



Journal of the
RVW
 Society

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EDITOR

*Stephen Connock
 (see address below)*

Much to look forward to...

The RVW Society is involved in a number of important and exciting projects, some of which will come to fruition quickly and others will take place in the 2002-2003 season. Of the greatest interest to RVW Society members is the major Festival of symphonies and choral works being planned under the title *Toward the Unknown Region*.

Toward the Unknown Region

This Festival will be conducted by Richard Hickox using his new orchestra the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. Eight concerts are being planned for Wales and there are likely to be four concerts in London. The Festival begins at the end of 2002 and many rare choral works will be programmed alongside all the nine symphonies. *Dona Nobis Pacem, Hodie* and *Sancta Civitas* will be played as will the *Six Choral Songs (In Time of War)* - coupled with the *Symphony No. 4* and the *Song of Thanksgiving*, coupled with the *Fifth Symphony*. All the concerts will be broadcast live on BBC Radio 3.

Have you seen but a bright lily grow?

It is also wonderful news that a new recording of *Sir John in Love* has been scheduled for 7-10th of December this year using the same forces who so memorably performed the opera at the Barbican in October 1997 as part of the *Vision of Albion* Festival. Donald Maxwell was outstanding as Sir John in a uniformly strong cast and repeats his role in the new Chandos recording. Richard Hickox conducts the Northern Sinfonia. The recording is being financed by The Garland Appeal and this will be the charity's first contribution to recordings of Vaughan Williams.

Members will also be delighted to learn that *Sir John in Love* will be performed in Newcastle City Hall by the Northern Sinfonia under Richard Hickox on September 29th 2000 as part of the preparation for the recording. There is such marvellous, heart warming music in this opera that all members are urged to get to Newcastle, somehow, for the concert performance on 29th September.

Charterhouse Symposium

Following the success of the Conference *Vaughan Williams in a New Century* at the British Library last November, Robin Wells of Charterhouse and Byron Adams of the University of California have jointly planned a superb series of lectures, concerts and other events at Charterhouse School from 23rd to 29th of July, 2000. At the very reasonable fee of £245.00 to RVW Society members for all events at the Symposium and overnight accommodation, this seems like an event not to be missed.

And more.....

With more Vaughan Williams scheduled for the Three Choirs Festival, with RVW Ltd. planning the next installment of the publication of the *Early Works* with the *Piano Quintet* being performed at our AGM on October 8th, there is indeed much to look forward to.

For full update on the activities of the Garland Appeal see page 20 - 22

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Vaughan William's response to the words of George Herbert

In the first of two postscripts on George Herbert following the last edition of the RVW Society Journal, Robin Wells considers VW's treatment of the words of the *Five Mystical Songs*.

Vaughan Williams conducted the first performance of *Five Mystical Songs* at the Worcester Meeting of The Three Choirs Festival in 1911 with Campbell McInnes as the baritone soloist. The previous years had witnessed the first performance of the *Tallis Fantasia* at Gloucester and the year following was to receive the first performance of the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*. Not a bad hat-trick of Three Choirs first performances as each of these works has gained a permanent and much loved place in the repertoire.



St. John's Church - Lower Bemerton

The composer may well have remembered the Worcester performance for a more obscure reason as Ursula Vaughan Williams recounts his reaction in her biography; When I looked at the fiddles I thought I was going mad, for I saw what appeared to be Kreisler at the back desk. I got through somehow, and at the end I whispered to Reed "Am I mad, or did I see Kreisler in the band?" "Oh yes", he said "he broke a string and wanted to play it in before the Elgar Concerto".

By 1911 VW had accumulated considerable experience with words and music. He had discovered and edited Folk Song; he had edited Purcell; he had written two songs cycles – *Songs of Travel* and *On Wenlock Edge*, while his two choral works – *Toward the Unknown Region* and the *Sea Symphony* had met with acclaim. His involvement with the *English Hymnal* (1906) where he strove to combine fine words with fine music would have helped in the development of what was already a very natural and instinctive musical response to poetry. He always knew where to turn to for his sources and for poets of quality. To date he had drawn upon Stevenson, Rossetti, Whitman, Housman to mention but a few, and now George Herbert (1593 – 1633). In selecting from Herbert's works, VW was turning to a poet of a very different generation; a cleric in whose parish of

Bemerton, many years later, VW's own father had served as curate before moving to Down Ampney.

The *Five Mystical Songs* were written over a period of time when he was also setting Housman's poetry in another song cycle – *On Wenlock Edge* and there are parallels which may be noted; tonal ambiguity and a freedom of key and mode characterised by flattened leading notes and pentatonic turns of phrase; and use of ostinato figures, parallel movement of fifths, triads and sevenths; a sure ear for instrumental colour and contrast. Dealing with words and music had so dominated his life for ten years that he had developed a most instinctive and natural feel for word setting and vocal characterisation which might be considered second only to Purcell. These features are developed even further in the Four Hymns to which VW turned in the following year.

With VW's treatment of words there is always a natural feeling for speech-rhythm and for the natural rise or fall of a phrase. Phrases are paced and measured so that important words and moments are well-placed and emphasised in a musical manner. This may be by means of note-length or a melisma, by pitch or timbre, or by some harmonic or rhythmical feature which heightens the interest. These are all features which any composer may apply when setting text, but VW has his own very individual technique as we shall see in the songs which follow.

Easter opens with a strong affirmation of the risen Lord. If it were only marked *nobilmente* we could be forgiven for thinking it was Elgar – or could we? As it is it is *Maestoso, Risoluto* and *Largamente* and despite this and the surge of triplets and secondary sevenths it could only be Vaughan Williams and the sweep of the opening of the *Sea Symphony* is not far away. The dominant to the tonic is always a most powerful musical statement and so it is here. VW's response to Herbert's uplifting text requires the Baritone to rise on the very word 'rise' from B flat to the high E flat supported by shifting seventh, ninth and eleventh chords. This is immediately reinforced by the chorus which rises from B flat to top F before settling down to E flat. This repetition adds great strength to the opening phrase and because of the appoggiatura F the effect is doubled. This rising phrase recurs mostly effectively at the end of the verse when the soprano line reaches out from B flat to F and then to G and finally higher still to A flat on the word 'Lord'. The key changes in verse two to a more animated modal E minor for 'Awake, my lute' then G minor with the parallel textures that we hear again in the third song. Tonality is often questionable and vague; the leading note is frequently flattened and yet as the music of the opening is heard again in the final phrase there is always a sense of natural resolution when we

get back to a chord E flat Major, even after the chromaticism of the final four bars.

The second song *I got me flowers* is contrasted in every way from *Easter*. It begins quietly even tentatively with repeated off-beat chords which gain momentum as if urging the voice to sing. The first two verses are effectively strophic for the baritone and almost pentatonic. The tonal centre in these two verses fluctuates between E flat minor and G flat major, but it has an underlying modality which is emphasised by the act that there is not one accidental in the whole song. Melodically the phrases balance well despite constantly shifting time signatures; but in a way the bar-lines are redundant such is the feeling for accent and the natural fall of each phrase. VW's attention to detail is seen in the extension by way of a 5/4 bar (2 before C) to carry over the third phrase at the end of the second verse helps to avoid any squareness while maintaining both musical and literal sense. The accompaniment throughout captures the simple mood with parallel woodwind and hard chords supporting the voice. The third verse sees a sudden change of mood and key to E major and a new idea as the choir takes over from the orchestra and supports the baritone with a wordless accompaniment. The composer explores choral sounds by asking the choir not to hum with closed lips, but to sing with a short "u" sound. VW, more than any composer to date, frequently asks his singers for very specific effects and vowel shapes and further examples are found in the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* and in *Flos Campi* especially. The song could have ended in this tranquil mood, but the key swings back into the mode of the opening for a triumphant final statement; initially E flat minor for 'There is but one' and then into the major, strengthened by unison voices, for the final assertive phrase 'and that one ever'.



St. Andrew's Church - Lower Bemerton

A study of the manuscripts in the British Library reveals that the composer originally intended only to set four songs. There is no mention of *Love bade me welcome* on the title page which is inscribed *Four Mystical Songs*. Michael Kennedy says that this song was the last to be written and so we may assume it was a later addition. And all the better for that because we have gained one of the composer's finest utterances. VW's ordering of the five rather than four songs gives a balance and symmetry to the cycle. The spacious, ecstatic opening of *Easter* is balanced by the noisy bustle of *Antiphon* while the gentle repose of *Love bade me welcome* adds a high point of intensity and expressiveness in the centre of the

cycle. *I got me flowers* and *The Call*, placed second and fourth, are again well contrasted, reflective and less weighty than the other songs.

At the outset the parallel fifths and gentle undulating triads and sevenths over long pedal notes such as we have just heard in the unaccompanied section of the previous song establish a mood of calm repose. The key is a modal E minor which the melodic line has a pentatonic flavour. This semi-strophic song builds to its climax in verse three when the harmonic rhythm increases to a degree with strong parallel movement throughout the texture as the melody is doubled in the bass, and the shadow of Debussy and Ravel looms large. Key is out of the window for a moment as minor chords of E, D, B flat, A flat and C sharp tumble one after the other. This restlessness continues as the composer tries to restore things to E minor. Compare the similarity with the end of the last song; just when we think we has finished and the climax passed we are distracted by a sudden wrench to G minor. Why? This is the master-stroke; the chord of E major that follows and ushers in the wordless chant of the choir (this time to singing to "Ah") is a moment of genius. The baritone undersings with great serenity in partnership with the plainsong *O Sacrum Convivium* as the songs moves effortlessly to its conclusion.



St. Michael's Church - Bemerton Heath

The Call is a strophic solo setting with no choral part. The words flow easily in two-bar phrases of compound time, mostly one note per syllable except for a short melisma to high light the word 'killeth' which again just offsets any squareness. The key so far has been a modal E flat major as in *Easter*, but now the third verse lifts into G flat major and two 9/8 bars help to extend and highlight the words 'joy' and 'none'. The rhythmical interest is maintained in the final phrase where 'joys' is drawn out by a long melisma but just when there might have been a hemiola it doesn't materialise.

Antiphon completes the set by excluding the baritone in the full version '*Let all the world in every corner sing*' sums up this cycle and makes for a fitting and exultant paean of joy for the chorus which complements everything that has gone before. It is confident and positive and looks forward rather than back. The persistent quaver rhythm, bell-like ostinato figures and hemiolas give it a tremendous feeling of busyness, of involvement by all and everyone everywhere. Harmonically this song is strongly rooted in D major, although interest is

maintained by the now customary thumb-prints of flat leading notes and colourful cadences. It is a good anthem like setting which has led to its popularity in that genre with voices in unison, in pairs, sopranos and altos set against tenors and basses. The words fall naturally into a speech-rhythm of one note per syllable, but the words 'praise' and 'longest' are characterised by melismas, and the hemiola adds strength to '*My God and King*'. VW keeps the interest alive to the end with a series of seemingly disconnected and unrelated chords before the final triumphant chord of D major. There is no doubt when it is over.

Although it has been suggested that VW had nothing to say with *Five Mystical Songs* it does

consolidate many features of his style at this stage in his development. There were not too many antecedents for such works – Stanford's *Songs of the Sea* (1904) and *Songs of the Fleet* (1910) perhaps, but for VW this was the right moment for this setting.

There is more to music than merely having something new to say all the time and this cycle has become an enduring part of his output. It is a work which gives much pleasure to both singers and audiences alike and a gentle introduction to something more challenging such as *Sancta Civitas* or *Hodie*.

Robin Wells
Charterhouse

The One that Got Away

In the second of our postscripts on George Herbert, Roger Juneau considers VW's setting of the poet in *Hodie*.

I enjoyed the articles on Herbert and Vaughan Williams that appeared in Journal No. 17 but, unless I've overlooked it, there was no mention of the Herbert poem that is set as part of *Hodie* as item IX, called (by RVW) *Pastoral*. Since it was composed over forty years later than *Five Mystical Songs*, *Pastoral* makes an interesting comparison with them, especially with the third song, *Love bade me welcome*.

Like Hardy, Herbert used a huge variety of stanza forms, but it happens that the form and length of "Pastoral" and "Love" are the same, save that the former has two extra lines (a closing couplet). Even so, "Pastoral" in performance has only half the duration of "Love". "Pastoral" has a brisker tempo; also, in the early setting ("Love") there are an introduction and brief instrumental interludes. This slowness (*andante sostenuto* – *tempo rubato*) and careful scene-setting are indeed very atmospheric. Yet "Pastoral", for all its brevity, is its equal in this respect, and has something more, which I will come to later. The orchestral accompaniment of "Pastoral" is just that – simultaneous playing virtually coterminous with the voice, scarcely allowing time for pauses between lines, but modulations of key and colouring wondrously run with and amplify the rapidly fluctuating mood of the poem. So much in so little! (2' 44' : Hickox). This is patently the work of a Master.

The composer had different purposes, of course, in his settings of these poems: in creating *Hodie / This Day*, a celebration of Christmas, he was plainly not writing further mystical songs. "Love bade me welcome" is an interior: a room, the heart of the poet, an esoteric inner dialogue on the state of the soul. In the introduction, the clarinet's repeated descending two-note phrase and pause evokes stillness and containment. The briskness of "Pastoral", by contrast, is an open air hymn, fresh with "the streams, they grace/ Enriching all the place" – and we can hear and picture the

streams throughout, ceaselessly flowing, even while the sung words move on, via fleeting chiding and sadness, to the main point: the desire of the poet to praise God ceaselessly in endless light:

His beams shall cheer my breast, and both so twine
Till ev'n his beams sing, and my music shine

I'm reminded by this synaesthesia of the anecdote of RVW in old age being asked about his musical activities in the next world, and replying "I shall be the music". The idea in this climax is an apotheosis of pastoral, but light and whimsical and merry, in words and music, and far from the solemn intensity of *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*. It is also a genial and almost overwhelming outpouring that persuades this listener that the composer lost himself in identification with the experience of the poet: an example, perhaps of Keat's negative capability. "Love", on the other hand, beautiful and dramatic though it is, seems a vivid projection of someone else's experience; there's a cultural distance between poet and composer.

The context of "Pastoral" is the global festivity of Christmas, of course, not rarefied personal mysticism; and that context in *Hodie* includes, too "The Oxen", by Thomas Hardy. The inclusion of this well known sceptical poem is often supposed to be an indicator of VW's agnostic viewpoint. Maybe, but I think that a qualitative difference cannot be detected in the *music*; VW was borne along by the totality of the idea and experience of Christmas: there is as much conviction in "Pastoral" as in "The Oxen".

Thus the octogenarian composer of major symphonies, in what Wilfred Mellers calls (as a term of praise) his second childhood. The work of his early maturity, *Five Mystical Songs* (1911), is superb too, but lacks the ripeness and fullness of the old man's grand humanity.

Roger Juneau
Repton, Derbyshire

R . V . W . & J . S . B .

by Michael Kennedy

Vaughan Williams was introduced to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach when he was at his preparatory school, he tells us in his *A Musical Autobiography*.¹ The visiting piano teacher gave him Novello's *Bach Album* edited by Berthold Tours. Bach, Vaughan Williams wrote, "had never been part of the home curriculum – Handel, Mozart, Haydn and some early Beethoven was what we were fed on at home ... Of Bach I then knew nothing and I imagined vaguely that he was like Handel but not as good. The Bach album was a revelation, something quite different from anything I knew, and Bach still remains for me in a niche by himself". That was written about 65 years after Mr C. T. West, as the teacher was called, made his inspired choice. It may today seem an obvious choice, but we should remember that the revival of interest in Bach's music in England occurred in the latter half of the 19th century and that the first complete performance here of the *St Matthew Passion* was not until April 1854.

