be staged. He referred in particular to the Vanity Fair scene - he wanted strip-tease artists and others on the stage to give colour and vividness to the scene.

As judged by this performance, VW need not have worried. As Rob Furneaux states in his review, Richard Hickox made excellent use of the spaces in the church, with soloists entering and exiting through the audience. The drama is in the music, and a performance as exciting and theatrical as this does not need props or staging to emphasise the action. From that wonderful use of *York* in the opening bars, through the House Beautiful, the fight with Apollyon (here superbly sung by Alan Ewing), the unforgettable prison scene, and ending with those memorable *Alleluias*, I left the church in torrential rain thinking, not for the first time, that this work is VW's greatest achievement.

Stephen Connock
Colchester

Critical reaction to *Pilgrim*

As a critic, I respond to the right circumstances too, and I admit that I was captivated by St. Endellion: everything about it, from the landscape to the genial company. But also, for purely musical reasons, this *Pilgrim* was the most momentous, meaningful and utterly engaging thing I've heard in concert or on stage all year. As the Pilgrim reached the end of his journey - to the sound of a full choir, Heavenly Voices (*dixit* RVW), and a

solo trumpet two feet from my right ear - I felt not just deaf, but humbled by the sheer transcendent splendour of it all: convinced that *Pilgrim* is a great work and a true festival conception, and convinced that it speaks truest and most movingly as a community event like this. When Hickox conducts the piece at the Barbican in November - semi-staged under the ægis of the Royal Opera - it will be interesting to see if he can duplicate the power.

*Michael White in Independent on Sunday
of 1st August 1997.*

1997 Proms - the one work by VW

From 3" of rain in one hour on the way back from St. Endellion in Cornwall, your well-travelled Chairman was now in the cauldron otherwise known as the Royal Albert Hall for the one work of Vaughan Williams in this year's BBC Proms. Saturday the 9th of August was one of the hottest days of the year, with temperatures in the hall in the 90s. Such heat led to a strangely subdued performance by the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain under Sir Colin Davis of Tippett's *Ritual Dances* from *The Midsummer Marriage*.

VW's *Sixth Symphony* followed. Before the work began I reflected on how poorly represented were most British composers in this year's Proms. No Delius, no Holst, one VW - yet 12 works by Britten. This despite endless letters to Nicholas Kenyon pointing out that this year was the 125th anniversary of Vaughan Williams's birth.

Such thoughts were temporarily removed by the opening *allegro* of the symphony. The orchestra boasted 10 horns, 7 trombones, 6 trumpets and so on and this remarkable array of young musicians gave the music tremendous lift and zest. The lyrical B minor episode was played with great expressiveness, whilst the menacing three note motto of the *moderato* movement was played with considerable venom. Colin Davis had the saxophone soloist in the trio section of the *scherzo* stand up - a theatrical touch which worked well. Best of all was the highly original *epilogue* where the players achieved a genuine *pianissimo* throughout, despite the heat and an audience using every available means to keep itself cool. A pity the audience began applauding too early, breaking the concentration which the orchestra had secured so well.

It was a fine performance which Sibelius's *First Symphony*, after the break, did not sustain. Sir Colin tried hard to maintain tension, but the heat won the day.

*Stephen Connock
Colchester*

Ursula Vaughan Williams provides a personal introduction to *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Poisoned Kiss*

Pilgrim

When the opera was produced at Covent Garden in 1951, RVW disliked a lot of the staging. Some critics said it belonged to a cathedral, but RVW insisted it was a stage piece. He had supportive letters from his publisher Hubert Foss, the composer Rutland Boughton and the critic Frank Howes, but far more important were several from Professor E. J. Dent, an expert on opera, who said: 'It is an opera, and its only place is the theatre. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is undoubtedly the greatest and the most moving contribution of modern times to the national repertory of musical drama.'

It was dropped after a few performances in London and the provinces and Ralph said '*The Pilgrim* is dead and that's that.' But in 1954 it was produced at Cambridge by Dennis Arundell, an actor, writer, musician and a splendid producer. Cambridge University made amends to RVW for the deficiencies of Covent Garden, and probably no other service to his music gave him more satisfaction.

Eric Blom wrote: 'He is not just exquisite, or gracious, or mellifluous; there is an unworldly nobility about many of those strains which are neither archaic nor modern, though they often sound both at once, but belong to all time or none. I am a keen Handelian, but when it comes to the Alleluias at the end of this work of Vaughan Williams's they seem to me authentically celestial and those in *Messiah* only full of a fine courtly Georgian swagger.'

This was the best that was said about this work until 1992, when Joseph Ward produced it at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. He was an actor as well as a producer, and we discussed the opera from the viewpoint of Bunyan's lines: 'So I awoke, and behold it was a dream.' As a dream the opera took in all the people who had saved Pilgrim and frightened him. The menace of Apollyon and the dangers of Vanity Fair were vividly exciting - and the Alleluias were sung as marvellously as they could be.



The Poisoned Kiss

When Ralph and I were asked to go to see a production of *The Poisoned Kiss* at Cheltenham they had shortened and revised it and changed the words.

After Evelyn died, Ralph suggested that another writer would be better and asked me to do it. Joan Sharp, Evelyn's niece, agreed that this was a good idea and Ralph paid her £100 for the rights.

I made the story very much more simple. Before, the work was very long and boring. So I turned it into couplets and they were funny and witty. When I saw the work again at the Royal Academy of Music, and again at Haddo, it was much more amusing and made people laugh. Of course, I left Evelyn's words as they were originally.

The Ancestry of Vaughan Williams

On his father's side Ralph came from a family distinguished in law. His great grandfather came to London at the end of the eighteenth century and became a Sergeant-in-Law. He married Mary and their second son became Edward Vaughan Williams. He was the first to be given the title of Common Pleas. His wife was Jane Bagot and they had six sons - (all daughters died in infancy). Two sons followed their father in the profession of law - two, Edward and Ralph's father, Arthur were ordained and became country clergymen.

On his mother's side Ralph's forebears were scientists and craftsmen. Among them were Erasmus Darwin and Josiah Wedgwood. Josiah was painted by Sir Joshua and is very like Ralph - particularly in his later life, with his wide forehead, bushy eyebrows and clear eyes. From Erasmus Darwin he inherited his long and sensitive hands.

Arthur died when Ralph was two and a half, and his mother and the two other children lived with his grandparents. Henry had a wife, but they had no children. Maggie was unmarried. Ralph and Adeline and his second wife, Ursula, had no children.

*Ursula Vaughan Williams
London*

By Season Seasoned: Shakespeare and Vaughan Williams

Our Guest Speaker at this year's AGM, Byron Adams, writes on VW and Shakespeare.

