



Journal of the
RVW
 Society

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EDITOR

*Stephen Connock
 (see address below)*

RVW Exhibition Now Open



Photo courtesy of Mr and Mrs Milton

Chairman's address

Stephen Connock, on behalf of the Trustees, said that the exhibition had been planned since the inception of the RVW Society in 1994. He was delighted with the setting in Down Ampney Church and deeply grateful to Rev'd Calvert and the Parochial Council of Down Ampney for allowing the bell tower area to be used for an Exhibition. He thanked Ursula Vaughan Williams for performing the official opening and for so kindly giving permission for the many and varied photographs of RVW to be included. Ultimately, Stephen Connock wanted a larger exhibition to match those for Elgar, at Broadheath, or Holst at Cheltenham. This was, however, a wonderful start which added to the growing recognition of RVW as a composer of worldwide stature.

The RVW Society's permanent exhibition on the life and work of Ralph Vaughan Williams was officially opened on 19 August 2001. Ursula Vaughan Williams pulled the velvet ribbon at the ancient doorway to the bell tower of Down Ampney Church and declared that our long cherished vision of an exhibition for RVW was open for all to see.

Memorable occasion

Over 150 guests joined in the Opening Ceremony, including Sir Roger and Lady Norrington, Michael and Joyce Kennedy, Brian Couzens of Chandos Records, all Trustees of the RVW Society, over 60 members and many local dignitaries and supporters. The Service was opened by the Reverend John Calvert, welcoming everyone to the birthplace of RVW and to the beautiful church for which RVW's father had been vicar in 1872. Three hymns followed, with everyone moved by *Come Down, O Love Divine* (Down Ampney), *For all the Saints* (Sine Nomine) and *He who would valiant be* (Monk's Gate) to Bunyan's uplifting words. Perhaps the high point of the service was Michael Kennedy's reading of part of *An Oxford Elegy*, including the poignant final verse:

Why faintest thou? I wander'd till I died
 Roam on! The light we sought is shining still.
 Our tree yet crowns the hill
 Our Scholar travels yet the loved hillside.

Jolly good ale and old

Simon Coombs, Project Manager for the Exhibition, thanked everyone for coming to Down Ampney and pointed the way to excellent refreshments, provided in the Village Hall. A wonderful occasion for the village of Down Ampney, for the RVW Society and for the great composer himself.