The flame that Mr West lit in RVW burned ever brighter. He joined the Bach Choir in 1903, learning the music in the best way – by taking part in performances. No doubt he introduced the congregation to Bach during his short tenure of the organ loft of St Barnabas, Lambeth, and in 1915, while stationed at Saffron Waldon in the army, he spent most of his free time playing Bach on the church organ there. He had conducted Bach motets and cantatas at the Leith Hill Musical Festival in Dorking since it was founded, with him as conductor, in 1905, but it was after his appointment in 1921 as conductor of the London Bach Choir, in succession to Sir Hugh Allen, that he was able to undertake works beyond the scope of the Leith Hill choirs. His first Bach Choir concert, on 14 December 1921 in the Central Hall, Westminster, was a programme of three Bach cantatas and three instrumental works, with the London Symphony Orchestra led by W H Reed, Harold Samuel the pianist, Harold Darke at the organ and Steuart Wilson and Clive Carey the tenor and baritone soloists. What a line-up! The performance of *Jesus nahm zu sich* was thought to be its first in England.

He first conducted the *St Matthew Passion* on 7 March 1923 at the Queen's Hall, repeating it during the month at Central Hall, Westminster, and in Bermondsey. He received a congratulatory letter from his former teacher, Stanford, who found the performance "so

dignified and pious (not 'pi') ... the points were so exactly what J.S.B meant", but thought the part of Jesus was sung too emotionally. In the same month Vaughan Williams also conducted four performances of the *St John Passion*, using a small choir drawn from the Bach choir. It was not until 24 March 1931 that he conducted the *St Matthew Passion* at the Leith Hill Festival in Dorking, when the performance (with nearly 400 voices) was dedicated to the memory of his sister Margaret. (She had founded the festival and this memorial was at the wish of the committee. RVW accepted their wishes, although he had never particularly liked her). The soloists included some of his favourite singers: Dorothy Silk and Astra Desmond the soprano and contralto, Steuart Wilson and Eric Green the tenors, Arthur Cranmer and Keith Falkner the bass-baritones. Because of financial difficulties, there were no further performances until 1938 and 1942. After 1942 the *St Matthew* became an annual event, Vaughan Williams conducting it until 1958. I have written about his "version" of it (now available on Pearl CDs) elsewhere,



but I shall always count myself fortunate and privileged that I attended several performances with Eric Greene and Arthur Cranmer unforgettable among the soloists. Whatever one's religious views, it was more than a musical experience – a great communal act of faith in something beyond human knowledge. This was intensified by the audience joining in the chorales, when VW would turn round and conduct. I was also lucky enough to attend rehearsals where one saw VW the practical musician at work, sometimes losing his temper in a terrifying fashion. It would be remiss, though, to omit mention of the performances of the *St John Passion* that he conducted in St Martin's Church, Dorking. These were more intimate, with a small choir, but in their way as moving.

With the Bach Choir he also, of course, conducted the Mass in B minor. A 1924 performance brought a letter from Sir Hugh Allen: "*Et exspecto* lifted me out of my seat. The performance was exhilarating and often astonishing – I never heard them double along as you made them in the *Osanna*. It's the first time I've ever known angels to be hustled." This suggests that today's generally faster tempi in Bach, in this work especially, would neither have surprised nor shocked RVW. During the Second World War, while on duty fire-watching in Dorking, Vaughan Williams fitted the words of the English liturgy to the music of the Mass in order to bring the work into the range of village choirs who felt they could not cope with Latin. The question of in which language Bach should be sung had exercised him from the start of his conductorship of the Bach Choir in 1921 when he wrote in the programme:

The Bach Choir have no unreasoning

prejudice against the German language, but it is difficult to sing from the heart in any language but one's own [is it?]; therefore English must be the language of an adequate rendering, provided that the English used has (1) any relation to the German original, (2) any relation to the English language as it exists outside opera libretti.

In a programme-note he wrote for performances of the Mass in B minor in English, he asserted that it was "worthwhile occasionally to alter a crotchet to two quavers, to re-articulate a tied note or even (occasionally) to add a note, or (very occasionally) to omit one, for the sake of keeping the Prayer Book text unaltered." The thorniest problem he met in the Mass was with the *Quoniam* and *Cum Sancto*. He explained:

It would sound rather absurd to sing the most jubilant music in the world to 'with the Holy Ghost, in the glory of God the Father'. Moreover, Bach, when setting these words, not any ecclesiastical dogma, but an expression of the 'Glory of God the Father'. Therefore I feel justified in leaving out any extraneous words in this chorus. Nevertheless, by my rules I was obliged to fit the complete sentence in somewhere. Why not at the end of the *Quoniam*? Here the word 'altissimus' actually occurs, which in English becomes 'Most High', the structure of the Latin sentence being quite different from that of the English; this leaves me free to use the words 'Thou only art most high in the glory of God the Father. Amen', as a fitting background for what is, to some of us, the greatest musical movement ever written.



That is what one might call the technical aspect of RVW as Bach specialist. There is a wider interpretative aspect, his appreciation of the dramatic nature of the *St Matthew Passion* (although whether he would have approved of the transfer of the Passion into the opera house is open to debate). But he observed, in a lecture he gave in Dorking before the 1931 performance, that "there is fairly good evidence that Bach must have been familiar with the ceremonies where, after a church service, a procession to the Cross took place out of doors in which the various characters in the story, including a representative of Christ himself,

¹National Music and Other Essays (OUP 1987), pp. 178-9.

with his cross, marched in traditional order, chanting hymns. Surely a procession of this kind must have been in Bach's mind when he planned his great opening chorus in which the opposing choirs cry to each other 'See him – whom? – the bridegroom' and as the procession advances a third choir is heard singing the well-known hymn 'O Lamb of God most holy'." Somewhere, in one of his essays, RVW suggested that the *St Matthew Passion* would make a wonderful film.

The question of his views on 'period' performance of Bach has been often discussed. In his famous broadcast talk *Bach the Great Bourgeois* (1950), delivered before the present preoccupation with "authenticity" and playing on period instruments or reproductions of them got under weigh, he said: "We cannot perform Bach exactly as he was played in his time even if we wanted to, and the question is, do we want to? I say emphatically No! ... Why should we perform Bach with all the disabilities under which he suffered any more than we perform Shakespeare in the Elizabethan pronunciation."

The argument goes on and there can be no resolution to it. He was often attacked for his use of a pianoforte continuo in the Passions instead of a harpsichord. He was adamant: "There can be no doubt that the pianoforte, with its infinite gradations of tone, from an almost orchestral *fortissimo* to an almost inaudible *pianissimo*, performs the function of a continuo better than the harpsichord, with its hard, unyielding tone. The same applies to our oboes with their lovely tone, which no one hesitates to use instead of the coarse-sounding oboes of Bach's time: why make an exception of the harpsichord as is now fashionable?" (letter to *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 February 1958). He had once told Cedric Glover that he thought "a harpsichord and a small organ are ideal for the recitatives (as they do at Amsterdam) but this is out of practical politics – and who is going to play it? Also the harpsichord by itself at once gives an 'antiquarian' flavour to the music which we want to avoid at all costs." But he evidently hardened his views because, in the 1958 letter quoted above, he said that "to my mind the use of the harpsichord or viola da gamba for continuo seems to reduce the *St John Passion* to a museum piece to be put in a glass case." And he wrote to me in 1957: "I WILL NOT HAVE a voil da gamba inside the building."

Why was it that RVW responded so strongly to Bach? Well, quite simply, he regarded him as the greatest composer who had ever lived. If we look for Bach's influence on Vaughan Williams' music we will find it, superficially, in the Violin Concerto and in the lay-out of *Sancta Civitas* and *Hodie* and in the short motets such as *Valiant-For-Truth*. But it goes deeper than that. It is connected with his own views on nationalism in music, how music must appeal to the composer's own countrymen before it can become international. "Belonging to no period or style, something for all time" – that was the key to Bach for Vaughan Williams. And, as he said in *Bach the Great Bourgeois*, "it is Bach's intense humanity which endears him

to me and my fellow bourgeois ... Through all the changes and chances, the beauty of his music abides because his music appeals to everyone – not only to the aesthetic, the musicologist or the propagandist, but above all to Whitman's 'Divine Average', that great middle class from whom nearly all that is worth while in religion,

painting, poetry and music has sprung." Perhaps they, the German and the Englishman, were yeomen at heart. Across the centuries, as one could realise at a Passion performance, their minds met.

Michael Kennedy

The Bach Connection:

On performing Vaughan Williams' *Introduction and Fugue for Two Pianos*

From the word go, getting to know Vaughan Williams' *Introduction and Fugue* was an (almost) unalloyed delight. It would be foolish to claim that learning any substantial two piano work is ever less than challenging in matters of ensemble, interpretation, tonal matching and differences in artistic temperament (or, to be more accurate, sheer bad temper under rehearsal conditions!), but I can truthfully say that we felt immediately at home with this, our first essay into Vaughan Williams territory.

I think it helps that we are the daughters of a vicar. The work is compellingly mystical – most obviously throughout the first 32 bars of the *Introduction* and in the various meditative moments of the *Fugue* itself – and this particular type of spirituality is firmly based in the tradition of hymnody (with its attendant organ based richness of sound and resonantly chordal texture) into which we were born. Of course, the *Introduction and Fugue* is far more than a series of extended hymnal passages and ethereal soundbites. I would suggest, nevertheless, that its inherent mysticism springs from a source with which many of us feel intimately connected and this is surely one of the more essential, and satisfying, ingredients in music of a 'nationalist' (horrid word, but you know what I mean) bent.

Then there is the Bach connection. It has been often noted that the *Introduction and Fugue* is a direct descendant of Bach's Preludes and Fugues with its loose fantasia-like *Introduction* and the more disciplined and rigid contrapuntalism of the *Fugue*. The influence of Bach is also present in the architecture of this work. The proportions are just right: the fugal themes and counter-themes driving themselves towards a climax, and the complexity of the contrapuntal writing becoming more intense as the *fugue* progresses – all pure Bach in construction terms – but what particularly struck both myself and Alexandra was the architectural building in to the piece of several soaring arches which exuberantly overlap one with the other: Vaughan Williams' personal response to the overarching majesty of Bach's work perhaps, and certainly reminiscent of the places of worship from which it all sprang.

Vaughan Williams' *Introduction and Fugue* is no homage to folk-songs of the British Isles or paean to English whimsy. The strangely murky opening bars – with their harmonic shiftiness, wink at the Orient, and 'impressionistic' vibemetamorphose later in the *Fugue* into frightening, cataclysmic beasts which rampage up and down the keyboard in a frenzied attack on our preconceived notions of 'Englishness' and the verdant in English music. This is not to say that Vaughan Williams ever totally relinquishes his grasp on a musical and psychological landscape that is essential English – there is a great deal in the piece that follows the lush and undulating contours of our land – but more cosmopolitan and wide reaching influences are indelibly printed on this remarkable piece.



"Nicola Bibby (left) with her sister Alexandra"

There are, indeed, so many shadowy contributors to the *Introduction and Fugue* the more obvious amongst them being the aforementioned King of *Fugue* and keyboard skills himself, J.S.B, along with Debussy and Holst (shades of Saturn from the *Planets* in the opening section) – that is should sound, in actuality, like a parody of the names and styles with which Vaughan Williams was so closely linked throughout his life. But, of course, as with all good art, the references become subsumed and transformed; the feelings and emotions of the composer overlay the technical influences and connections; the work takes on a life of its own, and we, happily, are blest with a wholly original monument to a unique and enduring composer.

I wish I could tell you all to rush out and buy the CD of this piece of music for the good of your hearts and minds, but, tragically, this is not possible due to the fact that it has never been recorded. If any of you have any ideas about how we might find the money to put such a project into action (along with the two piano arrangement of *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*, *Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn Tunes and Greensleeves*), please do not hesitate to contact me. I would be delighted to hear from you.

Nicola Bibby

Hodie and the Bach Passions

by Marjorie Monroe-Fischer

It is significant that, after a life-long commitment to the Passions of Johann Sebastian Bach, Vaughan Williams should utilise some of Bach's ideas himself. Perhaps the attraction for RVW was Bach's propensity towards symbolism and incredible depth of meaning that he composed into each piece; his great faith, something that Vaughan Williams never found; and the fact that Bach composed his sacred music using the language of his fellow countrymen, an idea which began with Martin Luther, was taken up by the Church of England, and was important to RVW. In the programme notes for a Bach Choir concert in 1921 Vaughan Williams wrote that it seemed 'to be a sound principle that no singer should sing in any language with which both he and his audience are not familiar'.

It is probably due to the limited number of large works for Christmas, and his liking of the idea of Christmas, that RVW commented in 1953 that there should be another work for Christmas, and

that it would be fun to write one. The result was *Hodie (This Day)* in which he allowed himself, whilst using his own harmonic language, to give subtle homage to his favourite composer. The concept of the work closely resembles that of a Passion: the telling a biblical story, in this case that of the birth rather than the death of Christ.

The overall structure of the Passions of Bach consists of a great opening chorus, the telling of the story through the use of a tenor soloist, with secco recitative accompaniment, as the narrator or Evangelist and the choir, accompanied by the full orchestra, acting as the crowd in the Turba choruses. Chorales, familiar to the Lutheran churchgoers of the time and solos are interspersed with the action commenting on the story. *Hodie* is constructed in much the same way. Following the great opening chorus the narration of the story is presented in a single melodic line offered by Vaughan Williams as a boy's chorus rather than soloist, accompanied not by the full orchestra but by an organ. Just as Bach changed Jesus' recitative accompaniment in the *St Matthew Passion* to full strings for a halo effect, RVW uses a fuller

orchestral sound to accompany the tenor soloist appearing as the Angel in Joseph's dream.

Vaughan Williams employs solos and chorales in much the same way as Bach did. Rather than using familiar hymn-tunes as Bach did, RVW composes his own, as beautiful in their simplicity as Bach's chorale harmonisations were in their complexity.

One very distinctive difference between *Hodie* and the Passions of JSB is the compilation of the text. Rather than using a librettist for a uniformity of writing style and imaging Vaughan Williams uses texts from a variety of poets which incorporated a variety of periods and writing styles. The result is an exciting fusion of four centuries of English language, the English oratorio, the German Passion and RVW's characteristic musical style.

1. Vaughan Williams U: *R.V.W.* Clarendon Press, 1964 p 423
2. Mellers, W: *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion.* Albion Music Ltd, 1989
3. Vaughan Williams, p 337
4. Vaughan Williams, p 148

Working with Ralph Vaughan Williams in Bach at Dorking

by John Carol Case OBE



John Carol Case had the privilege of performing the *St Matthew Passion* several times under VW's direction and is a soloist in the new CD recording of the Passion issued by Pearl.

Here he tells the RVW Society of his experience working with RVW.

Occasionally, when I look back on my singing career, I have a wry smile at remembering something which at the time appeared to be almost a backward step, yet turned out to offer an unexpectedly important opportunity: for instance the way events led to me being introduced to Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Having been a Choral Scholar at King's College, Cambridge and with a certain amount of solo-singing experience at the University, I blithely set out on a career as a singer, (encouraged by the then-organist at King's Boris Ord), little realising how different the world of professional performing would be. For a year I struggled to make a living, and eventually my father suggested that with two Cambridge degrees, and having given singing a try, perhaps it would be far more sensible to do what I had originally intended: become a schoolmaster. In 1948 I was lucky enough to be appointed Director of Music at King's College School, Wimbledon (no connection with Cambridge) and after I had been there a short while, one of the members of staff, knowing I was a singer, asked if I would join his choir to sing the solo part in R.V.W.'s "Fantasia on Christmas Carols". No fee (of course!) but it was a work I knew and loved, and in those early

days I never turned down an opportunity to perform, so I agreed. We discussed a few details and as he was turning away he casually mentioned that R.V.W himself would be conducting!