Nothing better illustrates Vaughan Williams's deep love of Shakespeare than the following anecdote from the fall of 1951, related in Ursula Vaughan Williams's evergreen biography of her husband:

We came home by Stratford, as the Clarion Singers from Birmingham were giving performances there of *Sir John in Love*. Anthony Quayle, the director of the Festival Theatre, also gave us tickets for *Henry IV, Part I* for the following night. This production of *Henry IV* had one amusing consequence for us, for we disagreed about the character of Hotspur, played by Michael Redgrave. Ralph said that the only thing to do was to re-read the play. He started on it directly we got back to Dorking and when he finished both parts of *Henry IV* he suggested that we read all the plays. We had both read them at one time or another, but never straight off -- and it turned out to be an extraordinary experience... We both came to the conclusion, perhaps an obvious one, that the popular plays were the best, though we had other favourites -- of these Ralph's was *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.¹

A testament to the seventy-nine year old composer's determination and powers of concentration, this story also reveals the seriousness with which Vaughan Williams returned to the works of Shakespeare throughout his life. Earlier the same year, Vaughan Williams had completed his *Three Shakespeare Songs* for unaccompanied mixed chorus, in which he set texts drawn from *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. Their immersion in Shakespeare may well have revived both their interest in writing for the stage, the dawning impulse for their sadly uncompleted opera, *Thomas the Rhymer*.

A study of Vaughan Williams's relationship to Shakespeare not only illuminates a composer's engagement with a seminal author over the course of a long career, it clarifies as well aspects of Vaughan Williams's aesthetic philosophy. Shakespeare is a notoriously protean figure, of course: a consummate playwright and inspired poet; an uncomfortably androgynous artist, forever shuttling between masculine and feminine points of view; at once a keen observer of life and English life and folk customs and a seer of deep and universal archetypes; at once popular and exalted, tragic and comic, and, with Tyndale and others, one of the casual inventors of the modern English language. The way in which Vaughan Williams, himself a formidably protean figure, grappled with the legacy bequeathed to succeeding generations of English artists by Shakespeare and the way he incorporated that legacy into his own work

provide insights into the development of the composer's creative process, his treatment of literature, and his convictions as a cultural nationalist.

Although Vaughan Williams set Shakespearean texts throughout his life, Shakespeare is rarely mentioned by scholars in discussions of composer's literary predilections. Poets commonly associated with Vaughan Williams are those who employed language highly charged with symbolic and mystical associations such as Whitman, Herbert and Blake. However, if the libretto for *Sir John in Love* -- arranged by the composer himself from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* -- is taken into account, Vaughan Williams set more of Shakespeare's own words than of any of the authors mentioned above. Indeed, even if we exclude the libretto of *Sir John in Love* from consideration, we find more settings of Shakespeare (twenty-five works in all, including two distinct settings of *Orpheus with His Lute* (*Henry VIII*, Act III, Scene I) than settings of either Blake (ten, and all from one late song cycle) or Herbert (seven). Only Walt Whitman and texts from the Bible exceed the number of Shakespearean texts, and only John Bunyan, whose *The Pilgrim's Progress* intermittently occupied Vaughan Williams over forty-six years (from 1906 until 1952), rivals Shakespeare as the author with the longest hold over the composer's interest. The longevity of Vaughan Williams's fascination with Shakespeare surpasses that of his involvement with Bunyan, however, for his first setting of a Shakespearean text dates from around 1891 and his last dates from 1951, a period of some sixty years.

Vaughan Williams first set poetry by Shakespeare were written sometime between the years 1890 and 1892, when he was a student of Sir Hubert Parry at the Royal College of Music; perhaps Parry himself assigned the texts as an exercise. In his *Musical Autobiography* Vaughan Williams writes that "Parry's criticism was constructive. He was not merely content to point out faults, but would prescribe the remedy. The last two bars of my early part song *The Willow Song* were almost certainly composed by Parry." Parry may well have had a hand in revisions of the young composer's other Shakespearean part-songs from this early period, settings of two of Feste's songs in *Twelfth Night*: the nimble and amorous *O Mistress Mine*, (Act II, Scene III), and the rather droopy *Come Away Death*, (Act II, Scene IV). All three of these part-songs, while possessing stylistic features that hint of the mature Vaughan Williams, also clearly derive from Parry's own style of writing for unaccompanied voices, with its emphasis on blended choral textures and suave part-writing.

Apart from the first setting of *Orpheus with his Lute*, which dates from 1903², Vaughan Williams did not select any more Shakespeare for the next decade, turning instead to contemporary poets such as Robert Louis Stevenson, Dante

Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti, A.E. Housman and, above all, Walt Whitman. In 1913, however, Vaughan Williams's fascination with Shakespeare was reanimated when he accepted the position of musical director for Sir Frank Benson's Shakespearean season at Stratford-upon-Avon. Of this episode, Ursula Vaughan Williams writes: "It was his first introduction to the world of the theatre and he was delighted with it. He and Adeline had rooms in Stratford, and the friendliness of the company, the glamour of being part of two worlds, Shakespeare's and the players', was as constant a pleasure as Benson's utter disregard for music -- except as something that had to be there -- was an irritation. He became deeply interested in production, in lighting, in the whole process of illusion, and the magic worked for him at each performance in spite of all shortcomings."³

During his tenure as music director at Stratford, Vaughan Williams provided incidental music for *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV: Part 2*, *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The scores for these productions consisted of arrangements of folksongs and dances, including the lusty dance tune *Half Hannikin* (later used in *Sir John in Love*), and adaptations of music by other composers, such as Dowland's *Lachrimae* pavan. One of the inevitable results of supplying incidental music for a production and supervising the music through the run of a play is that the composer memorises large portions of the play. Entire monologues and, indeed, whole scenes can stay lodged forever in the composer's memory. Thus it is not surprising that Vaughan Williams should have recalled lines from *Henry V* to shattering effect in his *Song of Thanksgiving* of 1945, or that his intimate knowledge of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, gleaned from attending repeated rehearsals and performances at Stratford in 1913, prepared him to extract an enchanting libretto from this play for his opera *Sir John in Love*. Sadly, Michael Kennedy reports that only a single page survives of Vaughan Williams's incidental music for *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.⁴ Ursula Vaughan Williams, relying on information that came directly from her husband, provides some fascinating insights about the lost music and its connection with *Sir John in Love*:

"When it came to the summer season *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was one of the new plays. Taking Falstaff's words 'Let the sky rain potatoes, let it thunder to the tune of Greensleeves, hail hissing

² The second setting of *Orpheus with His Lute* is the last of the *Three Songs from Shakespeare* written for Steuart Wilson in 1925.

³ U. Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, 104.

⁴ Michael Kennedy, *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 78.

¹ Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 312-13.

comfits and eringoes' as his cue, he invented entr'acte music based on this tune -- well known in Elizabethan days, and used for a dance tune, for a hymn, and for political ballads in later years -- in its original form belonging traditionally to the great army of gold-diggers. In the middle section of the entr'acte he used *Lovely Joan* (which he had collected in Norfolk in 1908), both tunes that summed up the allurements used by the merry wives to entangle Falstaff. It was a play that he had not known before and it captivated him: so much so that he began thinking of it in terms of an opera.⁵

Over a decade passed before Vaughan Williams began work on an opera based on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a tumultuous decade for the composer that included five years of service during the First World War. In the years after his demobilisation in 1919, Vaughan Williams completed *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*, a 'pastoral episode' in one act after Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which was premièred on 11 July 1922 at the Royal College, and he finished the initial revision of his first full-length opera, *Hugh the Drover*, which was given its first performance two years to the day after the production of the 'pastoral episode'. By the time Vaughan Williams began work on *Sir John in Love*, he was a composer with a detailed knowledge of the theatre who had the invaluable experience of having two of his operatic scores produced within the space of two years.