Brian Kay our speaker at Three Choirs Festival on 22nd August, 2001

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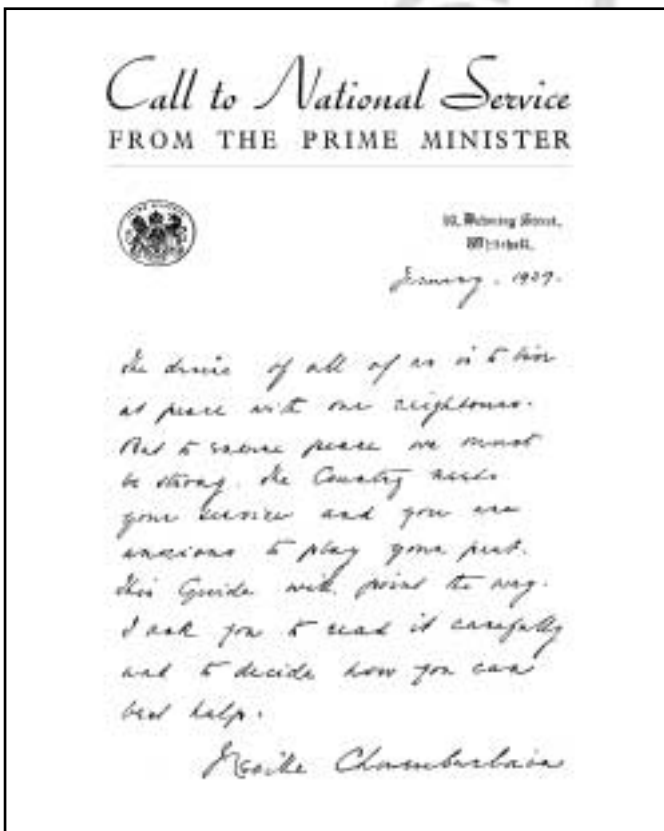
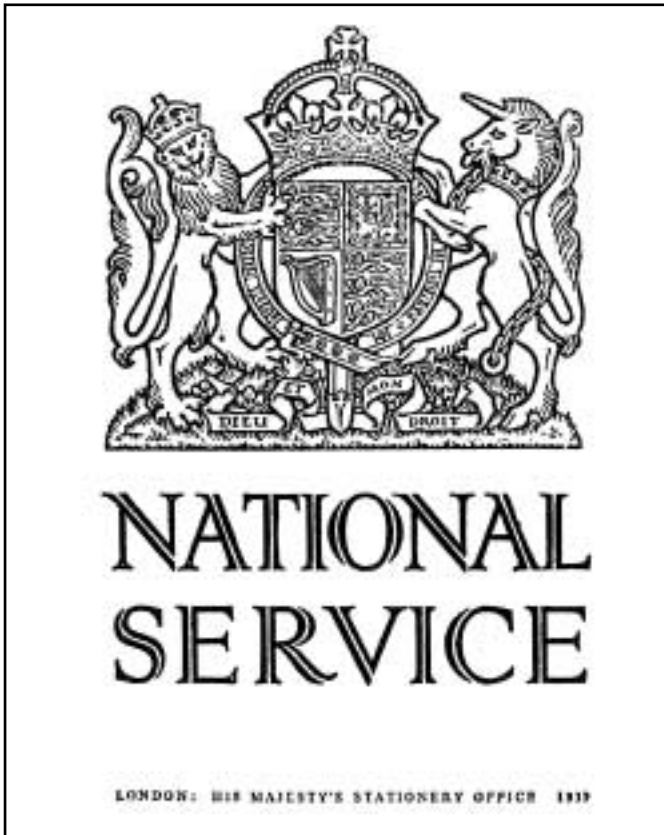
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Salvage and the war effort, 1939 - 45

by Micheal Gainsford



I was 4 when the war broke out. Because we lived in north Lancashire we had very few bombs dropped on us. But in 1940 there were many air raid warnings. Indeed, part of my very first day at school was spent underneath a classroom chair awaiting the 'all-clear'. I believe we were put on alert during raids on Liverpool, and mine-laying activities in the Irish Sea.

It is perhaps not realised today just how much the whole of the United Kingdom was geared up to recovering salvage and recycling during the war years. I understand that this country was far in advance of the other belligerents not only in reducing waste, but also in getting everyone involved in the war effort. Housewives were cajoled into handing in their spare aluminium saucepans 'to make Spitfires'. Garden railings disappeared, and everyone saved paper, bones, vegetable peelings and every conceivable form of refuse. Nothing at all was wasted. It was against the law to put out bread for wild birds. Hens and ducks had first priority. One was even exhorted not to waste money, particularly by adverts featuring an evil looking insect covered with little swastikas – the 'Squander Bug,' no less!

At school, I can recall two particular efforts to boost the recovery of salvage, I think they involved old bones and old newspapers. On one occasion we were all awarded Bakelite 'cog badges' in recognition of bringing to school a certain amount of salvage. This was to demonstrate that we were all cogs in the giant wheel which was to defeat Nazism. On the other occasion the powers that be thought up a wizard scheme that would really harness the competitive spirit. What was on offer this time was a little tin badge with an army rank on it, from lance corporal to Field Marshall, no less. The badge you got depended on the amount of old newspapers etc brought in to school. I think I made sergeant major...

RVW was doing what thousands of others were doing at the time. No doubt it did help the war effort, but it also gave everyone the feeling that they were all in the fight to defeat Hitler.

A well-known rhyme of the time went:

*Dearly beloved brethren,
Is it not a sin?
When you peel potatoes
To throw away the skin.
For the skin feeds the pigs,
And the pigs feed you.
Dearly beloved brethren,
Is this not true?*

M J Gainsford

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

the SYMPHONY and the SECOND WORLD WAR

with a comparative CD review of the Symphony No. 5 in D

“All I know is that it is what I wanted to do at the time.”