As can be imagined I went to the rehearsal feeling more than a little nervous, but he soon put everyone at their ease: he was applauded as he came into the room, whereat he beamed and asked, in that gruff voice of his, if anyone had a conducting-stick, as he had left his at home. No fancy word like *baton*, but a good solid English word – conducting stick; how typical! Of course we all laughed and at once the tension was lifted. Nobody had a spare 'conducting stick' (!) so he had to use a rather stubby pencil. A great deal has been written about his conducting technique, but his stick-work was unimportant, he really conducted with his eyes. As we all know, the 'Fantasia' opens with eight bars of 'cello solo then in comes the baritone with 'This is the truth ...' At this point he turned and just looked at me over the top of his half-moon glasses and without him saying a word I knew exactly what he wanted: he was the only conductor I worked with who could do this. I was once asked what did his eyes convey? The answer is simple: total sincerity and belief in the music.

This was even more evident when, as a result of that 'Fantasia' concert, he asked me to sing the arias for him in his annual performance of Bach's 'St Matthew Passion' at Dorking. These performances, with R.V.W conducting, were very special occasions.

He obviously loved and revered the work, but had definite ideas as to how he wanted it performed, and, for instance, would not allow a formal entrance by the performers onto the platform. I think he wanted us all to approach the performance as if were a commemorative service rather than a concert. During the ten minutes or so before it began, all of us, R.V.W, soloists, choir and orchestra would quietly take our places in much the same way as a congregation would assemble in church. When the time came, he would turn round

to look at the audience and, if all seemed ready, he would stand, and the performance would begin.

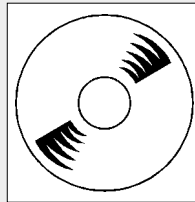
We have to remember that this was nearly fifty years ago, so the idea of using 'authentic' instruments was in its infancy, and all the tempi were considerably slower than we expect today: looking back, it was as if R.V.W were viewing the work through 19th century eyes. He certainly had no truck with a harpsichord, and when it came to the recitatives he used a grand piano having himself written a continuous flowing accompaniment, not the few sparse chords we are so familiar with now. Today this may sound like an anachronism, but after all if a piano is to be used, then it makes sense to have a 'pianistic' accompaniment. I remember being somewhat taken aback at first, but it all seemed logical within the context of R.V.W's approach; and it is quite fascinating to hear the way one composer performs the work of another.

He seemed to regard the 'Last Supper' scene almost as the centrepiece, and insisted that everyone should be on their feet for this: he would turn round to the audience, looking over their glasses, and would not continue until everyone was standing; at the end of the scene he would gesture for them to be seated. R.V.W had most skilfully abbreviated the Passion, omitting some numbers completely, leaving out the 'Da capo' for others, but as with everything he did it seemed apposite, and the whole performance flowed seamlessly. I was fortunate to have had the privilege of performing the 'St Matthew' several times under R.V.W's direction, and those performances remain etched in my mind: you too can share that unique memory thanks to the live recording of his last performance of the 'St Matthew', now issued by Pearl on CD.

As I wrote at the beginning of this article, had I not decided to take up teaching, as part of my career, when I did, the opportunity to meet Ralph Vaughan Williams might never have occurred, and what I would have missed!

Record Review

The St. Matthew Passion conducted by VW
by Lewis Foreman



J. S. Bach: *St Matthew Passion*. The Leith Hill Festival performance from 5 March 1958 conducted by Ralph Vaughan Williams. Pearl 2 CD set GEMS 0079

It is a matter for celebration that this legendary performance should now be available on CD, and it needs to be said at the outset that it is not merely a performance to be considered against other performances. It is something special, a long cherished event from 42 years ago suddenly made available to us all in remarkably good sound.

First the history. Although Pearl announce this to be the first issue of this recording in any format, those lucky readers who have the LP issue will know that it first appeared on three LPs on the Caviar label (CH-104) in Canada. They are probably among the rarest of LPs, and I have only ever seen one set since it was issued around thirty years ago. However, comparison of that recording with the Pearl version is to experience a wonderful revelation. It is like a window being cleaned, or brown varnish removed from a really dirty picture. And the impact the reversal of the compression on the old LPs gives to the choruses is breathtaking.

Also this is not a broadcast transcription – the BBC did not take these performances at the Leith Hill Festival; rather it was recorded in the hall by admirers led by Gerald Finzi's son Christopher as a gift for the composer.

It is worth remembering how the *St Matthew Passion* emerged as a repertoire work over Vaughan Williams' lifetime, to understand his very personal mixture of the practical, the dramatic and the devout in his response to it, and how this determined how he thought it should be done.

An English version of the *St Matthew Passion* was published in 1862, but the emergence of the complete *St Matthew Passion* for British audiences was a gradual one during the nineteenth century, and when Sir Joseph Barnby conducted it in Westminster Abbey in 1871 it was unfamiliar to most music lovers. In 1885 Otto Goldschmidt conducted a performance in the Royal Albert Hall and featured specially made instruments – oboe d'amore and what was called a "Bach trumpet" – perhaps the first tentative beginnings of authentic performance. In 1910 Stanford is

recorded as saying that even then he had only conducted it in full twice.

It is also worth remembering Sir Henry Wood's account of the development of his approach to the *St Matthew Passion* (in *My Life of Music* pp 283-296). For his Sheffield Festival performance in 1908, Wood wanted to do a more authentic version than the Robert Franz edition then generally given which added trumpets and trombones, and used an English text which was not faithful to the King James Bible. But Wood's attempt at authenticity produced a performance in which he used a choir of three hundred, a very full complement of strings and eight woodwind to each part. Wood remarked that all he did was to amplify Bach's original orchestration.

Later came the Elgar-Atkins edition which introduced the English words from the King James Bible, and was first heard at the Three Choirs Festival in 1911. It is the basis of the performance under review, and presumably RVW knew it from then. Later, between the wars, conductors as varied as Sir Hugh Allen, Sir Henry Wood, Charles Kennedy Scott and Sir Adrian Boult, all friends and colleagues of RVW, tackled the complete *Matthew Passion* – and this sense of a great musical mountain to be climbed is the climate which attended Vaughan Williams' espousal of the work. His championship of the music very much grew out of the performances in the 1920s.

We may put it in perspective by reference to the splendid reissue on Dutton (2CDAX 2005) of the celebrated 1947-8 Decca recording of the Elgar-Atkins edition featuring Kathleen Ferrier and the Bach Choir, which many readers will have long cherished on three Ace of Clubs LPs. There the Evangelist was sung by Eric Greene, the regular soloist in the role of Bach Choir performances of the work; but he was also a regular with Vaughan Williams. He sang it again at Dorking in 1958, though by the time this performance took place ten years had passed, and the voice may, perhaps lack a little of the brightness heard on his earlier recording.

Vaughan Williams first gave the *St Matthew Passion* with the Bach Choir, in March 1923. As Jerrold Northrop Moore points out in the Pearl booklet note, what he wanted "before all else was to share the inspiration he himself found in Bach's music with as many people as possible".

For Vaughan Williams this was not something of the moment, but something he worried at and worked on over very many years and his view slowly matured. So what we have here is the result of a lifetime's practical performance.

In my recent RVW Journal article on Vaughan Williams as a conductor I quoted Sir Adrian Boult on the history, but Sir Adrian's comments are so apposite that I think I have to repeat it here to complete the story:

When Vaughan Williams took over the London Bach Choir, he asked the Committee to allow him to have no concert at all for the whole of the first winter, but to devote it to the study of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*. At the end, when Easter time came, he gave about half a dozen performances of it, in various places, with different sections of the Choir. It was a most moving and interesting performance. I heard the first of them. He took some arbitrary liberties with Bach which are not perhaps to everyone's taste, and these he developed more and more as he developed to the annual performances which made such a deep impression in connection with the Dorking Festivals, and were repeated with the Halle Orchestra in Manchester, a year or two before his death.

The paramount impression on me, when I first heard the London *St Matthew Passion*, before Vaughan Williams had done it very many times, was that it was not a fine piece of conducting in that sense at all. It was that a very great musician indeed had worked for six months with a large number of intelligent people and at the end of it he had impressed the whole choir with his own view of the Bach *St Matthew Passion* so that the production of it was not at all a piece of conducting. The performance could not proceed except as it had been rehearsed and rehearsed: Bach through the spectacles of Ralph Vaughan Williams. The performance of the *St Matthew Passion* was a spiritual matter with Vaughan Williams.

The Leith Hill Festival is a competitive choral competition for choirs from Surrey towns and villages around Dorking, held since 1905. During each festival the choirs come together for joint performances of a varied repertoire of choral music with orchestra, and it is in this climate in which Vaughan Williams developed his performance of the *Passion* music. Margaret Cullen, onetime Secretary of the Festival recalled how it developed.

No one having sung it under him will ever forget the dramatic and spiritual

emotions experienced on those occasions. Each year the performance grows more secure, more dramatic and more moving. It has become something of more than merely musical significance, akin to an act of faith.

The recording Pearl have issued is the last time, at the age of 85, RVW conducted the music. Within a few months he would be dead. But there is no sign of an old man slowing down or lacking vigour here, other than when he did so for interpretative effect; quite remarkably it places on permanent record RVW's lifetime devotion to the music with all its strengths and idiosyncrasies.

This is a large choir performance, slightly cut, with good soloists of its day – as well as Greene, we have Gordon Clinton as Jesus, and soloists Pauline Brockless, Nancy Evans, Wilfred Brown and John Carol Case. Wilfred Brown in "O grief! That bows" and "I would beside my Lord" reminds us of a greatly loved artist associated with Leith Hill and British music. Solos are sung legato emphasising beauty of line and timbre, when today they might be delivered in more rhythmic and sprightly style; everything is directed at

expression and a dramatic telling of the story, RVW notable in his use of rubato to this end. The choruses are dramatic and punchy. In the chorales we have the effect of a large community of believers commenting on the story, but there is no roughness or anything less than confident singing. The instrumental solos are finely taken, and though the strings lack the polish they might have had from a leading orchestra in a metropolitan centre, they are finely expressive of RVW's objective.

However, I have skirted round the point at issue for those not in thrall to RVW and the Leith Hill Festivals: RVW's use of the piano, with specially composed parts, as the continuo. This not only colours the solos and the telling of the story in a quite idiosyncratic way, but it informs the whole enterprise, and is quite a shock if you are used to harpsichord or organ. Yet for RVW's prime objective, a dramatic telling of the story, with every word, in English, beautifully articulated, this works very well and for me that is a unique bonus. I suppose for most listeners this is not a performance for every day, but I suspect once on its wavelength you may find that you dip into this recording rather more often than more "authentic" modern ones.

So, in conclusion, this gives a vivid flavour of what RVW did, and what he believed in. With its piano continuo it is decidedly not a performance of the nineties, and yet it is an entity bringing great rewards on its own account : as Holst wrote about one of RVW's own works, 'a blessed abiding fact'. Johann Sebastian Bach's St Matthew Passion conducted by Ralph Vaughan Williams at the Leith Hill Festival on 5 March 1958 was another World. And yet one, I think, worth remembering; and a great composer seen also to be a great interpretative artist, whose art, thanks to these Pearl CDs can still be recalled for us today.

Where possible could contributors supply their article on disk, along with a printed copy.

This makes the production of the Journal much easier, and reduces the number of errors, as it saves the re-typing of contributions.

Advice Notice of our sixth AGM - 8 October 2000

The sixth AGM of the RVW Society will be held at Charterhouse School, near Godalming in Surrey on Sunday 8th October, 2000. We are delighted to have the honour of performing the second modern performance of Vaughan William's early *Piano Quintet*. This, together with a visit to Parry's house near Haslemere, should make this years' AGM a memorable occasion.

The details are as follows:

- 12.00 Members meet at Parry's house at Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere near Haslemere (a map will be provided in the AGM papers)
- 12.15 Private tour of the house commences (includes Ploughman's Lunch)
- 14.00 Members return to Charterhouse
- 15.00 AGM commences
- 15.50 Introduction to the early chamber works of RVW and to the *Piano Quintet* by Bernard Benoliel, Director of RVW Ltd.
- 16.05 Performance of the *Piano Quintet* by soloists from the Royal College of Music
- 16.45 Refreshments
- 17.30 Meeting concludes

There will be a small charge for lunch at Parry's house and a voluntary contribution of £10 each will be sought for the concert to contribute towards artistic costs.

All the papers for the AGM will be sent out with the October Journal toward the end of September, 2000.

Vaughan Williams and the St Matthew Passion

by Michael Kennedy

This article by Michael Kennedy is reproduced with kind permission from the Halle Concerts Society magazine of March 1956.

On Passion Sunday March 18, 1956, the Halle Society will atone for one of the most astonishing present-day examples of neglect of a musical masterpiece. Not since 1904 has there been a Halle performance of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, a fact seemingly so incredible that I checked it several times before committing myself to it in print. But it is true. However, in restoring this wonderful work to its repertory the Society has had the inspired idea of inviting Ralph Vaughan Williams O.M. to come to Manchester to conduct the performance.

Vaughan Williams' adoration (it is not too strong a word) of Bach is well known. For six years in the 1920s he was conductor of the London Bach Choir and every year still, in February and March, he conducts the St John and St Matthew Passions at Dorking, where he lived for 25 years. These performances sung by an amateur choir with professional soloists and orchestral players are among the richest experiences to be encountered in our musical life today. They have a special atmosphere, for by now they are a local tradition. There is no concert-hall "ceremonial". Conductor, soloists and players go to their places on the platform in the five or ten minutes before the performance is due to start. At 7 pm Dr Vaughan Williams signs to the audience for silence, and the music begins. There is no applause for this is an act of worship as well as a musical performance. Whether it is possible to translate this air of dedicated informality to the more impersonal surroundings of the Free Trade Hall remains to be seen. But I am sure Dr Vaughan Williams will wish his Mancunian audience to join in certain chorales as Bach intended and as is the custom at Dorking. All his life Vaughan Williams has cherished amateur music making and in this small Surrey town each year the fruit of his labour is manifest; people coming together not for glamour or gain but to sing Bach because they love to. But let no one (least of all the Halle Choir) imagine that it is a picnic. Vaughan Williams spares no effort at rehearsal to get things as he wants them, spurring his forces on with remarks as pungent as some of his writings. Many years ago Basil Maine wrote about a Leith Hill Festival rehearsal of the Passion when Vaughan Williams angrily said to the choir: "You will never be able to sing Bach. Never!" There was a frigid silence. Then he barked: "Bar forty-two". The singing continued and later he said quietly: "Why couldn't you sing like that at first?" That was when he was nearing 60. At 83 he is just as formidable and loveable.

His readers will know that Vaughan Williams like Casals holds strong and controversial views on how Bach should be performed. Not everyone will agree with them, but all must respect a master-musician's thoughts and convictions on

the problems involved. To the purist of course, he offers nothing. We cannot, he says, even if we wanted to, perform Bach "as he wrote it" because the instruments today have changed their character so much. "The question is, do we want to? I say empathetically, No! We must introduce Bach to our musical public not as a museum piece; we must do nothing to give the slightest hint or the scholar of the antiquarian." When Vaughan Williams conducts Bach this involves substitution of the pianoforte for harpsichord continuo. It has probably given hundreds of people, including myself, vicarious pleasure to share Vaughan Williams' whole hearted condemnation of an instruction that, even under the most skilled hands, seems to have a strangled sound. Its devotees find it gives a sense of period. To Vaughan Williams the harpsichord is associated with "nasty detached twangs" and sounds in a big hall "just like the ticking of a sewing machine".

So on March 18 there will be a pianoforte on the Free Trade Hall platform to provide "a flowing melodic outline varying according to the nature of the narrative and the emotional content of the words". And, in place of the archaic oboe da caccia solo in "O Grief! How throbs His heavy laden breast" there will be the modern cor anglais. At Dorking, in this aria, he substitutes a viola, a marvellously effective stroke. Horror among the purists! But then this interpretation of the Passion is not intended for purists and specialists. It is for people who love this music because its message shines from age to age, surpassing styles and fashions. "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life". "If" Vaughan Williams says, "we adhere meticulously and mechanically to the letter of Bach we shall inevitably kill the spirit If my modifying the letter we kill the spirit of Bach, then he had better remain dead and be put in the museum with the other mummies".