In a letter to Harold Child, the hapless librettist of *Hugh the Drover*, Vaughan Williams declared that he wanted to write a "musical" about "English country life (real as far as possible -- not sham)... for I have the idea for an opera written to real English words, with a certain amount of real English music and also a real English subject might just hit the nail right on the head."⁶ As Michael Kennedy has ruefully pointed out: "It is apparent that Harold Child was the wrong man for the job."⁷ Given the amount of revision that Vaughan Williams undertook to improve *Hugh the Drover* (including extensive changes to both words and music made as late as 1956), he was clearly dissatisfied with the limitations of Child's text. After wrestling with the libretto of *Hugh the Drover*, Vaughan Williams may well have reasoned that one way to avoid similar problems and find a "real English Subject" was to adapt the work of a real English author such as Shakespeare. The subject he chose was the amorous machinations of Sir John Falstaff as found in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; the resulting opera, *Sir John in Love*, occupied Vaughan Williams from 1924 to 1928.

What Vaughan Williams found in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was precisely the sort of atmosphere that he had wanted for *Hugh the Drover*: an authentically English subject that allowed for the introduction of "real English music." Vaughan Williams's choice of this play is particularly consonant with the cultural

nationalism that he espoused throughout his career, for it is the only one of Shakespeare's comedies actually set in England.

The characters and milieu of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* doubtless appealed to Vaughan Williams's passionate egalitarian social and political convictions. As Stanley Wells writes in his *Shakespeare: A Life in Drama*: "it is a small-town comedy rather than a romantic one, peopled by members of the middle and lower classes, with no aristocrats in the cast list; it is full of the details of ordinary life that would have been familiar to Elizabethan Londoners... its language is colloquial and up-to-date."⁸ Despite a few glancing references to the reign of Henry IV, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* seems to be filled with affectionate reminiscences by Shakespeare of his own childhood, suggested by the scene, omitted by Vaughan Williams, in which a boy named William is comically tutored in Latin grammar by Sir Hugh Evans and Mistress Quickly.⁹ The lively English bourgeoisie who laugh, gossip and scheme throughout *The Merry Wives of Windsor* elicited a sympathetic response from Vaughan Williams, who once wrote that "A young exquisite once said to me, 'I don't like Bach, he is so bourgeois,' to which I probably answered that being bourgeois myself I considered Bach the greatest of all composers."¹⁰

Vaughan Williams was further attracted to *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by its frequent and matter-of-fact references to music; the number of musical allusions made by the denizens of Windsor is high even by Shakespearean standards. Thus the play allowed Vaughan Williams to bring together two of his greatest loves: English folksong and music of the Tudor period. As is well known, Vaughan Williams was an active and successful collector of some 800 folksongs; he was also an historian who encouraged musicologists such as E. H. Fellowes as they prepared modern editions of Tudor madrigals, anthems and masses. Both folksong and Tudor music had an equally profound influence upon the development of Vaughan Williams's mature style; in *Sir John in Love*, folksongs such as *Greensleeves* and *Lovely Joan* are woven into a musical fabric that owes a great debt to the contrapuntal vivacity and immaculate prosody of Elizabethan madrigals. In an essay from 1948 entitled "A Minim's Rest", which, by the way, begins with a quotation from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*,¹¹ Vaughan Williams gives an eloquent tribute to the Elizabethan age: "Under Elizabeth, music was a living thing to old and young, rich and poor. At one end of

the scale comes Morley's pupil who was ashamed because he could not take his part in a madrigal after supper, at the other end the 'groundlings' who did not misunderstand when Shakespeare called one of his most beautiful songs silly sooth, old and plain, sung by the spinsters and knitters in the sun."¹² They knew that Shakespeare realized the beauty of their 'old plain' ballads; is he not always quoting them?"¹³

Vaughan Williams revelled in the racy language of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and considered Shakespeare as much a part of the English Cultural tradition as the Authorized Version of the Bible. In the same essay, the composer alludes to a passage in Trevelyan's *History of England* "in which he describes the submergence of the Anglo-Saxon tongue unwritten and unspoken except by the villain through three centuries till it emerged in Tudor times as the vehicle of the poetry of Shakespeare and Milton".¹⁴

At the same time, however, Vaughan Williams did not let his reverence for Shakespeare deter him from the ruthless decisions required for the condensation of a talky play into a succinct libretto. With his innate grasp of the swift action required for a sung comedy, Vaughan Williams realised that the straightforward story of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was apt for opera, unlike, say, the convoluted plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Just as he did with Whitman or the Bible, Vaughan Williams did not scruple to make extensive cuts in Shakespeare's text or modify the import of certain lines by removing them from their original context. In order to expand and emphasise the romantic elements of the plot, he introduced poetry selected from other plays by Shakespeare as well as poems by several of Shakespeare's contemporaries such as Marlowe and Jonson. In his preface to the opera, Vaughan Williams writes: "With regard to Shakespeare, my only excuse is that he is fair game, like the Bible, and may be made use of nowadays even for advertisements of soap and razors... My chief object in *Sir John in Love* has been to fit this wonderful comedy with, I trust, not unpleasant music." In light of the extensive alterations made to Shakespeare's text, Vaughan Williams's sly conclusion to this preface is more than a little ingenious: "The text is taken almost entirely from the *Merry Wives*, with the addition of lyrics from Elizabethan poets. A few unimportant remarks (e.g. 'Here comes Master Ford') are my own."¹⁵

One important speech from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* that Vaughan Williams retained in full for *Sir John in Love* is Mistress Page's narration of the legend of Herne the Hunter, a story which, in Mistress Page's words, "the superstitious, idle-headed eld/Received and did deliver to our age." Her tale has its origin in folk customs that existed hundreds of years

(continued overleaf)

⁸ Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare: A Life in Drama* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 185.

⁹ Act IV, Scene I.

¹⁰ Ralph Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 171.

¹¹ Act I, Scene III.

Falstaff: His filching was like an unskilful singer, -- he kept not time.

Nym: The good humour is to steal at a minim's rest.

Vaughan Williams set these lines in the episode that was part of the *Prologue, Episode and Interlude* composed for a production of *Sir John in Love* in 1933. Only the *Interlude* found a permanent place in the opera as the first scene of Act III.

⁵ U. Vaughan Williams, *R.F.W.*, 104.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 402.

⁷ Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 179.

¹² Vaughan Williams alludes here to Duke Orsino's description of "Come Away, Death" in Act II, Scene IV of *Twelfth Night*.