RVW on his Fourth Symphony ¹

“...one may hazard that the Fifth Symphony is Vaughan Williams’ greatest work because it is a quest that attains its goal.”

Wilfrid Mellers ²

“What does this amazing symphony say, mean, want of us?”

Christopher Palmer on the Sixth Symphony ³

In trying to appreciate a difficult piece of music a logical starting point would seem to be what the composer himself had to say about it. Let’s look at two of the greatest figures in twentieth century English music to see how this might work in practice. Britten rarely ventured into the written word, either to comment on his own music or on that of others, still less on other subjects, and he gave few interviews. When he did commit himself to print he didn’t say much. Tippett, on the other hand, wrote a lot, about philosophy and politics, as well as his own music and the often complex issues behind it. He also wrote his own opera libretti. Opinion is sharply divided about the quality of Tippett’s literary skills, but it’s safe to say that many commentators believe he should have stuck to music.

Are we to rely on what composers have to say about their own works? They frequently seem so concerned with technical matters that their attempts at explanation result in overloaded phrases full of specialist language which mean little to the average music lover, helping hardly at all. In any case, to what extent does music have to be explained, and is the composer necessarily the best person to do this?

Reading *National Music and other Essays* makes clear that Ralph Vaughan Williams was an accomplished writer. The thoughts expressed are authoritative, yet they appear in an easily digested form, avoiding technical language whilst retaining substance. They are exceptionally readable; he was, as we say nowadays, a good communicator. The one disappointment is that his own music is only obliquely dealt with. This is a pity, since we need guidance on much of it.

Of the three symphonies associated with the period of the Second World War, the violence of the Fourth has been explained by many as the composer’s response to the rising threat of another global conflict. The Fifth was given its first performance at the height of the war, yet it is one of the composer’s most untroubled works, at least on the surface, closing in “pure blessedness” (Ottoway, p40). And then in the Sixth, composed in large part after the war, we find neither optimism nor hope, but something rather more akin to the mood of the Fourth, yet different: more complex in its effect and profoundly enigmatic.

The Fourth Symphony came as a shock to contemporary audiences, even if they sought to explain it by reference to the times. Many saw in the serenity of the Fifth an old man’s farewell gesture to the world. The Sixth was the most perplexing of the three, and remains so for some, but if we look to the composer for help we are frustrated. On the subject of the Sixth Symphony he once said to Roy Douglas “It never seems to occur to people that a man might just want to write a piece of music” (Kennedy, p302).

This was Vaughan Williams’ way, but it simply will not do. We may listen to Berlioz’ *Symphonie Fantastique* simply as a piece of music and gain much pleasure from it, but knowing the programme behind it helps us gain much more. In any case the programme forms an integral part of the work and of the composer’s intentions. We may equally appreciate the

beauties of Vaughan Williams’ *Pastoral Symphony* without knowing that it relates to his experiences in the First World War, but it helps enormously when we do. And Vaughan Williams did give it a name, after all, even if the name tells only part of the story and the composer chose not to divulge the rest for many years. This too was Vaughan Williams’ way. None of the three symphonies under discussion bears a name, and the composer gave few clues as to their meaning. Indeed, on the Sixth Symphony he wrote “I DO NOT BELIEVE IN meanings and mottoes...” (Kennedy, p302). This, along with his comment to Roy Douglas, would lead us to believe that he wanted these works to be heard without questioning their meaning, but is this really the right way, a responsible way of appreciating this music?

In the first part of this paper I want to first provide an introduction to the three wartime symphonies, Nos. 4, 5 and 6, with particular attention to No. 5; and second, to try to delve deeper into the question of what these works mean. I know there will be readers for whom this search is fruitless and unimportant.

I’ve recently been able to listen to and compare eighteen different recorded performances of the Fifth Symphony. The second part of my paper is a report on that privilege.

PART 1

Which of Vaughan Williams’ symphonies more properly finds its place in an edition of the Journal devoted to the Second World War? If we look at the dates, the Fourth Symphony was first performed in April 1935, the Fifth in June 1943 and the Sixth in April 1948. The Fourth is a shocking work of violence; the Sixth likewise, with an added, otherworldly, cold deadness about it; and the Fifth, for the most part, is radiant and serene and filled with the spirit of human goodness and hope. Yet it’s the Fifth which most occupied the composer during the actual war years.