The performance of the Bach Passions is a special study. There is, I suppose, no "right" or "wrong" way. The innate power of great music will always survive whatever conductors like to do to it. Vaughan Williams' approach to the *St Matthew Passion* is to make it as human and dramatic as possible and to preserve the beauty of the English of the Authorised Version. (Here again, we are on thorny ground) Some would have it only sung in the original German. To what extraordinary narrowness of outlook can pedantry lead! Here are Vaughan Williams' words on the subject:

"Of course, when Bach has a definite melodic passage, as in his arias and ariosos, his notes must come first. But in the mere narrative, where his object was to fit notes to the words so as to make correct declamation of the text, surely we may alter a note or two so as to preserve our superb English Biblical language, though of course even here, when Bach has a magnificent phrase for a particular word, we must, of course, place that word under the note which expresses it. Thus we are obliged to say 'Go yonder and pray' instead of

'Go and pray yonder' so that the word 'pray' can be under Bach's wonderful musical illustration". In other words, common sense. A treasure of mine, to which I have had resort while writing this, is a score of the Passion with "a note or two" altered by Vaughan Williams and many other marks of his careful editing. The work is abridged to bring it inside three hours and to heighten the drama. Vaughan Williams is among those who believe it is a mistake to perform the Passion in its entirety. "We must admit that Homer occasionally nods and that some of the arias are not up to Bach's high standard... It is not impossible that Bach never meant them all to be played on the same occasion but that he made a different selection from year to year".

From the foregoing I hope that listeners in the Free Trade Hall on the 18th will find, in addition to the sublimity of the music, that it is fascinating to hear it conducted by one who, himself a great composer (I shall be writing to him in this respect next month), has given a long lifetime's devotion to Bach: not the devotion of a scholar, but of a music maker. His is the practical musician's approach. But, being a creative genius it is the humanity of Bach that makes the greatest appeal to him – "for eternity we turn to Beethoven, for humanity to Bach". To those who know the Matthew Passion the truth of this will need no emphasis. Dominant throughout its telling of the story of Christ's death is the human understanding of mankind, from the first great lamentation "Come, ye daughters, share my mourning" to the sublime final chorus "In tears of grief, dear Lord we leave Thee", possibly the most moving music in existence. The last two notes of the work, a heart piercing cry from woodwind, symbolise the Son of Man's triumph over death with a simplicity only possible to a truly great composer. The drama of Barrabas; the great tenor watching song, "I would beside my Lord", with its marvellous oboe obbligato, the soprano's "For love my Saviour now is dying" – these and many more are permeated with the utmost compassion. I like to hope, too, that there will be those at this performance who will be hearing this music for the first time. For them, as indeed for us all, it will add to the sum of life to hear it conducted by the great Englishman who has written: "Through all the changes and chances, the beauty of Bach's music abides because his music appeals to everyone – not only to the aesthete, the musicologist, or the propagandist, but above all to Whitman's 'Divine Average' that great middle class from whom nearly all that is worth while in religion, painting, poetry and music has sprung".

For those who have a score of the Passion in the Elgar-Atkins edition the following is the order of Dr Vaughan Williams' abridged version:-
Part I 1-8 inclusive; 11-17 incl; 21; 20; 22-35 incl., omitting part of 34; Part II 36, 37 (part omitted); 42-48 incl., 53-59 incl., omitting part of 54 and 59; 62-64 incl., omitting part of 64; 67; 69-78 incl., omitting part of 73, 75 and 76.

Vaughan Williams and 'the greatest of all composers'

by Timothy Day

There is a tendency nowadays to 'put Bach in his place'. He is labelled as 'Baroque' (whatever that may mean) and according to the latest orders from Germany he is to be performed as 'period music' in the precise periwig style. This is all part of a movement to 'play Bach as he wrote it'. To do this would be impossible even if we wanted to. Our violins are played on quite a different principle; our horns are soft and our trombones loud. I should like to see Mr Goossens confronted with one of those gross bagpipe instruments which in Bach's time stood for an oboe. The harpsichord, however it may sound in a small room - and to my mind it never has a pleasant sound - in a large concert room sounds just like the ticking of a sewing machine. We have no longer, thank Heaven, the baroque style organ, which we are told, with very insufficient evidence, was the kind of instrument Bach played upon. (By the way, I see there is a movement afoot to substitute this bubble-and-squeak type of instrument for the noble diapasons and soft mixtures of our cathedral organs.)

We cannot perform Bach exactly as he was played in his time even if we wanted to, and the question is, do we want to? I say emphatically, No!

Vaughan Williams' well-known and often repeated views on attempts to re-create eighteenth-century sonorities and performing styles are usually taken as the dogmatic pronouncements of an old man whose tastes were formed in another age, through his experience of singing in the Bach Choir for sixteen years early in the century, and then conducting it in the 1920s, perhaps by the performances of the cantatas he listened to with such delight at the Sing-Akademie in Berlin in 1897.²

By the 1950s it could not but be otherwise that such a musician, however enlightened, openminded and adventurous, would inevitably fail to appreciate how thoroughgoing investigations into historical styles were sweeping aside yesterday's clichés and revealing this music in startlingly fresh colours. Vaughan Williams could be forgiven his views, because of his age, and also because of his own creative genius, whose inevitable blind spots and prejudices were inseparable from his creative gifts.

Of course there's some truth in this explanation. I don't wish to pretend that prolonged exposure to stylish and idiomatic

harpsichord playing by Thurston Dart, say, or Gustav Leonhardt. On instruments by Hass or Grabner would have disturbed Vaughan Williams' convictions one bit; he simply didn't like the sounds of harpsichords ticking and clicking inconsequentially. The sounds carried for him evocations of eccentricity, and self-consciousness, and quaintness, and daintiness; perhaps in his mind's eye he saw Arnold Dolmetsch in his velvet suit and the concert room at Dowlands, tinted a soft diaphanous green, you remember, and illuminated just by wax candles.³

But while such views were formed in part by taste, as they always must be, it is more important to remind ourselves that he was protesting so relentlessly over so many years - and it must be said with some degree of relish - not so much about sonorities and performing styles as such as about attitudes to music and the states of mind of those engaged in music-making, whether as executants or as listeners.

The style of Bach performance that Vaughan Williams himself favoured can be glimpsed from a recording of the last performance of the St Matthew Passion that he ever conducted, the twenty-third performance he gave at Dorking Halls with the Leith Hill Choirs; this was on 5 March 1958.⁴ It would now be considered hopelessly Romantic, highly coloured and flamboyant. Its tempos are disconcertingly fluid, and most startling of all perhaps are the fully written-out piano accompaniments Vaughan Williams devised for the recitatives, which have something about them of a Bach-Busoni transcription.

Something of the intensity and sweep of the performance can be detected in the recording, and certainly many details of value might be appropriated by the performer who is not inhibited - as of course most performers are not inhibited - by current or even outworn notions of musicological correctness. To say it is not Bach for our time is to say nothing of value. To account for its style it would be necessary to examine the evolution of styles of Bach playing through the first half of the century and to set such a performance against the norms that prevailed in the 1950s. This would certainly be possible and interesting. But it would not tell us everything. In fact listening to a sound recording alone can never tell us very much about the meanings attributed to musical sounds. An ethnomusicologist would suggest that we're obtaining about ten percent of the information, and that the other ninety per cent relates to the reasons why these musicians are doing what they're doing and the whole context in which they are doing it. For music of course

is never a matter of sounds; it's a question of the meanings and the significance's of sounds, of the states of minds of those making the sounds and of those listening to them.

In performing Bach, Vaughan Williams thought, musicians are re-creating the music of the 'universal musician',⁵ 'the greatest composer the world has yet produced',⁶ he called him. And his views on Bach performance allow us a glimpse of what he considered the nature of musical experience to be at its most elevated and profound.

The most serious music-making is not, according to Vaughan Williams, mere entertainment, although that's what *The Times* seemed to think, he complained, at least that's how it advertised performances of the *St Matthew Passion*, under 'Entertainment's'⁷ It was not merely the creation of structures in sound projected and articulated by the performers. The sounds and structures of music in performance enabled those involved in the music 'to understand what is beyond the appearances of life', music represented 'a reaching out to the ultimate realities by means of ordered sound',⁸ music offered 'a vision beyond earthly sense'.⁹

Music was or could be, in some sense then, a spiritual or a religious experience. But in what sense? Well perhaps, at least in its psychological aspects, in the sense in which William James described the common characteristics of religious experiences in his famous book published in 1902. For Vaughan Williams this of course is not an 'Anglican' experience or even a specifically Christian one - as it was not for William James either - but the experience, at least in his maturity, from the 1920s onwards, of a 'cheerful agnostic'.¹⁰ I would wish to stress the 'cheerful agnostic' rather than the 'disappointed theist',¹¹ because Vaughan Williams' fundamental attitude is of a man who rejoices in the natural and intense and spontaneous spirituality he recognizes is possible for those who share a common culture but not necessarily a particular religious creed or indeed any creed at all. William James describes the religious experiences of many different people in many different kinds of society - their religious experiences, not the doctrine or dogma which may underpin their beliefs - as imparting 'a new zest which adds itself like a gift to life, and takes the form of lyrical enchantment or of appeal to earnestness and heroism... an assurance of safety and a temper of peace, and, in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affections'.¹² And he quoted the American psychologist Professor Leuba: 'Not God, but life, more life, a larger, richer, more satisfying life, is, in the last analysis, the end of religion. The love of life, at any and every level of development, is the religious impulse'.¹³ Might we not take this kind of religious impulse as approaching the spirituality which, Vaughan Williams thought, was fostered by singing and playing and listening?

In the performer Vaughan Williams looked for 'that twin mind which will translate (the composer's) imaginings into sound, and consummate that marriage of true minds which alone can give his music life.'¹⁴ The two essentials of great conducting in his opinion were 'faithfulness to the composer' and 'the power of the conductor to express himself to the full at the moment'.¹⁵ There should be 'nothing of the scholar or the antiquarian about Bach performance', he thought, nothing analytical or impartial, no interest in detail simply because it is old and charming.¹⁶

Intimacy, naturalness and spontaneity are prerequisites of the deepest musical experiences. So self-consciousness in a performer is death. Preoccupation with the 'correct' number of oscillations in a shake, or with its 'correct' termination would kill spontaneity and naturalness and destroy any chance of that kind of vitality which was a *sine qua non* for genuine musical expression in Vaughan Williams' view.

A distinguished scholar writing in the 1980s on the performance of old music concluded that a performer 'seems to need the psychological protection of actually believing in what he is doing'.¹⁷ For Vaughan Williams to believe in what he was doing, was the first requirement of any singer or player - or indeed of any grown-up human being.

He wanted to hear a flesh-and-blood creature speaking to other living men and women. He might have agreed with Frans Bruggen that a performance, a live performance, must have mistakes in it because they are a part of natural speech, of natural delivery to an audience.¹⁸ Otherwise a performance becomes artificial, without character, too good to be true. He agreed with Parry that the beauty of the French horn derived partly from its 'human fallibility'.¹⁹ And he would have understood Sir Walter Parratt, his organ teacher, who refused to descend from the organ loft at St George's Chapel, Windsor to direct the choir; some extra fine shading might have been attained, some greater precision in ensemble with a conductor, but these gains would not be offset by the loss of spontaneity.²⁰

Music-making is a corporate act involving both performers and listeners; the listener must be drawn up into the music, must be on the inside, not remaining on the outside as a critic, or a connoisseur, whether of compositional technique or performance expertise.

The attitude of the listener should not be critical, or detached, or neutral, but expectant, ready to receive. The greatest music demands not cold, aloof impartiality, but imaginative sympathy, and emotional involvement by both performers and listeners alike. Vaughan Williams speaks of listening to a performance of the Verdi *Requiem* when the music 'possessed' him.²¹

Preoccupation with the precise realization of

the 'curlicues and twirligigs' of old music,²² with a concern to reproduce expressive elements which were not part of a performer's habitual and natural expressive vocabulary, was not only likely to inhibit the performer but would also tend to lead to the creation of audiences of specialists, connoisseurs of the most minute inflections in articulation, artificially revived and only distinguished and admired by a handful of *cognoscenti*. Bach's masterpieces should be presented, as he put it in a famous phrase, 'to everyone - not only to the aesthete, the musicologist or the propagandist, but above all to Whitman's "Divine Average"'.²³ He considered great music as his friend, the historian G.M. Trevelyan considered great literature, not as an intellectual conundrum, a puzzle to be solved or worked out by the application of rules; it was 'joy, joy in our innermost heart. It is a passion like love, or it is nothing'.²⁴ 'The history of events is ephemeral, and for the scholar', Trevelyan said on another occasion; 'the poetry of events is eternal, and for the multitude'.²⁵

In order to create personal involvement, and to increase the emotional impact in music-making, performances of old music will cultivate and value local particularities and idiosyncratic variants in order to engage the hearts and minds of particular listeners. This was the reason he performed Bach's choral works in English, and preferably not in what Dr Troutbeck imagined English to be,²⁶ but in the English of the Authorized Version of the Bible, or of the 1662 Prayer Book, each with deep and powerful resonances of their own, at least to most of those singing or playing or listening in Vaughan Williams' performances.

The greatest musical masterpieces come to us bearing the aura of previous interpretations, and trailing behind them the traces they have left in the culture or cultures through which they have passed. The English view of Bach will inevitably be a different one from the German view; the German will recognize the work as the consummation of those elements he has known since childhood in the great traditional chorales.²⁷ But the English view is our view, with its own idiosyncrasies which have particular value for us. A performance of a work by Bach in Hereford Cathedral during the Three Choirs Festival may be far removed in sonority and aura from the work as it was heard in Leipzig in the 1740s - even a performance of Samuel Sebastian Wesley's *The Wilderness* may after all not be quite so close as we imagine in style and sonority to the performances it first received in Hereford in the 1830s - but the local stylistic evolutions of great works are what give them their potency and force. The assumption that the

sounds of Bach's music will somehow mean more if they reproduce the sounds Bach himself heard - even if this were possible contradicts elementary psychology. In part it is a question of familiarity and a host of associations: those who attended services and concerts in Hereford Cathedral had learnt to love the unique qualities of that particular 1893 'Father' Willis organ in that particular acoustical space.

They might have remembered how Dr Sinclair, Elgar's friend, played Bach on the instrument. There was also the mystical element, intertwined with historical elements in aesthetic appreciation:

*Look thy last on all things lovely,
Every hour.*

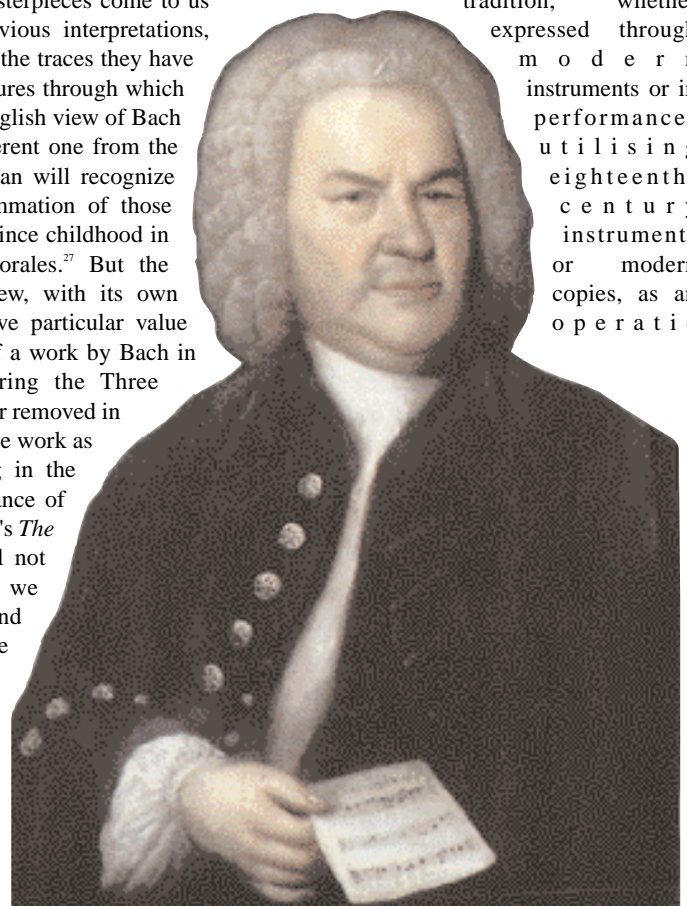
as Walter de la Mare wrote:

*Since that all things thou wouldst praise
Beauty took from those who loved them
In other days.*²⁸

But such performances as Vaughan Williams' were regarded of course by many scholars in the 1950s merely as excellent examples of woefully corrupt performing traditions, so barnacled with incrustations of the past that no rescue operation should be attempted, it were better that they should sink without trace.