¹³ RVW, *National Music*, 166.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁵ U. Vaughan Williams, *R.F.W.*, 174-5.

before Shakespeare's birth, such as the Horn Dance, which took place annually at Abbots Bromley from the minority of Henry III until the Second World War (and may still take place, for all I know).¹⁶ The archetypal folk belief that resonates through the tale of the ghostly huntsman of Windsor forest touched a deep chord in Vaughan Williams's imagination, for he adorns Mistress Page's recitation of the old story -- which she is in the act of passing on to a new generation -- with some of the most uncanny and poetic music in the score.

After the première of *Sir John in Love* in 1929, Vaughan Williams completed two more Shakespearean projects, both connected with the opera: *In Windsor Forest* of 1931, a choral suite of extracts from *Sir John in Love*; and an expansion of the opera for a production in 1933. Vaughan Williams set no further Shakespeare until 1938, when he composed the incomparably beautiful *Serenade to Music* for sixteen solo singers and orchestra. Written as a gift for Sir Henry Wood, the *Serenade to Music* is a setting of lines selected by the composer himself from the first scene of the last act of *The Merchant of Venice*. Vaughan Williams does not worry much about the context of these lines in the play: he cares little which character is speaking at a given time. What he does instead is to create a new, touching and self-sufficient literary entity that perfectly serves his expressive purpose. Though the original context is obscured, the moonlit atmosphere evoked in this scene is faithfully expressed by Vaughan Williams's ravishing music.

But the influence of Shakespeare upon Vaughan Williams's music is not limited to vocal works using Shakespearean texts. Vaughan Williams refers to Shakespeare in connection with two of his symphonies. In a letter sent in 1937 defending his *Fourth Symphony* against the strictures of his friend R.G. Longman, Vaughan Williams wrote: "I agree with you that all music must have beauty -- the problem being what is beauty -- so when you say you do not think my F mi.[nor] symph.[ony] beautiful my answer must be that I do think it beautiful -- nor that I did not mean it to be beautiful because it reflects unbeautiful times -- because we know that beauty can come from unbeautiful things (e.g. King Lear, Rembrandt's School of Anatomy, Wagner's *Niebelungs*, etc.)"¹⁷ Years later, in a letter to Michael Kennedy dated 22 January 1956, he invokes lines from *The Tempest* in connection with the finale of the *Sixth Symphony*: "I do NOT BELIEVE IN meanings and mottoes, as you know, but I think we can get in words nearest to the substance of my last movement in "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded by a sleep."¹⁸ Vaughan Williams made this connection explicit musically, for he quoted the final cadence of the symphony when he set the following lines from *The Tempest* (Act IV, Scene 1) as the second of his *Three*

Shakespeare Songs for unaccompanied chorus of 1951:

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

Shakespeare and Vaughan Williams: have two artists ever been more essentially English? Both were engaged with the earthy life that surged around them, and both were immensely practical artists. Had they been merely English or merely practical, however, no one would attend Shakespeare's plays today, nor listen to Vaughan Williams's music. But their combination of genius with supreme courage gives their work its universal and lasting significance, for they looked without flinching at the ineluctable tragedy of human destiny, the implacable progress of Time and the evanescence of all earthly things.

And in doing so both men trusted in the power of art to transform and ennoble our precarious existence here on this earth. Vaughan Williams believed that "A work of art is like a theophany which takes different forms to different beholders."¹⁹ Shakespeare invokes such a theophany for the healing of the sleepless and anguished Prince Pericles: "But, hark, what music?... The music of the spheres!... Rarest sounds! Do ye not hear?... I hear most heavenly music. It nips me into list'ning, and thick slumber/Hangs upon my eyes: let me rest."²⁰ By reaching beyond the boundaries of sense and knowledge into an imperishable realm of the spirit, these two great Englishmen clasp hands across the centuries, inspiring, entertaining and consoling: they were not of their ages, but for all time.

Byron Adams
University of California, Riverside.

Professor Byron Adams

Byron Adams (b. 1955) holds degrees from Jacksonville University, where he received a Bachelor of Music degree, *magna cum laude*, studying piano with Mary Lou Wesley Krosnick and composition with Gurney Kennedy; from the University of Southern California, where he studied with Halsey Stevens and Morten Lauridsen; and from Cornell University, where he received his doctoral degree studying musicology with William Austin, and composition with Karel Husa. Internationally recognised as a composer, Byron Adams has had frequent performances of his music in Europe, such as at the 26th "Warsaw Autumn" International Festival of Contemporary Music in Poland, the Leith Hill Festival in England, the Conservatoire Américain in Fontainebleau, France, and the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra. In America, his music has been

presented at such institutions as the Eastman School of Music, Harvard University, Yale University and Carnegie Recital Hall.

In addition to his work as a composer, Byron Adams's scholarly work was recognised when he received the first Ralph Vaughan Williams Research Fellowship in 1985. He has published widely on the subject of twentieth-century English music and has given lectures on this topic over the BBC and at the 1995 National Meeting of the American Musicological Society. Articles and reviews by Prof. Adams have appeared in *Music and Letters*, *MLA Notes*, *Current Musicology* and *The Musical Quarterly*, as well as in *Vaughan Williams Studies*, a volume recently published by Cambridge University Press.

Prof. Adams held the post of Lecturer in Music at Cornell University from 1985 to 1987. He is presently Associate Professor of Music at the University of California, Riverside. He was appointed Composer in Residence of the Colonial Symphony of Madison, New Jersey, during the 1990-91 and 1991-92 seasons. During the summer of 1992, Prof. Adams taught solfège, composition and conducted the chorale at the Conservatoire Américain in Fontainebleau, France.

Music by Byron Adams is published by the Brass Press, Southern Music Co., and Earthsongs, and Yelton Rhodes. Recorded performances of his music are available on the Orion Master Recordings, Skylark and Mark record labels.

(Book Review continued from page 17)

Vaughan Williams is mentioned, too, in the works of Peter Mennin, Howard Hanson and Roy Harris. This final chapter is exceptional, though one wishes the comments were not of such brevity.

We should thank Pimlico for reissuing Mellers's book, first published in Great Britain by Barrie & Jenkins Ltd. in 1989. Mellers has attempted much, and some will say that he has not always succeeded. But we should not deprecate him for that; we should be glad that he wrote it. Those who love English music should read *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, for in it they shall find reflected a love for the "land of lost content" and the "blue remembered hills"; for the music of the Anglican Church, which for many enshrines the mind of England; and, most of all, for Vaughan Williams's greatest music, which reveals a premonition of the numinous -- homage and elegy and hope.

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¹⁶ F.J. Drake-Carnell, *Old English Customs and Ceremonies* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1938), 68.

¹⁷ Kennedy, *Works*, 247.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 302.

¹⁹ RVW, *National Music*, 3.