Vaughan Williams wrote that he began the Fourth in 1931 and completed it in 1934. Although this was undoubtedly a turbulent period of European history, Kennedy reminds us (p230) that he began work on it two years before Hitler came to power in Germany, and the work must have been taking shape in his mind for some time before that.

The general reaction to this tumultuous piece was, as we know, one of shock. Yet if the public were unprepared for the apparent change in style this music brought with it, they should not have been, as signs were present in a number of earlier works, in the Piano Concerto, for example, in *Sancta Civitas* and especially, in *Job*. But we see that now with the benefit of hindsight, and in any case, nothing, not even *Job*, could have prepared the public for the opening of the Fourth Symphony: full orchestra, fortissimo, Cs in the bass, the most fundamental of notes, and above them D flats; in short, a crashing dissonance of a semitone, perhaps the harshest sound available to a composer. Dissonance in itself usually leads to consonance: a fourth resolving onto a third brings repose, a seventh resolving onto an octave, as at the end of the *St Matthew Passion* or Sibelius’ *Seventh Symphony*, brings finality. But here the resolution lasts only an instant until the dissonance take over again. The first subject group is made up of this and other motifs which share the same, uncompromising violence and which lead after a mercifully short time to an equally short full stop. The second subject, on the face of it, brings complete contrast: a huge, long-limbed, wide-ranging melody played in octaves by all the strings except the double basses, a huge melody of extremes, infused with extraordinary expressive and lyric power, yet whose accompaniment of chords does nothing to establish any notion of pulse. As it subsides, what little respite it has been able to create is soon dissipated by the return of the original mood. Its return leads in turn to

the coda. Here the original clash between C in the bass and D flat above it is presented quite differently: the D flat music is filled out into chords played pianissimo by muted strings. The D flat eventually wins, for the moment, and the movement subsides into silence.

The slow movement presents us with no heart-warming melodies to sing on the way home, only fragments of themes, passed round from one to another in the orchestra, often over pizzicato bass, seemingly going not very far. The range of these melodies is restricted, claustrophobic, yet when, at the end of the movement, the solo flute presents its descending, closing phrases we realise that this has been our goal all along. I have found this movement one of the composer's hardest nuts to crack, so I was interested to read that after the first performance he said that Boult was the one who had created it: "...he himself had not known how it should go, but Adrian had." (UVW, p205)

One aspect of this symphony which is often missed is its humour: the scherzo and trio is a rollicking thing based on rising fourths. It is linked to the finale by a passage in which the timpani are put to the same use as did Beethoven in his Fifth Symphony, and the finale bursts on us in a similar way to the Beethoven work also. Humour is again present in the first part of this movement, in the oompa accompaniment for example, but it is humour of a darker kind: there's not much lightness of touch here. The symphony ends with what the composer calls an Epilogo fugato, based on a four note theme which is at once derived from the opening gesture of the symphony but which is also reminiscent of the four note figure so often used by Bach and based on his own name. The music rises, as Michael Kennedy has memorably put it "to boiling-point" (p268) before the opening dissonances return, only to be summarily dismissed with a final chord of open fifths.

No summary of this piece can hope to convey the impression it creates to someone who has never heard it. It is music which takes you by the throat, its own extraordinary energy drags you with it. But energy is of little use in music without logic, and its inner logic is equally irresistible: the return of the opening music at the end is stunning at every rehearing. No wonder the audience was in shock that first time.

We have seen that what the public perceived as a change of style was not so much a change as the logical outcome of many years of development, the seeds of the Fourth Symphony being present in earlier works. Contemporary critics seem to have seen the work as simply a change of style, dissonant yet already old-fashioned in not following the twelve note technique recently developed by Schoenberg. It was only later that the association with the rise of fascism, the threat of war, in short, a reflection of the times, began to be propagated. Even Boult, writing in the *Musical Times* in 1958 (Kennedy, p264) thought that the composer "foresaw the whole thing". But to what extent is this true?