In the 1990s a great number of different performing traditions are available to everyone; an enthusiast now has the kind of knowledge that can distinguish between different performances of the St Matthew Passion as belonging to the Mendelssohnian

tradition, whether expressed through modern instruments or in performances utilising eighteenth-century instruments or modern copies, as an operatic



interpretation like Furtwangler's, as the 'late-classical' view of the work of John Eliot Gardiner, that can recognize subtle tempo differences between Harnoncourt and Leonhardt, or differences in tonal quality between the Tolzer Knabenchor and the boys of St Thomas's Leipzig, that enable him to express preferences for performances employing the timbre of modern instruments but the speeds favoured by those using period instruments. Such knowledge represents an altogether different kind of experience of the work from the one Vaughan Williams strove to cultivate. 'Knowledge about a thing', William James wrote, 'is not the thing itself. Knowledge about life is one thing; effective occupation of a place in life, with its dynamic currents passing through your being, is another'.²⁹

Half a century ago there was no need for commentators to spin out a string of elegant epithets on the 'beauty' of the great works of the past; what was required of scholars and historians was 'factual stylistic analysis' which should take the music to pieces 'as a mechanic does a motor' in order to demonstrate the 'specific effect' of the notes, as Manfred Bukofzer explained in 1947.³⁰

But what was important to Vaughan Williams was not so much a musical text, not so much a musical sonority or style - though he knew what he liked - but the effect music had on the lives of men and women. He considered a great work of musical art embodied and enshrined values, and not just aesthetic values, but also moral and social and spiritual ones, and these values to be embedded deep in the civilization of the musicians and their audiences.

So, sometimes, he was not too respectful towards the preoccupations of musical scholars. He might even have considered that description that goes no further than musical facts can ever be more than a trivial occupation. In 1971 the English music critic Martin Cooper explained in a broadcast talk that many musicologists write of music as an enclosed, self-contained world obeying its own laws; and they prefer to deny or disregard the influence of personal, social or economic factors which threaten the objective, scientific character of their work.' Whatever his private views on the desirability or otherwise of this state of affairs, he was not intending to criticize or to be provocative but to seek to define what he took to be the critic's task, the journalist's job, and to contrast it with the work of the academic musicologist, at least as those functions were carried out in the England of the 1970s. The 'musicologist proper', he thought, was concerned with 'the actual language of music and its historical development', he was 'the grammarian or philologist of the art, less interested in judgements of value than in the constation and arrangement of facts'.³¹

But, as we all now realize, the musicologist very proper in recent years has begun to

consider broader cultural issues. What was important about music to particular men and women in this particular epoch? What forces have shaped their responses to organised sounds? This approach perhaps Vaughan Williams himself would have been more sympathetic towards, these efforts to describe scrupulously what men and women have done with music and why. At any rate his vision of music as a life-changing, life-sustaining, life-enhancing force, if in essence the legacy of the nineteenth century, is one that we might perhaps be loathe to abandon completely as we enter the twenty-first.

This article was given as a paper at the British Library on 20 November 1999 as part of the conference organised by the Library and The Royal Musical Association entitled Vaughan Williams in A New Century.

1. Ralph Vaughan Williams (speaker); recorded in July 1950; BBC Transcription LP 161451 [*side number*]; transcribed as 'Bach, the Great Bourgeois', in *National Music and other essays* (Second edition, London, 1987), pp.170-171.
2. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'A Musical Autobiography, in *ibid.*, p.187.
3. Mabel Dolmetsch, *Personal Recollections of Arnold Dolmetsch* (London, 1958), p.18.
4. The mono recording is in the British Library with the shelf-mark: National Sound Archive Tapes T4366-T4370; the performance is mentioned in Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London, 1964), p.342; see also 'Vaughan Williams and Bach', in Ursula Vaughan Williams, R. V W *A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London, 1964), pp.423-430.
5. Vaughan Williams, 'Should Music be National?', *National Music and other essays* (Second edition, London, 1987), p.2.
6. Vaughan Williams, 'Harpsichord or Piano', in *ibid.*, p.303.
7. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'A Minim's Rest', in *ibid.*, p.154.
8. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'What is Music', in *ibid.*, p.206
9. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'Gustav Holst: an Essay and a Note', in *ibid.*, p.151.
10. Ursula Vaughan Williams, *RVW~A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford, New York, 2/1988).
11. Hugh Ottoway, under 'Vaughan Williams, Ralph', in *The New Grove* (London, 1980) vol.19, p.569.
12. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, 1902), p.486.
13. William James, *ibid.*, p.507.
14. R.Vaughan Williams, 'The letter and the spirit', *National Music and Other Essays* (Second edition, London, 1987), p. 124.
15. Ralph Vaughan Williams in Northrop

Moore (ed.), *Music & Friends* (London, 1979), p.121.

16. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'Bach, the Great Bourgeois', *National Music and other essays* (Second edition, London, 1987),p.171.
17. Howard Mayer Brown, 'Pedantry or Liberation?', in Nicholas Kenyon (ed.), *Authenticity and Early Music* (Oxford, 1988), p.55.
18. Frans Bruggen, in an interview conducted on 22 March 1977 at Ann Arbor Michigan, in ed John Harvith and Susan Edwards Harvith, *Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph: A Century in Retrospect* (New York, Westport, Connecticut, London, 1987), p.204.
19. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'How Do We Make Music?', *National Music and other essays* (Second edition, London, 1987), p.223.
20. Donald Tovey and Geoffrey Parratt, *Walter Parratt: Master of Music* (London, 1941), p.67.
21. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'A Musical Autobiography, *National Music and other essays* (Second edition, London, 1987), p.183.
22. Edward Dannreuther, *Musical Ornamentation* (London, 1893), vol.1, p.vii.
23. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'Bach, the Great Bourgeois', *National Music and other essays* (Second edition, London, 1987), p.176.
24. G.M.Trevelyan, *A Layman's Love of Letters* (London, 1954), pp.124-5.
25. G.M.Trevelyan, *Garibaldi and the Making of Italy* (London, 1911) p.297.
26. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'Bach, the Great Bourgeois', *National Music and other essays* (Second edition, London, 1987), p.171.
27. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'Should Music be National?', in *ibid.*, p.9
28. 'Fare Well', *Motley and Other Poems* (1918), *The Complete Poems of Walter de la Mare* (London, 1969), p.218.
29. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, 1902), p.489.
30. Manfred Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque era* (London, 1948), pp.xiii-xiv.
31. Martin Cooper, 'The critic's task', a BBC Radio talk recorded on 16 August 1971, BBC Archives LP 34939; printed in *Judgements of Value* (Oxford, New York, 1988), pp.3-7.

16.Bach, 18.Foe. (or Gob, or Lob!), 12.Little, 13.Star, 15.NCO, 5.Back, 6.AGM, 8.lnn, 10.Wenlock, 11.Hob 1.Douglas, 2.ArnoId, 3.Nun, 4.Lamb, Down: 18.Foster, 19.Cheyne Walk. Lomondd., 14.John Milton, 17.Ann, 1.Down Ampney, 5.Bunyan, 7.Ram, 9.Loch Across: Solution:
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On Reading Arnold Whittall's Article on the *Fifth Symphony*

There are many ways of writing about music, and in every issue of the RVW journal we are treated to a wide selection. If I divide these ways into two broad types, it's only because it suits my purpose today, in so far as it supports what I want to say about an article in the February issue, as well as what I want to say about Vaughan Williams.

The first way of writing about music as I see it is to give information. There would be little point in devoting years to detailed research, for example, if, in the end, you didn't pass on the truths you had discovered. Music students, too, need writing to be factually based.

The second way gives less information but stimulates a more active participation in the reader by asking questions. The writer may not have answers to these questions, perhaps because no answers exist. A good example of this is "What *does* this amazing symphony say, mean, want of us?" from the late Christopher Palmer in an inspired booklet note accompanying a recording of the Sixth Symphony.

I'm not talking about speculation here. Speculation is the kind of writing that puts words into the mouths of people in biographical works, because this is what they might have said in a given situation. Speculation is feeling that we understand a composer so well that not only do we know what he did, we also know why he did it. There was no speculation in Arnold Whittall's article about the Fifth Symphony. There was lots of information, but there were questions too, and even suggestions for further study. And one thing which seems unarguable is that the very finest writing will have the effect of sending us back to the music. Mr. Whittall's piece had just this effect on me, and I'm grateful to him for that. It's never too soon to revisit the Fifth Symphony.

The weight Mr. Whittall places on Michael Kennedy's comment about the symphony being made up of "so many varying constituent elements" is surely right. And yet something which has always struck me is just how remarkably unvaried it is, at least in tone. From the animated passage in the first movement, which in some performances can sound like Tchaikovsky; through the whole of the scherzo; the alarums which sound in the Romanza; and then, of course, the reprise of the first movement theme in the finale: none of these, at least to this listener, disturbs the overall atmosphere of the work. Yet unvaried doesn't mean monotonous, and the work is not a bar too long. It ends, in fact, at just the right moment, not because we would be bored if it went on longer, but because

within his own framework the composer has said everything in the most cogent and convincing way. Mr. Whittall says that we should not "...seek to undervalue the disparities and diversities that are present in the symphony... the unquiet as well as the serene." A fair warning, and perhaps my response to the work is a perfect example of this danger.

We are often stimulated by disagreement, and a few of Mr. Whittall's observations surprised me, as did some of the words he used. So when I did revisit the Fifth Symphony it was also to compare my reactions with his.

I find myself at odds with Mr Whittall in his view of the close of the first movement. His words "bleak and disturbing" don't work for me at all. Having said that, finding other words is difficult, beyond saying that the music is slow and quiet. It's easier to say what it's not. It's neither peaceful nor calm, for example. It seems to me devoid of tragedy. It doesn't provide anything like a full close, nor yet does it disintegrate into nothingness as happens elsewhere. It lacks a sense of finality in a way which is not explained by the fact that the symphony continues for three more movements. (The end of the first movement of Beethoven Seventh, for example, manages both at once.) It is, in an extraordinary way, provisional music: it's perfectly formed and polished, yet it comes to a halt not without having said what it has to say, but rather, still in the process of saying it. (This is not at all the same as saying that it seems unfinished.) Thus it seems to me that the beginning of the scherzo is not a means of getting away from this mood, but a continuation of it, the composer changing only the tone of his voice whilst continuing to say the same thing.

I also differ from Mr. Whittall in his view of the finale. I agree there are passages where the word triumphant seems right, but the other word he uses, genial, is by far the more important. But it's not the whole story. The opening pages can't fail to produce a smile on the listener's face, yet tears are not far away either. Why is this? A personal reaction concerns the intensely human spectacle of a composer who, having used a single descending four-note phrase for so long and to such telling effect in the third movement brings it back again so soon here. So simple, that Allelujah phrase, and yet it means so much to him that he can't leave it alone. The notion of a composer so moved by what is no more than a tag, to the extent that we find it so frequently in his music, and at such significant moments, is moving in its turn.

As for the closing pages, I find them amongst

the most unequivocal in all music, as straightforward in their own way as the closing pages of Beethoven's 5th I don't at all hear "suspended animation" and even less "a state of numbness". Suspension at the end of the first movement, perhaps, but not here. One might want to know why Vaughan Williams decided on a long, low timpani roll in the final bars. Drums, after all, are associated with thunder and war, threatening, menacing us. Such things are very distant here, and we mustn't spend too much time on the question for fear of losing sight of the wood through the trees. All the same I think there's no denying that the radiance of the final moments of the symphony would be even more enhanced if the timpani roll were not there.

In the end it's a tiny thing. From the moment the little storm - I choose my words carefully - provoked by the reappearance of the symphony's opening subsides we slip into a world where the two conflicting emotions - smiling through tears as if in some sentimental film - are even more present. Those wonderful, overlapping, rising Allelujahs are perhaps a symbol. Do they represent human aspiration as a cathedral spire does, for example? Perhaps they do, but it's not important. (And we might remember here that Britten later used a similar technique to equally moving effect at the end of "Death in Venice", though the emotional world evoked there is very different. Traces of it can even be heard toward the profoundly melancholy close of the same composer's orchestral suite "A Time There Was...".)

This is music of such extraordinary contentment that we may well be moved to tears by it. Is this the duality Mr. Whittall refers to? Here, unlike the close of the first movement, there is real calm, real peace. I'm not at all surprised at the reaction of contemporary listeners who heard in it a summing up of an old man's life and work, a perfect valedictory gesture, even if we can hear this more clearly today in, for example, "Tired", a tiny little song written towards the (real) end of his life. And it would be easy, too easy, to hear in the agitated passages of the symphony the trials and difficulties which occur from time to time in any life. All the same, this is healing music, heart's-ease. It should be prescribed to anyone sick in body or mind, and in particular to people suffering loss. The emotional content of the final pages corresponds exactly with a person calling to mind a departed loved one, sometimes with a smile, not without tears, but always with warmth and pleasure, once the worst of the pain has gone away.

William Hedley

Concert Reviews

Superb VW in Liverpool

Liverpool concert-goers all remember with notoriety the season held a few years ago in the Anglican Cathedral whilst the Philharmonic Hall was under refurbishment. Laying that memory to rest on 22nd of April was a concert billed 'Music for Easter', a well-conceived programme featuring excerpts from Bach's Passions, with RVW's *Tallis Fantasia* and *Five Mystical Songs*, plus a clutch of shorter works, all equally memorable. The low organ notes in Elgar's *Sospiri*, manifested by a gigantic shuddering sensation, threatened to loosen the vaulting stones above us; and Tavener's *Song for Athene* really did 'bring the house down' – in the wrong place. It seems that despite his popularity, the public hasn't quite got used to Tavener's style yet.

Ian Tracey conducted the RLPO strings in a careful performance of the *Tallis Fantasia*, prefixed by a disembodied performance of the original Tallis psalm setting. 'Careful' isn't a slight: this particular Cathedral acoustic always threatens to swamp. The quartet, therefore, was kept at a safe distance, closer than in rehearsals. Andrew Davis' recent controversial experiment for the BBC of placing them at the opposite end of the nave in Gloucester would never find as much success here.

I wondered how *Five Mystical Songs* would fare. I shouldn't have worried. This too is Cathedral music, and I'm tempted to suggest that this performance sounded better than anything I've ever heard in a studio acoustic on disc. Full marks then, to Baritone Christopher Maltman, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir and Liverpool Cathedral Choir for sheer beauty of interpretation. After the Tavener faux-pas, I wasn't surprised to hear generous applause after the first song, *Easter*. One of my favourite RVW pieces, performed superbly in a glorious setting – what more could I ask for? Well, it seems that Chester Cathedral is the venue for yet another interpretation in May according to my diary...

Rolf Jordan

Symphony No 5 and The Lark Ascending Exeter Cathedral April 13th

There's no doubt that from the atmosphere point of view Exeter Cathedral is Devon's most foremost concert venue. It was good to see that a largely VW programme (with the addition of the Sibelius 3) filled every seat in the house.

The Lark was given a well paced and flawless performance by Jonathan Carney who coped effortlessly with both the more taxing passages and the long sustained notes of the final sequence.