²⁰ *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, Act V, Scene II

YOUR LETTERS

We are always pleased to receive contributions for this page



Re: Epstein

I was introduced to Epstein by a friend of his and he asked me if he should write to RVW to ask if he would agree to sit for him. I enjoyed Epstein very much; he had wonderful stories about everything and I loved his tale about "the lady who had her hair in coils" - he considered her to have curls.

After I told RVW and Adeline about Epstein's request, RVW agreed that Epstein should write to him. Ralph enjoyed their discussions during the sittings but he fell asleep after about half an hour. Usually six models are made before a work is completed but with RVW, Epstein did about twenty. The back of RVW's head was perfect but not the rest - Epstein gave him very wide eyes.

We enjoyed Epstein's company and he liked coming to Dorking with his lady, who was an interesting model, to the St Matthew concerts which Ralph conducted.

*Ursula Vaughan Williams
London*

RVW concert performances on CD, tape or video

Further references in the Society journal to the existence of a war-time performance of the *Fifth Symphony* conducted by RVW, and the plans for its release on CD, prompt me to raise the whole issue of the release on CD or video of concert performances. I have long preferred the extra tension that often seems to spring from live performances, as opposed to those perfected in the recording studio, and have a not-inconsiderable collection of concert performances, though by no means all are of RVW works.

The promotion of the symphony cycle last year and the opera season this year is to be praised; there are few opportunities to hear the music in the concert hall, particularly it seems in the North East, and I am disappointed that the Northern Sinfonia are not repeating the 125th anniversary concert performance of *Sir John in Love* in their home town. There is no Vaughan Williams in their 97/98 Newcastle season alas.

The lack of access to live performances in the concert halls could be ameliorated by the involvement of the Society in the promotion of concert performances on CD or even better, on video. There are performances in the BBC video archives I believe of at least two of the major works, conducted by Sir Adrian Boult - the *Fifth Symphony* and *Job* - and I for one would welcome an opportunity of being able to see and hear these performances. I have no doubt that there are other performances preserved, either by the BBC or by others, officially or not, on video and I would urge the Society to become involved in making them available to members at least.

What do other members think? I would welcome

contact from members with a similar interest.

*David Lax
Tyne & Wear*

Dorking Halls

I had the (mis) fortune to experience the restored Dorking Halls earlier this year.

It took the entire interval time to make it out of the "pop concert" seating to the bar - where the crush was so bad that free drinks were being given out to those who made it just as the return bell was ringing.

All around me I heard comments about bad planning and the fire trap we were in. The sound of the music seemed a little muted - no wonder with the resonance lost due to the DIY seating. What a lost chance to restore the building. Yes, there's glitz about the place now, but oh how RVW would no doubt have called it all humbug.

*A Milne
Dorking*

Folklore

The Editor is to be congratulated for going to a great deal of trouble in translating and publishing the brilliant abstracts of the pamphlet in Russian by Olga Borisovna Manulkina, under the heading *Folklore in the Symphonies of Ralph Vaughan Williams*.

These abstracts suggest a fundamental reason for the 'puzzling reluctance of Vaughan Williams to follow up... extraordinary evidence of a living local folk song tradition' mentioned in my article *Chain of Destiny* in JRVWS No. 8. He had already formed a high ideal of what folk music should be like and when at the end of his Brentwood lectures in April, 1903, Locksie (Georgiana) Heatley confronted him with the folk songs she had taken down from local singers he feared the music of these songs would not match his ideal. That would have left him with a serious credibility gap in his musical theory.

That would be the position arising from the following from Olga Borisovna's article:

Amongst the peculiarities of Vaughan Williams's biography in folklore is that his theoretical pronouncements outstrip practical experiment. His folklore activity proper begins with lectures on the folksong.

...Vaughan Williams undertook his expeditions in search of his melodic ideal, which had taken shape in advance; folkloric practice was called on to confirm it.

It took RVW over six months, until late in 1903, to break this impasse, probably after some urging from Locksie Heatley, but also no doubt from his own conscience, especially after Cecil Sharp's experience in Hambridge, in September, 1903.

But, at the end, we can see the hidden hand of destiny again at work. RVW is somehow directed to the very person, Charles Potiphar, whose first song *Bushes and Briars* is exactly in line with his ideal. What a sense of relief he must have felt that December day at the old man's cottage in Ingrave.

It all bears out Olga Borisovna's conclusion that:

A special mission lay before Vaughan Williams by predestination. English society at the *fin de siècle* was impatiently awaiting the appearance of 'Englishness' in music; Vaughan Williams was predisposed towards this mission and strove to realise it in all his activities. In accordance with his pronouncements, he sought the foundation of his style in the oldest and most reliable source, folksong.

*Frank Dineen
Ingrave, Essex*

A Sea Symphony

I am writing about a forthcoming concert by the Harrow Choral Society to mark the Society's 60th Anniversary. The main work in the programme will be Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony* and the performance will be given in St. Albans Cathedral on Saturday 29th November. The concert will also include Dvorak's *Te Deum*. We are engaging the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra and the soloists will be Geraldine McGreevey (soprano), 1996 Kathleen Ferrier award winner and Christopher Booth-Jones (baritone). The conductor will be Simon Williams.

The chosen venue will be an imposing one for the concert but it is 15 miles from Harrow and not at all easy to attract our normal audience. There is no suitable or practical alternative in the Harrow area. The costs of the performance will be high and we shall not recoup the costs even if all the tickets are sold. Efforts to secure sponsorship have failed so far and we would be most grateful if you could advise us of any possible sources of help in this direction.

The sale of tickets is important to the success of the concert and we would appreciate making the event known to members of your Society.

*H Hodson
Harrow, Middlesex*

First Impressions

My first impression of RVW's music was what must have been almost the first (!) performance of the *Sinfonia Antartica* in the City Hall in Sheffield when I was in my mid-teens. We were almost blown away by the 'wind machine' - student tickets for weekly performances by (usually) the Hallé Orchestra under Barbirolli cost the princely sum of 1 shilling! Later, I came to know the *6th Symphony* through its use as theme music for the television serial *A Family at War* during the early Seventies.

My husband and I belong to the dwindling race of 'cassette only' owners and I have several recordings of RVW, my latest acquisition being *Ten Blake Songs*, sung by the inimitable James Bowman with the Downshire Players. On the same tape are beautiful songs by Warlock, Howells, Alan Ridout and Roger Steptoe.

As an afterthought, we buy most of our tapes now from CD Selections, a mail order firm on the south coast. I can supply details if anyone wishes.

*Jennifer Van der Linde
Cirencester*

PARRY AND VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: IDEAS, IMPRESSIONS AND INFLUENCES

Dr Jeremy Dibble concludes his two part exploration.