We know from his exchanges with Holst that for Vaughan Williams the most important element of a musical work was not meaning as such, but beauty. He wrote in 1937 to R G Longman (Kennedy p247) as follows: "...I do think it beautiful...because we know that beauty can come from unbeautiful things..." "I wrote it not as a definite picture of anything external – e.g. the state of Europe – but simply because it occurred to me like this..." and "I don't think that sitting down and thinking about great things ever produces a great work of art (at least I hope not – because I never do so...) a thing just comes – or it doesn't..."

There is an innocence here which is very endearing, and I'm not in a position to deny the sincerity of Vaughan Williams' words, nor would I want to. But it isn't enough to explain away the opening gesture of this symphony by saying only that that was how it occurred to him. I don't suggest that he read the papers one day and decided to compose a symphony about the threat of war, realising there and then that a grinding, semitonal dissonance was the perfect musical metaphor for it. But neither do I believe in a twentieth-century composer who simply strings notes together in the pursuit of beauty. I believe that "the state of Europe" had a profound effect on this composer's mind and that this, combined with stylistic developments which were already taking place

within him, was why the Fourth Symphony occurred to him in the form it did.

The question of meaning is not necessarily a great deal easier to elucidate even when there are words involved. In his unaccompanied chanson *La bataille*, composed in 1515 to celebrate a French military victory, Clément Janequin vividly illustrated the words with cries and other noises to imitate the different sounds of battle. In his *War Requiem* of 1961 Britten's task was to find music to convey, in Wilfred Owen's words, "the pity of War". These are both vocal works composed to texts, and in both cases the meaning of the music and the meaning of the text are identical. What Janequin had to express was relatively simple, because the words are simple. Britten's subject, if not more complex, is more subtle, but accessible all the same, if only because the texts, those of Owen at least, are unequivocal in their message. But I think the meaning, or message, of *Sancta Civitas* is less clear. The text is certainly less direct, with many conflicting clues as to what it actually means, and the music seems stretched almost to bursting point trying to express ideas which are half-hidden and which perhaps cannot be expressed in words in any case. Did this music too, simply occur to him like this?

Let us consider a work without text, from 1938, and therefore roughly contemporaneous with the Fifth Symphony, the *Concerto for Double String Orchestra, Piano and Timpani* by Bohuslav Martinu. As the threat to peace intensified, and in particular the threat to the composer's Czech homeland from which he was exiled, he was moved to compose a work of high tragedy. I don't think it fanciful to hear in this music fear, apprehension, despair and resignation. In this purely orchestral work the composer has been able to express universal ideas in a less exact, but no less intense way, than words would have made possible.

It's a masterpiece, but I don't suppose its origins are to be found in a decision on the composer's part to write a piece about the imminent destruction of his homeland. But I do believe that it reflects the state of his mind and his preoccupations at the time he was composing it. Indeed, I don't see how this can be otherwise. I believe that a creative artist is bound to be affected by events around him. Vaughan Williams, with his profound concern for humanity, will have been affected by the gathering storm, and even if he resisted "sitting down and thinking about great things", the state of his mind, affected by the state of Europe, is, I believe, the key to the meaning of the extraordinary series of musical gestures which make up the Fourth Symphony.

The Sixth Symphony, like the Fourth, opens with a dramatic gesture played by the full orchestra, but we don't really know at first hearing what the nature of this gesture is. It opens with three notes rising in a fragment of a scale. How do they affect us? Do we find them uplifting? In fact, we don't have time to find anything, because straight away another music brushes them aside: busy, rushing semiquavers, displaced accents. From time to time the original gesture returns, but never for very long and never to any lasting effect. There isn't much to latch onto in the way of melody. The cellos have a go but it soon peters out. Then, at Figure 8, there is a more lyrical subject, but one which, in spite of its longer note values, stubbornly refuses to turn into a real tune, and which, in addition, returns obsessively and repeatedly to the same note, B. Soon the scurrying, unquiet music returns, the displaced accents again preventing the music settling to anything. The second subject returns on the brass, but the accompaniment undermines any lyrical quality it may have. Once again the fast music has the upper hand, and then, a remarkable moment, out of nowhere: the harp strums a couple of E major chords as accompaniment, at last, to the second subject properly allowed to flower into a long-breathed, even singable melody. It rises now, seemingly about to take wing, though the obsessive repeated return to the tonic, now an E, doesn't help much. Again it tries and seems almost to be succeeding when the unquiet music returns, and in the space of no more than three bars all that this melody has been aspiring to, all that it hoped to achieve (if we may so express it) is brutally destroyed, the movement ending with a return of the opening gesture, now seen for what it really is, disillusion, disappointment, destruction, passing through a harsh cadence to end on fortissimo unison Es, like a blow.