Symphony No. 5 – given precedence over the Sibelius 3 as the single work in the second half – proved far from pedestrian and the conductor Paul Daniel certainly managed to pull something out of the hat (in common with the almost identically named conjurer). Daniel set about the work with considerable enthusiasm – perhaps almost over enthusiasm in some passages. Taking the same approach as Sir Yehudi Menuhin in his memorable Virgin recording; he gave considerable emphasis to the more 'robust' sections of movements 1, 2 and 4. His approach in stamping his authority on the piece was so noticeable that some of the 'pithy' trombone passages sounded more akin to Symphony 4 than 5. This stance was more than borne out when during the final passacaglia the kettle drum player went about his business with such gusto that the end flew into the air from one of his drum sticks. The offending sphere soared into the air and came to earth amongst the trombones – but none of these were shocked into silence for the rest of the performance.

By contrast the 3rd movement was both magical and ethereal and made all the more memorable by the surroundings as the last vestiges of twilight dimmed amidst the sea of stained glass. The concert was concluded by well-deserved warm applause. I wonder though, what would have been the reception if Daniel's had tacked No.6 with the same gusto? Perhaps he would have achieved what the Luftwaffe narrowly failed to do to the cathedral in 1941.

Rob Furneaux

Powerful Dona Nobis Pacem

A belated mention for a concert held last November: Hoylake Choral Society's well attended Remembrance Day Concert, which featured Mozart's *Requiem* and RVW's *Dona Nobis Pacem*. Held in the attractive red-brick

church of St. Hildeburghs in Hoylake, the performance proved surprisingly powerful, despite reduced forces, and highly moving – perhaps for the same reason. David Houlders' organ reduction of the score worked wonderfully well, losing none of the subtleties, an arrangement I wouldn't hesitate to hear again.

I was privileged to attend rehearsals and observe Musical Director Simon Russell drilling the Society, now in its 53rd Season, in the phrase 'Rattle quicker, heavier drums'. Quite why I found myself in with the tenors at one point, I can't explain. Good sense won out in the end – I remain a listener!

Rolf Jordan

OFFER TO RVW SOCIETY MEMBERS

The Rochester Cathedral Choir under Roger Sayer, with Sean Farrell (organ), are issuing a new CD of VW's music called *A Vaughan Williams Portrait*. The contents are as follows:

O clap your hands
The Blessed Son of God (Hodie)
The Call
Hymn Tune Prelude on Rhosymedre
O taste and see
Sweet day so cool
The Song of the Tree of Life (The Pilgrim's Progress)
This is the truth sent from above
Mass in G Minor
Valiant-for-Truth
Te Deum in G
Come Down, O Love Divine (Down Ampney)
Antiphon

The recording is on Lantern Productions LPCD 4 priced at £13.99. Sean Farrell has kindly offered the recording to RVW Society Members at £9.99. Members should quote reference LANT/RVWSOC with cheques made payable to Lantern Productions. Orders to 3, St. Margaret's Street, Rochester, Kent ME1 1TU. The intended release date is 1 May, 2000

Music you might like

Andrea Preston introduces
us to the music of George Lloyd



Some years ago my local library sold the record stock and invested in CD's. Among the bargains I managed to bag, for the princely sum of 50p each, were three records of George Lloyd's symphonies, numbers 2 and 9, 5 and 7. I had heard George Lloyd's music before but this was the first time I had paid it the attention it deserves.

George Lloyd was born in St Ives in 1913. He served in the Navy during the war, returning badly shell-shocked. He became a market gardener in Dorset, growing first carnations then mushrooms which he found less temperamental. Finally he retired from market gardening to concentrate on composition.

His repertoire is impressive – twelve symphonies, four piano concertos, a symphonic mass which was premiered not long before he died in 1998, short orchestral and solo piano works. His music has a gentle, lyrical quality – he always maintained he was not afraid to write in a tuneful style unfashionable though this might be. This is not to say his music is nothing but bland, pretty tunes. It can be as tempestuous as the sea around Godrevy lighthouse, at times it is downright exciting; I always think his first piano concerto would be an excellent accompaniment to a gripping thriller.

George Lloyd's music has been – and still is – greatly neglected. It deserves better recognition. Anyone who enjoys English music should certainly try it. My personal favourite is the 11th symphony but in truth none of his works have disappointed me. When I discovered that many of them are only available on CD I bought a CD player and upgraded the rest of my hi-fi system solely so that I could collect those works missing from my collection

His music was also responsible for rousing in me a compulsive urge to return to Cornwall, which I did every year for several years, coming to know this beautiful county very well. Music which can have such a profound inspirational effect on a person must be of some consequence and deserving of attention.

Andrea Preston

Works

Operas	Iernin The Serf John Socman
Chorus & Orchestra	The Vigil of Venus
Symphonies	Numbers 1 to 12
Violin Concertos	Numbers 1 to 2
Piano Concertos	'Scapegoat', (No1) and Numbers 2 to 4
	'Aubade' for 2 Pianos
	'An African Shrine' & other solo Piano works
	'A Miniature Triptych' for Brass Quintet
	Various pieces for Orchestra
	Various works for Brass and Wind Band

Book you might like

Paul Chennell considers Grainger on Music
Edited by Malcolm Gillies
and Bruce Clunies Ross
Oxford University Press, 1999,
£35.00, pages 396 (ISBN 0-19-816665-6)

Since the publication twenty-five years ago of John Bird's masterly biography of Percy Grainger, our understanding of this composer has grown immeasurably. Grainger, like Vaughan Williams, was an outstandingly successful collector and arranger of folk songs, and a composer who has been rather neglected in the nearly forty years since his death. It is instructive to read what Grainger has to say on music, it's composition, performance and place in the community, in order to understand his musical legacy. As we read more of what Grainger has to say about music his reputation as a thinker grows.

Grainger on Music contains 46 essays spanning the period from 1900 to 1955, many of which have been published. The book also contains an introduction and a list of Grainger's writings. These reveal the extraordinary breadth of Grainger's musical interests; from Richard Strauss to jazz, and from Anglo Saxon folk music to the works of Natalie Curtis. They also reveal Grainger's democratic approach to music and music making. He is not always looking back to the past, but is truly forward thinking. The book

contains one piece; *Beatless-Notation Machine*, from 1902, which must surely predate most of the thinking of more radical musicians of the 20th century by several decades. This piece was not published, but shows how early Grainger was thinking of new ways to write and present music.

Several pieces in the book are specifically concerned with English composers and English music. Not surprisingly Grainger has much to say on Vaughan Williams and his music. According to Ursula Vaughan Williams in her biography of her husband, he had met Grainger by 1903, when she suggests that Grainger is one of "so many friends" of Vaughan Williams. They were to remain in contact for the rest of Vaughan Williams's long life.

Grainger's fascinating 1929 article *Impressions of Art in Europe*, considers music by Purcell which he believes to have been akin that of Delius and Vaughan Williams in their musical moods. In this same article Grainger observes; "The golden worth of Vaughan William's music becomes more evident each year. His Pastoral Symphony seems to be the most successful essay under this title by any composer". Grainger calls Vaughan Williams *Concerto Accademico*, "a happy achievement".

In an article from 1949 entitled *Music Heard In England*, Grainger suggests; "To see what an immersion in folkish and early polyphonic traditions has accomplished for Vaughan Williams we need only examine the first movement of his Fifth Symphony, where

extended melodiousness, full of curve-beauty (analogous to Hogarth's 'curve of beauty' in the pictorial arts) has replaced the short breathed themes of the classic symphony and where the 19th century tune-on-top procedure is replaced by a polyphonic texture in which all the voices enjoy an exact equality of melodic pregnancy and importance". Grainger suggests this accomplishment can be heard in the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Symphonies by Vaughan Williams.

In this same article Grainger suggests that in time the Sixth Symphony by Vaughan Williams will be seen as his greatest. He believes Vaughan William's music provides a cosmic vision. In the article *Democracy In Music*, which was not published, but which is dated 1931, Grainger suggests that Vaughan William's music, which is polyphonic, suggests that the music is democratic. He believes this kind of music is richer and more subtle than all other kinds of music. This is something for us to think about in an age when much contemporary music is wholly unapproachable to many people.

This book will be fascinating for all those who love English music, and admire the musical achievements of Percy Grainger, who can now be seen to be a much greater creative musician than he has been viewed as in the past. This book will help us understand more of Grainger's musical thinking, and shows him to be a progressive and a musical prophet.

Paul Chennell

Book Review

Vaughan Williams

A new book by Simon Heffer

Weidenfeld and Nicolson, £12.99, 152 pages

The launch of Simon Heffer's new biography is a major event and is covered in the Journal by two reviews and an interview with the author.

We begin with a review by Barry Forshaw

If you plan to take to your desert island a piece by Vaughan Williams that evokes a vanished Arcadian England rather than one of his knottier, more neurotic symphonies, this could be the book for you. As a journalist, Simon Heffer would certainly excoriate any politician (left or right) who used an issue dear to his heart as a political football. But in this otherwise admirably lucid and concise biography, Heffer is guilty of claiming a composer for the bluer end of the spectrum whose socialist credentials are pretty well unimpeachable - while grudgingly admitting Vaughan Williams' antipathy to political conservatism. RVW's supranational status is finally becoming established in no uncertain terms. As little as ten years ago, eyebrows would have been raised at the claim that Vaughan Williams is the greatest of English composers. Elgar, surely, or Purcell? And in the modern era, Britten is clearly the natural recipient of this sobriquet. RVW always had his advocates, most notably Sir Adrian Boult: even in the period of neglect that immediately followed the composer's death, Boult's performances had the imprimatur of his friendship with the composer and served an admirably proselytizing purpose. But after the ground-breaking recordings and performances of Andre' Previn, who demonstrated that a foreign conductor might have the measure of Vaughan Williams' remarkable set of nine symphonies (and, more significantly, might demonstrate a love of this ungainly but supremely beautiful and powerful music to rival a native conductor), other non-English conductors of note began to queue up to record and perform the works. From Bernard Haitink to Leonard Slatkin, the list of foreigners who have put their stamp on the music grows at an astonishing rate. What distinguishes these performances (and the concomitant growth of interest in the music by foreign audiences) is a refusal to accept the perception of Vaughan Williams' music as the apotheosis of English pastoral. The markedly international violence and drama of such works as the ballet Job and the Fourth Symphony are now as familiar as such quintessentially English pieces as the mystical Fifth Symphony, and it is no longer easy for the composer's detractors to see his music as a simple celebration of this country's Arcadian beauties. It is the latter which presents a problem for Heffer, who clearly wishes to embrace of RVW as the first great composer of music that is incontrovertibly English. That some of the music undoubtedly is just that may not be gainsaid, but the neurotic and alienated aspects of his more disturbing

pieces will not be so defined: it is this which is leading to the growing perception that RVW, like all great composers, wrote music for the world, not just his native country. Another problem for Heffer is the composer's socialist leanings. He may correctly identify RVW's parents as espousing a brand of Conservative radicalism, and mention (without apparent irony) that RVW was inspired by his teachers at the RCM such as Stanford and Parry who had, for the first time, made music seem a "fit career for a gentleman", but RVW's refusal of a knighthood was only one of the many areas in which he was a very different Englishman from Elgar. While the latter lamented the loss of horses rather than men in the First World War, Vaughan Williams saw active service (despite his age) as a private in the ambulance corps in France. RVW's agnosticism, too, ill fits the ecclesiastical straitjacket of the High Church journeyman composer. And when RVW has undergone one of his periodic periods of disillusion with the Labour Party, Heffer suggests that he is not the only socialist to recant once he actually saw the ideal put into practice, and is soon yoking the spectre of Stalin to such a horror. It has to be said, though, that these tendentious passages are subsumed in Heffer's self-evident love and enthusiasm for the composer and his music. In cool, measured prose, Heffer makes the strongest possible case for placing RVW securely on the slopes of Mount Parnassus - and the composer's admirers may forgive him for attempting to hijack him as an unconscious standard bearer for the right.

Barry Forshaw

Simon Heffer talks to Barry Forshaw about his new biography of Vaughan Williams



Simon Heffer

As a biographer of Vaughan Williams, the political journalist Simon Heffer may seem to be a curious choice. With acclaimed studies of Thomas Carlyle and Edward the Seventh to his credit (along with a controversial polemic Nor Shall My Sword, about the need for an English national identity), RVW may seem a surprising figure for Heffer to tackle... unless his book about

British identity offers a clue. But apart from the author's considerable love for the man and his music, Heffer has other things on his mind.

Did Weidenfeld & Nicolson commission you to write this book, or was the initiative yours?

Well, Weidenfeld were creating a series of short lives, and asked me if I would like to contribute. I had always wanted to do a book on Vaughan Williams, and I asked if I might do this. I know that there is a man who is collecting all the letters (a twenty-year-process), so I realised that there was no chance to do a comprehensive biography. But I saw this as an opportunity to do a sympathetic biographical essay.

One thing that comes across a very strongly is your own enthusiasm - both for the music and the man?

I'm very fond of him. Also I don't think that anybody of my generation - I'm 40 - had written about the man, and most of the other RVW biographers had been born in the early part of the twentieth century, and were alive when Vaughan Williams was writing his music. I thought I might be able to bring something fresh.

Did you find it intimidating, the thought that such writers as Michael Kennedy had done such impressive work on RVW? Kennedy is often acknowledged in your book.

I know Michael very well - he's a very close friend - and I appreciated that there was nothing I could add to a lot of the work that he had done. I set out not to try to replicate or imitate Michael, but to look at RVW's music from a turn-of-the-century perspective, as well as giving the biographical facts. That is essentially what I sought to do.

Did you see yourself as fulfilling any kind of proselytizing role for RVW's music?

I certainly feel that people should be encouraged to listen to his music, and if what I have done can facilitate this, that's all the better. It is refreshing that his music is not as neglected as it was fifteen or twenty years ago. When I was a young man, there were very few performances.

Yes, events such as Andre Previn's recording of the symphonies were positively seismic back then?

That's true, and the championing of his music by American conductors is still important: if I had to choose one recorded cycle for all its faults, I would choose Leonard Slatkin's, which has some quite remarkable performances.

It's slightly depressing to hear that some of those Slatkin performances are already being deleted, although there is a possibility of re-issue.

Really? It's sad that such a fine set should be deleted.

I sense a certain dichotomy in your book: while wishing to celebrate Vaughan Williams as our greatest national composer you also feel that he is a composer for the world. Do you think these things are antithetical?

As an Englishman, I enjoy hearing representations of nationalism in music not just England, from whatever country. Smetana in *Ma Vlast*, for instance and Wagner's celebration of the German soul. At a time when other composers were celebrating nationalism in music, RVW was attempting to do the same: to put England on a level playing field, so to speak.

You mentioned Smetana: why do you think that his brand of nationalism is so widely exportable, while other nations resist the same impulses in Vaughan Williams?

That may have been true once but I believe that Vaughan Williams is exportable these days. Travelling around the world, I see his music represented on CD far more than it was, and performances of the works are starting to happen in other countries. Although, of course, there are still too few performances in this country. The thing about other European countries, though, is that they all have such rock-solid musical traditions of their own, and it is proving difficult to break into them. I've always been very critical of the BBC in this country for only promoting our music in a very limited way.

You think there's still a perception abroad that we are "das land ohne musik"?

No, I think that has broken down, that prejudice; we are seen as a musical nation now. The trouble is that while new composers may have a hearing - however brief - not enough attention is played to the music of the early part of this century. Elgar, Parry and so on.

I would guess from what you say that you would have negative views about the Glock regime at the BBC, during which the music of many more traditional English composers such as Malcolm Arnold were neglected in favour of the latest twelve tone piece?

I think Glock was an absolute menace, and that whole period was extremely bad for British music.

Certainly, composers such as Arnold suffered because of their unfashionable insistence on writing relatively tonal music?

Absolutely. I think he was an atrocious man, Mr Glock. The irony is that a lot of the music that he championed is falling away, and composers such as Arnold are finally coming into their own.