PART II

In acknowledging that Vaughan Williams gleaned much from Parry's philosophy of history, tradition and ethics, it is also important to determine how much he was both consciously and subconsciously indebted to his Victorian heritage and indeed to a national lineage of composers originating from the sixteenth century. In forging a link with the Elizabethan age, his self-conscious participation in the Tudor Revival is clear from his *Tallis Fantasia*, the *Five Tudor Portraits* and, with its overt emulation of sixteenth-century techniques, the *Mass in G Minor*. Moreover, his historical awareness can also be measured by his participation in the *English Hymnal*, his encouragement of the madrigal tradition, his two-part edition of Purcell's *Welcome Odes* (for the complete Purcell Edition) and his settings of Shakespeare. Parry too would certainly have encouraged such a focus of national culture. He too had played a role on the committee of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (between 1894 and 1904), whose revisionary work was epitomised by the 'historical' edition of 1909; he had also edited some early music in collaboration with Lionel Benson and William Barclay Squire, paid homage to Purcell, and excelled in his interpretations of Shakespeare, Shirley, Milton and William Dunbar whether in the form of solo song, part-song or works for chorus and orchestra.

Yet although it is important to understand the 'historical' dimension of Vaughan Williams's outlook, it is essential to identify the nineteenth-century English legacy that informs his musical language. His education during the 1880s and 1890s, like that of his predecessors, found its roots in the organ loft and in the degree system of the ancient universities where technical proficiency was highly regarded. As a student at Cambridge, he took his Mus. Bac. under the guidance of Charles Wood where he was expected to master the basic tenets of harmony, counterpoint and fugue. During his second stint at the RCM, he earned a living as organist of St Barnabas, South Lambeth, successfully passed his F.R.C.O. and took his Cambridge Mus.D by examination (i.e. under the old regulations) in 1897.¹ Indeed from these credentials one could be forgiven for believing that Vaughan Williams had every intention of pursuing a career in church music. His job at Lambeth was an arduous and generally unedifying experience but it nevertheless allowed him to become acquainted with the music of Walmisley, Smart, Stainer and S. S. Wesley, which, allied with his absorption of Parry's vocal works, equipped him with a broad knowledge of the Victorian choral repertoire.

Given this background it was inevitable that Vaughan Williams should possess a natural predisposition towards the diatonic language of his native predecessors and senior contemporaries. Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens* is, of all English nineteenth-century works, perhaps most paradigmatic in its manipulation of a higher species of diatonic dissonance. Though embryonically discernible in his dramatic cantata *Prometheus Unbound* (1880) and more so in *The Glories of Our Blood and State* (1883), Parry's expressive, muscular diatonic language came of age in his setting of Milton's ode. Replete with multiple suspensions, appoggiaturas, falling sevenths, a rich, eight-part contrapuntal texture and a well contrived musical structure, Parry's yearning sentiment found perfect utterance. For Vaughan Williams it was profoundly formative and remained a seminal influence throughout his life.

During the 1890s Vaughan Williams's earliest works are unequivocal in their assimilation of late nineteenth-century diatonic practices. One need look no further than the *Three Elizabethan Songs* (largely written under Parry's supervision) to see the traditional methods at work (Example 1).²



Example 1 - The Willow Song

Evidence of Parry's imprint becomes more discernible, however, in songs such as *Wither must I wander* (1901) written at the turn of the century. Within a few years we see Vaughan Williams attempting to assimilate Wagnerian chromaticism into his style, perhaps in a bid to embrace modernism; 'In Dreams' from *Songs of Travel* (1904) is clear evidence of this tendency as are the chromatic portions of *In the Fen Country* (1903; rev. 1935). Such chromatic departures were not a passing phase: *Toward the Unknown Region* (1905-6), *A Sea Symphony* (1903-9) and *On Wenlock Edge* (1909) show to a greater or lesser degree an indebtedness to Wagnerian procedures. And yet it is evidence of the impress of Parry's aesthetic that Vaughan Williams's forays into chromaticism are ultimately thrown into relief by the instinctive use of diatonicism for climax and grand statement. The climactic point of *In the Fen Country* (Example 2 - shown next page) reveals that his natural instinct for dissonance and resolution gravitated inexorably towards diatonicism where the components of melodic contour, appoggiatura and sequence perceptibly derive from those yearning gestures of Parry. The same can be said of the slightly later *Toward the Unknown Region* and *A Sea Symphony*. Parry's memorable phrase from *Blest Pair of Sirens* ('O may we soon again renew that song') echoes resoundingly

¹ A further indication of Vaughan Williams's pedagogical standing can be gauged by his 'Fugue' article for the second edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, written at the invitation of its editor, J A Fuller-Maitland.

² It is worth noting here that, according to Vaughan Williams, Parry completed the last two bars of *The Willow Song* ('A Musical Autobiography', *National Music and Other Essays* ed. Kennedy (Oxford, 1963, 2/1987), 182).

through the descending outline of Vaughan Williams's opening progression (Example 3);

Example 3 - Toward the Unknown Region

moreover, it is hard not to sense a structural parallel between Vaughan Williams's sturdy finale ('Then we burst forth') and Parry's aspiratory epode. I the first movement of *A Sea Symphony* the monumentality of Parry's choral conception (such as one finds in *L'Allegro, De Profundis, Job* and *Invocation to Music*) inhabits large tracts of Vaughan Williams's epic canvas. The grandiose statement of the opening paragraph ('And on its limitless, heaving breast'), the developmental chorus ('But do you reserve especially for yourself') prior to the recapitulation, the recapitulation itself ('Tokens of all brave captains') and the conclusion ('one flag above all the rest') all readily betray their origins, as does the central

portion of the Scherzo.

A Sea Symphony was in many ways a milestone in Vaughan Williams's creative output. It was by far his largest and most ambitious essay and marked the zenith of his 'Edwardian' period. Thereafter, overt reference to Parry rapidly diminished as his interpretation of diatonicism began to assimilate more fully such stylistic components as parallelisms, synthetic modes and bitonality. In this regard, *On Wenlock Edge*, the *Tallis Fantasia* (1910), the *Five Mystical Songs* (1911), the *Four Hymns* (1911) and *The Lark Ascending* (1914) signalled an important transition. It is also worth noting that, at the same time, Vaughan Williams jettisoned his dependence on Wagner. Wagner's example had, nevertheless, taught him how to handle the apparatus of voice-leading, albeit in a chromatic context; but now he could draw on the new resource of voice-leading within an all-diatonic framework, thereby making possible the expansion of his harmonic vocabulary beyond the confines of functional harmonic relations. As Philip Heseltine remarked:

Example 2 - In The Fen Country All VW's works are characterised by strong melodic invention

(often traceable to folk-song sources), and a most original fund of contrapuntal resource in which there is nothing even faintly reminiscent of scholasticism. With the purely harmonic developments of the XX century VW shows but little sympathy in his work. We certainly find extremely novel combinations of sounds in some of his later compositions, but they are almost invariably conditioned by the movement of individual parts, of which the line is often seen in a higher dimensional aspect, so to speak, through the addition to each note of the two other notes necessary to complete the common chord. It is easy to realise that lines of 5-3 or 6-3 chords handled contrapuntally as though they were lines of single notes may lead logically to what seem to be most surprising harmonic combinations, though the methods by which such chords are arrived at are radically different from those of the deliberate harmonist.³

This advance in his harmonic and contrapuntal style was already latent in *A Sea Symphony*; by the *Five Mystical Songs* it was more or less fully operative, but the most radiant illustrations are to be found in the final section of *Flos Campi* and the coda of the *Fifth Symphony*. Furthermore, Vaughan Williams did not ignore the potential of Parry's higher diatonic dissonance. One need look no further than the multiple appoggiaturas of 'Easter' (*Five Mystical Songs*), the 'Romanza' of the *Piano Concerto*, the radiant opening progression of the *Serenade to Music* or the slow movement of the *Fifth Symphony* (his diatonic work *par excellence*) to confirm that this distinctly English mannerism was in full vigour.