Your book undoubtedly has a political dimension?

Well, I'm a political writer. That's how I earn my living. I view things through a political prism, and I couldn't help but be interested in Vaughan Williams' politics. He was, of course,

far to the left of me - and he had this idea of both a world union and the European Union. In practical terms, though, his enthusiasm for a united Europe would nowadays translate very well into Euro-scepticism.

Compared with the subjects of your other biographies, Vaughan Williams' life would appear to be lacking in the kind of drama that makes for compulsive biography. Ken Russell specialised in scandalising music lovers with his outrageous film biographies of composers such as Mahler and Richard Strauss, but he virtually gave up with RVW and produced a very anodyne film, with Russell himself reduced to attempting (on film) to convince his clearly bored young daughter of the composer's virtues. Did you find the absence of any striking events (apart from, possibly his wartime experiences) a problem?

Well, it might have been a problem, if I had been obliged to write a 500 page book about him. But I considered that what was important about his life might be got into a shorter volume, and the lack of any obviously dramatic moments would not be a problem. All I really wanted to do was to acquaint people with the basic facts, and, hopefully send them anew to the music.

You don't go into great detail about his character... You stay quite close to the music.

To some degree, it seemed to me that his character was pretty well open and shut. He was obviously a very decent man - a good old fashioned gent. There's plenty of evidence of his kindness to the younger composers - and, of course, the help he offered Holst. In all the sources that were available to me (and I was very thorough) I was hard pressed to find any evidence of him being mean or nasty. He was in that great tradition of late Victorian liberals: a very earnest figure and very much part of that Darwinian, almost pre-Bloomsbury ideal.

But the monstre sacre almost automatically makes for an interesting biography Wagner, for instance?

Of course, but if I wanted to write a book about libertinism and sex, I wouldn't have chosen Vaughan Williams. What's interesting about him is the way he enunciated in his music what I feel to be my country, and the landscape of my country. Although, of course, I feel that he is most interesting when he stops writing about this landscape in his music, and also stops looking backwards, beginning to draw his inspiration from the painful events around him.

Yes, you clearly regard such works as the Fourth and Sixth symphonies as his most significant?

If there were only the Arcadian RVW, he would still be a great English composer. But his stature is defined by this astonishing range.

It's interesting that, inter alia, your book is very sharp on Holst, and although the limitations of a 200 page book no doubt precluded this, I would like to see you talk more about their

friendship.

Holst was an absolutely fascinating figure, and I would dearly like to have written more about him. But, as you say, I was obliged to concentrate on my given brief. But his music is very important to me - not just *The Planets*, of course.

Do you think that by attempting the embrace of RVW as an archetypal English composer, you are in danger of downplaying his universality?

I don't see any inherent contradiction between being archetypally English and possessing a universal appeal. Elgar is more quintessentially English in some ways, and that hasn't stopped his music from travelling.

Does the fact that some of RVW's music - the Fourth, for example - is supranational make it more difficult for people to locate him in the way that it is always easy to do with Elgar?

Possibly, but I have a feeling that all the preconceptions people have about Vaughan Williams - of whatever kind - are in the process of being broken down. If my book can help to continue the process, I'll be more than happy.

Our second review is by David Betts.

Over forty years have now passed since the death of RVW, but the good news is that his music seems to be handsomely surviving the vulnerable period when any composer's lifework can easily fall into neglect. The wide range of recorded performances of RVW's works under the batons of top-rank conductors including for example Richard Hickox, Leonard Slatkin, Vernon Handley is evidence of growth of serious interest, although one would like to hear as much in the concert hall as on the CD player. Then there are the publications of such works of scholarship as Wilfred Mellers' 'Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion' (2nd edition 1997) and 'Ralph Vaughan Williams In Perspective' edited by Lewis Foreman (1998). And of course there has been the founding in 1994 of the thriving RVW Society.

I rehearse these familiar points to provide a brief context for the appearance of this new biography. It is of course by no means the first; indeed there are several, and I am not even sure how many. The two key established works are of course Ursula Vaughan Williams' 'R.V.W. - A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams' (Oxford University Press 1964) and Michael Kennedy's 'The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams' (Oxford University Press, originally 1964, second edition 1980, paperback 1992). But there are others, including James Day's 'Vaughan Williams' (Dent and Sons Ltd. 1961), Paul Holmes' 'Vaughan Williams; His Life and Times' (see the letter in the last issue (17) of the journal), and Jerrold Northrop Moore's 'Vaughan Williams: A Life in Photographs' (Oxford University Press 1992).

With all this in mind, I think that Simon Heffer has chosen a propitious time to produce a new

biography in view of the increasing interest in RVW and the fact that the books by Ursula Vaughan Williams and Michael Kennedy basically belong to an increasingly distant period. The book is very pleasantly produced (with a nice photograph of RVW with his cat Foxy on the cover) and I found it an easy read at 152 pages; this is a definite plus for me as a slow reader. I can certainly recommend it to anyone who does not have time for the two key works (see above). But I found myself wondering how much new material was included. Having read the key works I guess that the answer to this is probably not much, although Simon Heffer has of course had to do much in the way of sifting and re-presenting for a new generation. On the whole, he has done a good job, although I have some reservations as noted below.

This is most emphatically not a work of scholarship, and I mean this in a neutral, technical sense. A book which depends strongly on more detailed predecessors, has no index, no footnotes to give references for quotations, and no musical or other illustrations, cannot sensibly be used for reference. I read it and I enjoyed it, but if I want later to pick up a thread

I will continue to go to the key works. Let me give a couple of trivial examples. I noticed with interest that the fifth symphony was dedicated 'to Jean Sibelius, without permission'. After finishing the book I noticed that Simon Heffer dedicates his book to Michael Kennedy 'without permission'. I wondered whether there was an intended connection and wanted to find Sibelius in the text - I found it on page 104 eventually after much page turning (Sibelius in an index would have helped). Inevitably, Ursula Vaughan Williams and Michael Kennedy are frequently mentioned though often (oddly I thought) as 'his widow' and 'Mr, Kennedy' respectively. 'His widow' is quoted on page 66 in relation to a first performance in 1926 of Sancta Civitas, when the first-time reader might naturally assume that it meant Adeline Vaughan Williams, still to be his wife for a quarter of a century, although the bibliography lists no work by her.

What the book is, and probably intended so, is a well-written, pleasant, undemanding introduction to the life of a sweet man who was also an influential and productive composer. Many of the compositions are discussed, often in the context of what was happening at the time in the world at large and in RVW's life. The

influences of folk-singing, friends, other composers, religion/mysticism, wars, are interestingly conveyed, and there is some useful concentration on atheism/agnosticism, mildly leftist politics, and the decline of the old world of England and the empire. In some areas there seems to be a constricting desire to keep the book's length under control, probably for sound commercial reasons. I would like to have seen a considerably longer 'coda' containing newly researched information on what has been happening since, say, 1965 in the way of recordings, performances (e.g. at the Proms, broadcast by the BBC, by London orchestras at home and abroad), and publications. These are mostly matters of record after all, although of course some fairly tedious work would have been necessary to bring it to our attention. This was, I think, an opportunity missed to bring the picture up to date.

In short, readers of this journal might well find this book £12.99 well spent, not instead of more substantial books on RVW but as an enjoyable extra.

David Betts

Letters

We are always pleased to receive contributions for this page

Getting a VW autograph

The February issue of the RVW Journal arrived today and has already provided much interesting reading. How I wish I could have heard Michael Kennedy on 19 November. I have long admired his championship of RVW.

The article about RVW's letters brings back memories of my school days. At the age of about 15, I rashly wrote to the great man requesting an autograph. I received a hand-written reply on a "White Gates" letterhead:

"Dr Vaughan Williams thanks you for your letter but he has no sympathy with autograph collectors and hopes you will give it up and find something more interesting".

How much of RVW is in those few lines - his directness (!), his wisdom, and his generosity of spirit (for of course, being hand-written, the note contained his signature.) Several years later, an enquiry about revisions to the Sixth Symphony brought a typed reply, but signed personally.

Hector Walker

Five Mystical Songs

It gladdened my heart to read your article "Such Sweet Art" on the subject of the *Five Mystical Songs* because recently I had begun to doubt my own critical appreciation of this work due to the adverse critical comments I had read. It is difficult to begin to explain how much these songs mean to me and I was very moved when I heard them at last year's Leith Hill Festival. So, when I recently read James Day's book, an author who is supposedly sympathetic to RVW, I was totally dismayed to read his negative criticisms of the work. Similarly I haven't been able to listen to the work of Britten without prejudice since reading his rather 'catty remarks'. Sometimes it's just pointless analysing crotchets and bars when one's basic feelings do the job. It is also important not to confuse sentimentality with tenderness or beauty. For me at any rate Vaughan Williams is never sentimental. If he did have tears streaming down his face as was reported when he conducted the Bach Passions, then he is a man I can happily relate to.

Whilst I have heard only three of the CD's discussed (I own two) in the CD review my own particular favourite is the EMI version featuring John Shirley Quirk with David Wilcocks conducting of which I never tire. To those members who have never heard this CD may I urge them to do so because the "Songs" are coupled with Gerald Finzi's Cantata *Dies Natalis* with Finzi's son, Christopher conducting. Since Finzi was a friend of RVW and RVW had conducted the cantata at Dorking and Christopher was also an acquaintance of RVW, it makes a compelling reason to buy this particular CD. Wilfred Brown's voice is magical. As a

further reason to favour this version, it has Holt's daughter Imogen, conducting her father's works. Connections indeed! If I was to give away my entire music collection I suspect this CD would be the last to go.

Tadeusz Kasa

Antartica in Antarctic: second performance?

It never rains but it pours. I read Bob Rush's letter just after we got back from the Antarctic peninsular (on the rather more luxurious Marco Polo). I also took a tape of Barbirolli's version - and played it off the South Shetlands, whilst re-entering the Drake passage, and steaming past long ranks of icebergs: It makes good sense there! I think I can claim a legitimate "furthest south" for this hearing, since it was south of the "Antarctic convergence", and at about 65 south latitude: According to my atlas, Macquarie Island is north of the Convergence, at about 55 south. However, we were just being hedonistic, and did no serious research work "down there"!

After our return, I turned to VW's eighth - for no particular reason I can fathom. It gave me an extraordinary insight into the diverse (and variable) power of absolute music to evoke emotions and reactions "in tranquillity". I found that the later symphony evoked the remote icy grandeur of the Antarctic, and it's stillness and "presence", even more physically and realistically than had number seven. I now feel the "Scott" symphony to be somehow more mystical and about the idea of the place, and less redolent of the *fact*. Is it possible that VW learned

more (or thought more deeply) about the southern spaces, after (or even because of) completing the conversion of his Scott music to symphonic form?

I would be intrigued to know whether any other members get any analogous reactions, on listening to these two late symphonies "in sequence".

*Angus J. Duke
Stratford-on-Avon*

Captain Scott

Eric Hung's contribution to the November Conference Scott: National Hero or Self-Involved Zealot reported in the February Journal deserves fuller exposition, although in review it's conclusions certainly confirm the statement made in the biography, that VW "...became more and more upset as he read about the inefficiencies of the organisation; he despised heroism that risked lives unnecessarily." (RVW, Ursula Vaughan Williams p279). Ralph's judgement was correct and ahead of the popular view of the time.

Although the full extent of the mismanagement of Scott's Last Expedition has only been understood in recent years the Ealing film did not disguise the more obvious errors, for example the one noted by Ralph in taking five men on the final stage, but in the film maintained the popular fiction of a Kiplingesque stoicism in the face of malignant adversity.

This was also untrue: Scott exhibited deficiencies of character as well as of judgement: the choice of the unfit and unreliable Evans merely to represent the 'other ranks' against men of proven toughness and worth such as Lashley and Crean was not only disastrous but demonstrated his poor evaluation of men.

In the film Scott exhibits a patronising leadership, if he listens to anyone at all it is the avuncular Wilson, but the nature of his attitude and qualification to lead such a high-risk expedition is well exemplified by an incident from his previous expedition where at one stage he confronts his fellows, Wilson and Shackleton as follows

"Come here you bloody fools". Wilson asked if he was the one addressed, Scott answered in the negative. Shackleton then said he must be the one. Scott replied "Right, you're the worst bloody fool of the lot, and every time you speak to me like that, you'll get it back".

Perhaps not too much should be expected of men on a protracted and isolated expedition in a harsh and unyielding environment;

Shackleton's last expedition revealed such tensions not unknown even to the organised Amundsen, whom history has rewarded with relative obscurity for his success-much better to fail and create a few myths along the way.

The worst aspect however is that public perception of what occurred is based on what was written by one man – Scott, so that even the death of Oates, usually regarded as an act of self-sacrifice may not have been what it seemed.

Mr Hung's thesis is reported to suggest that VW's collapse of the theme at the conclusion of Antarctica is a denial of the heroism; I had always assumed the decay of this to be merely symbolic of the termination of Scott's party.

The extent to which heroism is involved is certainly questionable; stoicism by the party in the face of oncoming death is something which may be assumed – but what else could they do?

It must not be overlooked that our understanding of it is based only on the account which Scott wrote – for posterity.

David Tolley

(Editors Note: The February, 2001 edition of the Journal will focus on the film Scott of the Antarctic)

VW Conducting the Fifth Symphony

Referring to the article in the Journal regarding RVW conducting etc., I would very much like to hear RVW conducting symphony no. 5 (and any works but especially that one) as I'm sure many other members would. Is there any way the Society can get access to these recordings? Maybe some kind of "subscription recording" could be floated. I, for one, would be very willing to pay "over the odds" to hear this and hopefully other such recordings.

Kevin Hill

Recording of Funeral Service

At the time of RVW's funeral I chose to absent myself from the local grammar school so as to record the VHF transmission of the whole service from the Abbey. Richard Dimpleby's commentary is still fresh in my memory but, unfortunately, the tape and recorder have long disappeared. As I recall Sir Adrian Bolt was conducting the LPO and amongst the VW works played were the Dives and Lazarus Five Variants.

If I thought that I was the only person to

have "captured" this transmission my loss would be immeasurably worse. Is there still available some devotee a copy of the broadcast?

Dewi Roger Price

(Editors Note: Any member who can help should contact Stephen Connock)

Job: A Masque for Dancing

I write as a devotee of this unique work; music for the ballet based on Blake's 'Illustrations of the Book of Job'.

This is RVW at his most inventive; sweeping themes, mischievous rhythms, overwhelming discords, and just as overwhelming melodious English scoring that transports the listener to some mystical yet familiar ethereal world

The full scoring includes tenor saxophones, bass flute and organ and the whole piece lasts 45 minutes. The first 'concert' performance was given in Norwich in 1930 with RVW conducting.

Although there is now a catalogue of recent and, more importantly, good recordings, 'live' performances are a rare occurrence. I have written to the major orchestras regarding this void but it seems that Job is a work which has failed to find a place in the mainstream concert programme.

Isn't it time to redress the balance and try a different approach? Would it be feasible therefore to reduce the ballet to say, a 30-minute suite for the purpose of programming? This scheme has worked successfully for Ravel's ballets, *Mother Goose* and *Daphnis & Chloe* and for Prokofiev's *Romeo & Juliet*, all regularly performed as suites.

It would be interesting to know where O.U.P. (VW's publisher) stand on this? Could musicologists such as Anthony Payne and Michael Berkeley get involved? I would be interested to hear their views as well as those of Ursula Vaughan Williams as the piece holds a special affection for her, too.

Perhaps a record label such as Chandos would care to sponsor work involved in such a project, or commission a recording?

I stress at this point that I would not wish this proposal to be detrimental in any way to Job or to RVW's legacy, hence my writing to the society rather than directly to a music scholar or composer. I simply wish to promote this music further.

Karen Fletcher (Ms)

The Garland Appeal

An Update by Stephen Connock

In order for members of the RVW Society to be completely up to date with developments in relation to The Garland Appeal, the Chairman of the Appeal presents a detailed report.

Infrastructure:

1. Following the registration in the UK of The Garland Appeal as a limited liability company (No. 3719720) and charity (No. 1075007), the Appeal has also achieved charitable status in the USA. It has been registered as a Pennsylvania non-profit corporation with 501 c (3) charity number 2911432. Within the UK, the Appeal has also registered under the Data Protection Act (No. Z 24617660).
2. The appointment of Polly Devaney as Director of Development for the USA on a full time basis has been followed by Zoe Howard accepting the role of UK Director of Development effective from the 1st April. Zoe has a music degree, plays the oboe as a soloist and has worked in PR and Marketing for Apple Corps. And other companies. She has considerable empathy with the fight against cancer having suffered from the illness as a fifteen year old. As with Polly Devaney in America, her main role will be fund-raising.
3. With the generous support of Sir Paul McCartney and his team in New York, the appeal has been given space in the MPL office at 39 West 54th Street, NYC 10019. The appeal will need a London office in due course.
4. The appeal has registered in the UK with the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) Administrative Services Unit. This provides, most importantly, a telephone service for donations. Our phone number is 01732 520111 and we have used the phrase Dial-a-Donation to support this link. In the UK, we will continue to use PO Box 1, London, EC2Y 8PN as our postal address for donations.
5. The Appeals web site is now fully operational and can be visited on www.garlandappeal.com. The Appeal is very grateful to Stuart Whaley of Wave Creative Design for undertaking this work free of charge. We are looking to add more information and to build links between interested parties on our web-site. We also need to create an opportunity to purchase the CD of a Garland for Linda via the internet.
6. The boards of the charity in the UK and in the USA have the following members:
USA
Stephen Connock (Chair)
John Rago (Vice-Chair and General Counsel)
Norman Sadowsky MD
UK
Stephen Connock (Chair)
John Francis (Finance Director)
John Sinclair
Rosamund Smith
7. Two events in the USA are generating considerable income. Firstly, the launch of The Garland Appeal in America, coupled with the release of the CD, was celebrated by a dinner and dance at The Supper Club in New York on the 27th April. Tickets were \$7500 for a table of 10. 220 people attended including Sir Paul McCartney,

Judith Bingham, Roxanna Panufnik, Sir John Tavener and Sir Richard Rodney Bennett. We raised \$160,000 in one evening. Secondly, the USA premiere of *a Garland for Linda* at the Riverside Church on 3rd June will generate excellent income if the church is full. The signs are good - \$20,000 dollars of seats were sold as soon as tickets went on sale at the beginning of March. The concert is being broadcast live across America. Members will be informed how the evening went in the next edition of the RVW Society Journal.

8. Five concerts are planned in the UK which should produce reasonable cash flow for the charity:
 - 28 May at the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester
 - 9 June at the Anvil, Basingstoke
 - 4 August at the Deal Festival (organised by David Matthews)
 - 21 September as part of a Festival in Brighton
 - 26 November as part of the Huddersfield Festival of Contemporary Music

All the concerts will be performed by the Joyful Company of Singers under Peter Broadbent. The choir and the conductor continue to provide the appeal with invaluable assistance.

Future Music Projects


9. Roxanna Panufnik has suggested a ballet version of *a Garland for Linda* and this is being followed up through Richard Hickox and his connections with the Sadlers Wells Ballet. In performance, it is hoped to couple the work with the Job.
10. The concert at the Anvil on the 9th June will feature world premiere arrangements of Paul McCartney songs for chorus, string quartet and flute. The arrangements will be undertaken by Peter Broadbent and include Penny lane, Yesterday and For No One.
11. The Anglo-american opera festival *The Moon turns Blue* is being planned for 2003 and will feature British operas (*Sir John in Love*, *Paul Bunyan*, *The Rising of the Moon*) and American operas (*The Tender Land*, *Vanessa*, *Porgy and Bess* and *Susanna*). We will also feature the world premiere of newly commissioned operas. This exciting project is subject to funds being available and an initial application for funds has been submitted to the Performing Rights Society Foundation in respect of these operas. The Festival will feature works of all the composers of *a Garland for Linda*.
12. The appeal has agreed to support a recording of *Sir John in Love* by Chandos. The artists are the same as those who performed the work at the Barbican in 1997 and fees at the 1997 level have been agreed.
13. Within the UK, the composition competition *A Song for Linda* has attracted considerable interest since it was publicised in the Classic FM magazine. Because over 3000 application forms will need to be sent out, the competition has been deferred until January, 2001. The scheme will be piloted in the autumn of 2000 and a number of schools and individual composers have agreed to take part in the pilot.
14. A music panel has been formed to assist the charity in the UK to shape its strategy in relation to British music. I am delighted that Judith Bingham, David Matthews, Roxanna Panufnik and John



Left to right: Robert Cohen (*Cello*), David Matthews, Roxanna Panufnik, Michael Berkeley, Sir John Tavener, Sir Paul McCartney, Judith Bingham, Stephen Connock, Sir Richard Rodney Bennett, Philippa Davies (*Flute*), Peter Broadbent, Richard Hickox.

- Rutter have agreed to take part along with Peter Broadbent and Lewis Foreman. This group would also be involved as judges in *A Song for Linda*. The charity will want to focus on helping British composers though, for example, bursaries, scholarships, travel help and general advice.
15. The public launch of the CD on 27th January in London was a great occasion with a superb performance of *a Garland for Linda* by the Joyful Company of Singers under Peter Broadbent. Despite a successful press conference, there was little press coverage – a major disappointment. The CD featured in Classic FM magazine for March and April with lead articles on Sir Paul McCartney. Excellent classical reviews, including *The Gramophone*, have added to the credibility of the cycle. Our problem is that whilst *a Garland for Linda* is becoming reasonably well-known in the UK, *The Garland Appeal* gets little coverage. This was most pronounced in the radio broadcast of the song cycle on 13 February when no contact address for the Appeal was given. Nevertheless, the CD is selling 500-700 a week in the UK, not bad, and entered the Classic FM charts at number 8. At the time of writing, it is No. 7 in the USA Classical Charts. The BBC are repeating the broadcast next year, and National Public radio will be broadcasting the USA premiere live across America on 3rd of June. Raising the profile of the charity remains a major priority if we are to attract donations. We are identifying a short list of celebrities who might help us raise the charity's profile in the UK, and the same task is necessary in the USA.
 16. The appeal in the UK is launching it's first *Garland Cancer Carer Award* at the Anvil on 9th June. These awards aim to provide recognition to people in the community who have provided wonderful support to friends or family members suffering from cancer. The awards are not aimed at celebrities. Criteria have been defined and a panel of judges, including Dr. Hilary Jones, determined. A successful press conference on 14th March set the scene.
 17. We are undertaking research into music and healing in relation to cancer, concentrating on the immune system. We hope to finish this research by mid year. We are in touch with the leader of the Medici String Quartet and other specialists in this field.
 18. We have prepared our first cancer fact sheet, on breast cancer, in conjunction with Breakthrough Breast Cancer, our UK beneficiary. This will be available in mid year and we hope to distribute it via Classic FM magazine. We will then move on to produce a fact sheet on colon cancer.
 19. The concert on the 9th of June at the Anvil will be focussed on helping *The Ark Facility* at the North Hampshire Hospital. We have received superb support from representatives of the Ark to enable this concert to be a success. At early April, £10,000 in sponsorship has been raised – a considerable achievement.
 20. A Nurses Panel is being formed in the UK and this will be complemented by a Medical Advisory Board in the USA. These groups will help us shape our strategy in relation to cancer.
- Other activities**
21. With the considerable help of Sabine Ranke-Heinemann and Thomas Gayda, we have set up a subsidiary in Germany.
 22. We need to have more performances of *a Garland for Linda* specially in America. We are encouraged that Philippe Brunelle will perform the work with his Minnesota forces in November 2000, and that the Joyful Company of Singers plan to perform the cycle on an American tour in 2001.

Stephen Connock



a Garland for Linda

The Garland Appeal raises money for cancer research and the promotion of British music - Fighting Cancer through Music.

Performed by

The Joyful Company of Singers Conductor

Peter Broadbent

The String Quartet from the

City of London Sinfonia

Flautist Philippa Davies

The Garland Appeal PO Box 1 London EC2Y 8PN Tel: 01732 520111 Web: www.garlandappeal.com

Registered Charity Number: 1075007



a Garland for Linda

a Gala Charity Concert in aid of The Garland Appeal and The Ark Facility at the North Hampshire Hospital

Hosted by Alan Titchmarsh

The Anvil, Basingstoke

Friday 9 June 2000 7.45pm

THE PROGRAMME:

Sir Paul McCartney and John Lennon

Songs for chorus, flute and string quartet, including world premiere arrangements by Peter Broadbent of Yesterday, For No One and Penny Lane

a Garland for Linda

Sir John Tavener

Prayer for the Healing of the Sick

Judith Bingham

Water Lilies

John Rutter

Musica Dei donum

David Matthews

The Doorway of the Dawn

Sir Paul McCartney

NOVA (arranged by John Harle)

Roxanna Panufnik

I dream'd

Michael Berkeley

Farewell

Giles Swayne

the flight of the swan

Sir Richard Rodney Bennett

A Good-Night

TICKETS ARE AVAILABLE FROM:

The Anvil Box Office, Churchill Way, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 7QR

Telephone
01256 844244

PRICE

£50, £25, £15 and £7.50 (concessions available).

RVW 2000
23rd to 29th July, 2000 at Charterhouse School
Vaughan Williams Symposium
Co-ordinator: Professor Byron Adams

This symposium will appeal to all lovers of the composer's music. It is offered in conjunction with The Charterhouse Summer School of Music (originated by RVW in 1945), The Carthusian Trust and the Vaughan Williams Society.

It will be held at Charterhouse and will commence on Sunday 23rd July until Saturday 29th July. It offers a wide range of activities connected with Vaughan Williams and his music.

Vaughan Williams was a boy in the school from 1887-1890. He maintained his links with the school throughout his life, returning to open the Old Music School in 1940, and to listen to concerts. Towards the end of his life he agreed to write the final scene for the 1951 performance of *The Masque of Charterhouse* and this year at the Summer School we hope that there will be a rare opportunity to hear this music. In 1972 the school celebrated the centenary of his birth with a fully staged performance of his opera *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In 1940 Vaughan Williams opened the newly converted Music School and in 1984 his widow Ursula Vaughan Williams opened the RVW Music Centre named after him and partly funded by the Vaughan Williams Trust.

The Carthusian Trust inaugurated in 1985 an annual Research Fellowship for an American scholar to spend part of the summer at Charterhouse while researching the music of Vaughan Williams. This scheme has continued to the present time.

The programme for the week will include:

Illustrated lectures

Many of these scholars are returning to Charterhouse this week to present papers on their researches. In addition, other Vaughan Williams scholars are being invited to give illustrated talks and to take part in seminars and discussions.

Excursions

There will be visits to locations associated with Vaughan Williams.

Concerts

The resources of the Summer School and its courses provide an opportunity for many performances and rehearsal sessions of his music during the week. We hope to include:

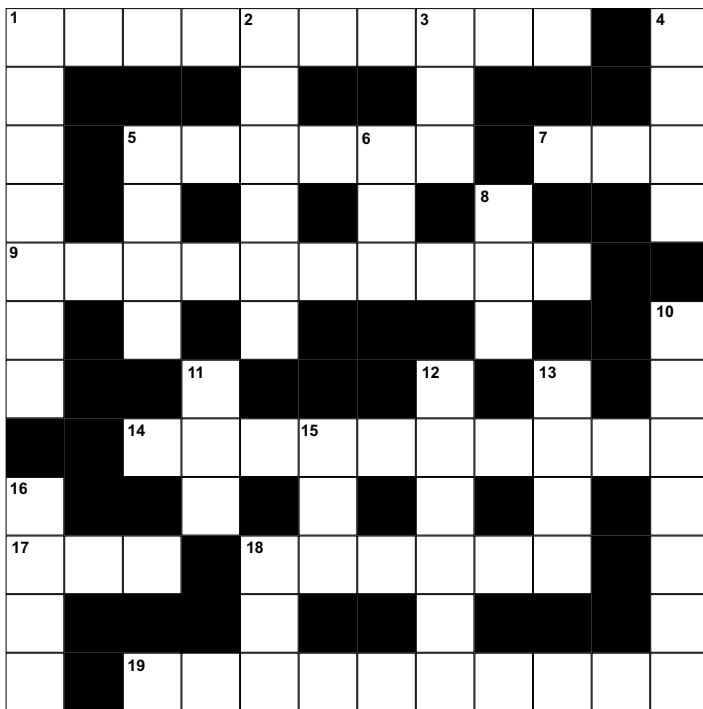
Symphony No. 6; The Lark Ascending; Oboe Concerto; Concerto Grosso; Folk Song Suite; Flourish for Wind; The String Quartets and Fantasy Quintet; On Wenlock Edge; Three Shakespeare Songs; Flos Campi; Serenade to Music; Towards the Unknown Region; 6 Studies in English Folksong; Romance and Pastorale; and more besides!

All those attending the Summer School are invited to sing in the final concert. Further details are contained within the Summer School brochure available from:

The Music Office, Charterhouse, Godalming, Surrey GU7 2DX Tel; 01483 291696

The residential course fee will be £295 (£245 plus RVW Society Member) and offers full board and accommodation in single en-suite rooms, attendance at all summer school concerts, selected rehearsals, lectures, seminars and excursions without further charge. Non-resident charge (no accommodation or meals) will be £145.

RVW Crossword No. 4 by Michael Gainsford



News and Notes

- Andre Previn conducts the *Tallis Fantasia* at the Barbican on June 2000.
- The *Tallis Fantasia* is also being performed in Canberra by the Canberra Symphony Orchestra under Andrew Robinson on 30th and 31st August, 2000.
- Stephen Connock is talking about *RVW Remembered* at the Three Choirs Festival in Hereford on 21st of August in the Green Dragon Hotel at 5.15 pm.
- Renee Stewart tells us that the Mole Valley District Council are again considering a statue of RVW outside the Dorking Halls.
- Surrey County Council have announce the official opening of the New Performing Arts Library on Tuesday 13 June at 4 pm.

Across:

1. Andy Owen MP gets shaken up to produce Gloucestershire village (4, 6)
5. John, who wrote the words set in RVW's *Morality* (6)
7. Leads the parade in the second movement of *Sons of Light* (3)
9. Scottish air arranged by RVW in 1921 (4, 6)
14. Wrote the words of *Nothing is here for tears* (4, 6)
17. RVW wrote her a wedding tune for organ (3)
18. Stephen, who wrote the song arranged for male voices in 1921 by RVW (6)
19. Weeny chalk upset in Chelsea. RVW was at no 13 (6, 4)

Down:

1. RVW joked that Roy 'wrote his music'. (7)
2. RVW's *Elegy* came from a book of Matthew (but not the Bible) (6)
3. Hildegard was one before becoming an Abbess (3)
4. A tune for this 'bestly animal' woke up RVW in 1958 (4)
5. With side, may go bare in *Sir John in Love* (4)
6. The *RVW Society's* is held annually at Charterhouse. (1, 1, 1)
8. Elinor Rummig kept a rather disreputable one (3)
10. The small forest on this Shropshire crest is in distress (7)
11. Any of the three assistant of Dipsacus will fit in here to (3 or 3 or 3)
12. Size of Cloister in hymn 262 (6)
13. The three kings in *Hodie* march towards this (4)
15. RVW skipped this rank in his WWI army service (1, 1, 1)
16. German brook greatly admired by RVW (4)
18. One that will not stay his might in *Monk's Gate* (3)

Answers on Page 12

Call for Papers

The February 2001 edition of the Journal will consider the film
Scott of the Antarctic

The deadline for contributions is
December 31st, 2000

Next Edition:
October 2000

Focus on Job

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houses by Bridget Duckfield (blank for own message)

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