Jeremy Dibble

³ Heseltine, P., 'Vaughan Williams' in *A Dictionary of Modern Music and Musicians* ed. P. Eaglefield-Hull (London, 1923), 508-9.

Concert Review

A Cotswold Romance

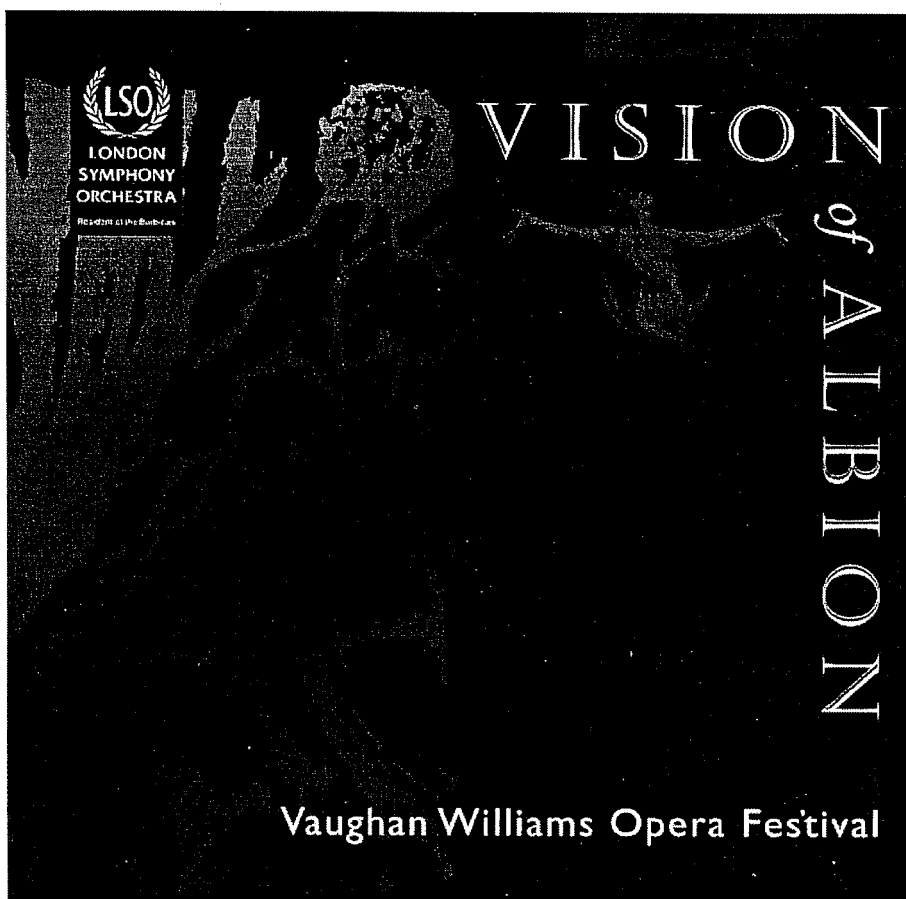
The RVW Society's *Vision of Albion* festival of the operas of Vaughan Williams got off to a superb start at the Barbican Hall on Thursday 2nd of October. Richard Hickox conducted the London Symphony Orchestra, on excellent form, together with Thomas Randle (tenor), Susan Gritton (soprano) and Matthew Brook (baritone). Susan Gritton was standing in at the last moment for the indisposed Rosa Mannion. The choir was that of the London Philharmonic.

The concert began with Hickox conducting an affectionate and broadly paced account of the *Wasps Overture*. However, it was *A Cotswold Romance* which most had come to hear. The chorus sang the opening *Men of Cotsall* with great vigour before Thomas Randle performed *Sweet little linnet* exquisitely. Indeed, the tenor excelled throughout, clearly enjoying himself and identifying fully with the music. He would be ideal as Hugh in a full staging of the opera. We also eagerly await his Amaryllus in *The Poisoned Kiss* later in October.

Susan Gritton obviously has considerable sight-reading ability because she was only asked to sing the piece the morning of the concert. She has much of the most expressive music in the cantata including *Here, Queen uncrown'd* and the gorgeous *Love that has set me free* both from Act II. Her pure and lyrical voice impressed even if there was a slight want of power in the higher register.

At the end, it was the sheer inventiveness of Vaughan Williams's tunes that will stay in the memory. Why is this work not performed more often? At least Chandos recorded it immediately after the concert, coupled with *The Death of Tintagiles* - both world premiere recordings. It will be released in the Spring.

After the interval,



Richard Hickox gave a glorious performance of *A London Symphony*, deeper even than his reading of 1995 with the same orchestra in the Barbican. An evening to cherish.

Stephen Connock
Colchester

Newsbriefs

(continued from back page)

- Bob Bungay, Chairman of the Abbots Langley Singers, informs me that *Dona Nobis Pacem* will be performed on Saturday 29 November at 7.30 pm in St. Saviours Church, The Crescent, Abbots Langley, Herts. Works by Howells and Purcell will be included. Details from 01923 266940.
- Michael Kennedy, the Society's vice-president, has been awarded the CBE. This is most deserved. Our congratulations to Michael.
- The Surrey Philharmonic Orchestra have given us advance notice of a concert on the 4th of April 1998 consisting of VW's *Bass Tuba Concerto* as well as *Job*. Other works by Holst, Butterworth and Howard Jones are to be included. The concert is in Dorking Halls.
- Members will have received notification of the Society's third AGM to be held in the large lecture room of the Guildhall School of Music on Sunday 12th October at 12.00pm.
- The date for the 1998 AGM is Sunday 11th October 1998 at Charterhouse School of Music.

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Obituary

ROBIN IVISON

The sudden death of Robin Ivison on 26th May deprived the RVW Society of its Vice Chairman, and one of its keenest supporters. He will be greatly missed. Stephen Connock attended the funeral service, and reproduces here extracts from the tribute by Adam Broke.

"Robin Ivison had so many sides to him that it is not easy to know where to start. If I had to choose a phrase to describe him I think it would be that he was a man of passionate enthusiasms - and if that sounds as though I am saying the same thing twice, so it should. He was an intellectual: he was a communicator: he loved music and art and architecture: he was a collector: he was a cricketer.

He was instinctively generous. Generous with his knowledge - he never saw knowledge as something for its own sake but as something to be shared. He was generous with money. And above all he was generous in the way in which he encouraged those who worked for him and gave them their opportunities.

He was a private man and yet he was outgoing, considerate, courteous and correct. He set high standards both for himself and for others. He had an astonishing memory with great powers of recall, and there was almost something of the Renaissance about the sheer breadth of his knowledge, his interests and his collections.

Robin was born in north London in 1929. He was the eldest of three sons of a very musical family. His father sang; his mother not only sang but also played the piano to a very high standard, indeed to concert standards. Robin was devoted to his mother throughout his life and she to him. His father's job and war service in the RAF meant that the family was constantly on the move. Robin used to say that he went to something like 10 schools in all but he finished at Allhallows School in Devon which certainly in later life he said he was fond of. He did well there, became captain of hockey and of course also of cricket.

Robin's professional life centred around tax and the Institute of Taxation but it wasn't in any sense the whole of his life. Music was just as central to him. One of his great

regrets was that he couldn't play a musical instrument - he learnt the piano as a boy but he wasn't really able to play. But from an early age he took himself off to opera and concerts and if you were talking to him about, say, opera he would have an absolute recall of every performance he ever saw, who played what, who sang what. He was a sort of walking *Grove's Dictionary*.

He was always a great collector and had a huge collection of records, tapes and CDs and his particular love was for the English romantic composers of the 19th and 20th



photograph taken November 1995

ROBIN IVISON 1929 - 1997

century, Stanford and Parry and Elgar and most of all Vaughan Williams. In fact, he was vice chairman of the Vaughan Williams Society and sadly was halfway through a book on the composer's life which he and Stephen Connock were writing.

And finally cricket - he played a lot of cricket as a schoolboy and high quality club cricket as a young man. He was a good batsman and was even offered a trial for Kent although he didn't take it up. His great hero was Len Hutton but he had seen everyone play who was anyone. And again of course he collected and he had the most enormous library of books on cricket.

The day before Robin died he got up at 6.00 in the morning to go to Lords to bag a dozen seats so that he and his friends could sit together in their usual spot in the Warner Stand. He had a wonderful day there in glorious sunshine - watching England beat

Australia for the third time in a week. When Father Time taps me on the shoulder and asks me what I want for my last day I can't think of anything better."

Robin Ivison - a personal tribute by Robin Barber

I first met Robin when, in the spring of 1994 a first meeting was held of those interested in founding an RVW Society. I was impressed immediately by his great love for the knowledge of English music born of some fifty years concert going.

A Chartered Accountant by profession he was a man of enormous culture with a deep love of the arts, in addition to music he was also a serious collector of books and paintings. A modest man who was unfailingly courteous, interested in and tolerant of the opinions of others and a source of innumerable anecdotes about important musical first occasions he had attended, meetings and correspondence with conductors, critics and composers over the years.

Robin was a stalwart of the Society, from the outset he gave generously of his time, experience and resources and its successful foundation meant a great deal to him.

In the field of English music apart from RVW, Robin's other great admiration was for the work of Sir Hubert Parry and he constantly urged me to listen to him. Of VW's music,

the one work that he kept referring to in our conversations, for it obviously moved him deeply, was No. 3 *A Pastoral Symphony*. Though first performed in 1922 it remained unrecorded for over thirty years, in the early fifties being frustrated at only being able to appreciate this favourite work from a score or rare concert performance Robin entered into a correspondence with Sir Adrian Boult encouraging a first recording. He recalled to me his delight when in 1953 whilst travelling on a train, he read in *Gramophone* that Boult had at last recorded it with the LPO for Decca. A performance which he regarded as definitive and unsurpassed by newer versions. This symphony is regarded by many to be a requiem, and in remembering his great enthusiasm for it, I will think of Robin when I hear it next.

Robin Barber
Ilminster

Listings

October

- 1st - 4th Sussex University, Gardener Arts Centre - Vaughan Williams. *The Poisoned Kiss* (Opera) The Wandering Minstrels 01273 685861
- 8th VW *Sixth Symphony* with Elgar's *Violin Concerto* LPO/Norrington Royal Festival Hall 19.30
- 12th London Barbican Vaughan Williams *Sir John in Love* Northern Sinfonia Orch/Hickox 15.30 0171 638 8891
****STUNNING CAST****
- 19th Cambridge Arts Theatre Vaughan Williams *Riders to the Sea*, Holst *Savitri* City of London Sinfonia/Hickox
- 23rd St Andrews Younger Hall Vaughan Williams *Symphony 5* Wilson *Introit* BBCSO/Maksymiuk 19.30 01334 474610
- 26th London Barbican Vaughan Williams *The Poisoned Kiss* (extracts), *Symphony 5* LSO/Hickox 19.30 0171 638 8891

- 30th Liverpool Philharmonic Hall Vaughan Williams *A London Symphony* Merseyside YO/Rundell 19.30 0151 709 3789

November

- 3rd London Barbican Vaughan Williams *Pilgrim's Progress* ROH, Covent Garden at the Barbican/Hickox 19.30 0171 638 8891
- 4th London Clerkenwell Music Festival: details TBA programme includes *On Wenlock Edge*, *6 Songs from Hugh the Drover*, *Phantasy Quintet*, *7 Songs from Pilgrim's Progress*
- 8th Liverpool Philharmonic Hall Elgar *Pomp & C. No 4* Vaughan Williams *Symphony 4 & Tuba Concerto* Walton *Symphony 2* RLPO/Handley/Haggart 19.30 0151 709 3789
- 29th *A Sea Symphony* at St Alban's Abbey Guildford Phil. under Simon Williams 01923 770543
- 30th Birmingham Symphony Hall Vaughan Williams *Pilgrim's Progress* 0121 212 3333

January 1998

- 5th Liverpool Philharmonic Hall Vaughan Williams *A London Symphony*, Holst *Planets* NYOGB/NYCh/Seaman 19.30 0151 709 3789
- 17th Liverpool Philharmonic Hall Elgar *In the South* Vaughan Williams *Sea Symphony & Oboe Concerto*, RLPO/Handley/Small/Dawson/Roberts 19.30 0151 709 3789
- 20th, 21st, 22nd Liverpool Philharmonic Hall Vaughan Williams *Greensleeves Fantasia* & choral works by Purcell and Vaughan Williams Walton *Symphony 2* Ch of Liverpool Cathedral/Tracey 19.30 0151 709 3789

February 1998

- 12th Glasgow Royal Concert Hall Vaughan Williams *Symphony 5* RSNO/Judd 19.30 0131 529 6000
- 15th Edinburgh Festival Theatre Vaughan Williams *Symphony 5* RSNO/Judd 19.30 0131 529 6000

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Newsbriefs

- *The Times* of June 17th informs us that Sir Peter Maxwell Davies will be composing his next symphony in Antarctica. He plans to write a homage to Vaughan Williams's *Sinfonia Antartica* whose première he attended in 1953. Sir Peter said: "The Antarctic experience will be an encounter with nature, with silence and emptiness such as one can never experience in Europe. I look forward to coming to terms with these new experiences in the symphony I will write."

(continued on page 34)

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