By this point we have had our moment of hope, and there won't be any more. The second movement begins without a break. A three-note rhythmic motif dominates this movement and will not let go. A central section offers some respite, but so cold and inhuman, so totally lacking in hope or warmth is it that we are almost glad when the three-note motif returns.

The scherzo is extraordinary: rapid counterpoint, opaque; a constant cacophony removing all will, all ability to reason or reflection. The sheer number of notes is awe-inspiring. A saxophone interrupts its progress at one point to deliver a sort of perverted night-club solo, but otherwise it is page after page of quavers and semiquavers, constantly on the go, yet going nowhere; verbose, garrulous, but saying nothing.

It just runs out of steam in the end, and so begins the slow finale. Here we encounter an almost empty soundscape, wandering melodic lines which again lead nowhere, often one or two voices in counterpoint, pointless, lacking in direction, lacking in melody, and all that in a constant pianissimo senza crescendo. It's a little like Neptune in *The Planets*, but there we may think we have a view of the distant planet such as human beings might have gazing at it. Here, human beings, human feelings, are absent, and when, at the close, two chords swing one to the other they could so easily continue to swing for a few hours (or an age or two) more. It would make little difference.

If Vaughan Williams had announced that this movement was meant to represent in music the aftermath of atomic warfare he would have been hailed as a genius who had succeeded one hundred per cent in his aim. But he didn't say that: in fact, he said nothing like it, gave no clue as to what, if anything, this most enigmatic of his works was meant to express. As we have seen, he claimed that the whole idea that his music meant anything was disagreeable to him, but once again we must see this as inadequate.

Take, for example, the third movement. It never stops talking, yet it says nothing: newspeak, doublespeak, nonespeak. Like a politician replying to a question, this music contrives at once to give the impression that the material of which it is made is being dealt with, engaged, whereas what is actually happening is that the material is being subjected to some kind of treatment, but one which leaves it essentially unchanged and the questioner so weary that the matter is no longer pursued.

Would we have heard the sea in Debussy's *La Mer* had he called the work simply *Three Symphonic Sketches*? I don't really think so, but neither do I think, in that particular case, that it would matter much. So does it matter that we don't know what, if anything, was in Vaughan Williams' mind as he composed the finale of his *Sixth Symphony*? Perhaps he feared that if this silent, unpeopled landscape were explained the essentially enigmatic nature of the music would be lost and a large part of its effect with it. I would tend to agree. But that does not necessarily mean that the music does not represent anything.

Searching for meaning in the three symphonies which span the Second World War, we may finally argue that the *Fourth Symphony* expresses the concerns felt by the composer, and those felt by any thinking person, at the increasing tension in the political situation in Europe from the early part of the 1930s onwards. And given the nature of the conflict, its end over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, universal hope turned to disquiet, the Cold War; given these things, the atmosphere of the *Sixth Symphony* should not surprise us either.

Nothing new there, then. And if we are to accept the composer's insistence that these were just pieces of music, perhaps allowing for my view that the state of his mind at this time, influenced as it must have been by the state of world events, was at the origin of the particular nature of these works, what are we to make of the *Fifth Symphony*, almost entirely composed during the war years, and first performed in 1943?

We know that the reaction of many was relief that the composer had apparently reverted to his original style. He seemed to be showing how things could be once, as Boult put it, "this madness" was over (UVW

p254). And then there was the feeling that the seventy-one year-old composer had written his swan song, that the symphony as a whole and its radiant close in particular amounted to a particularly eloquent valedictory gesture. How wrong they were!

The symphony opens quietly with low Cs and horn calls which do nothing to establish a sense of stability. Yet it is not a violent instability like opening of the *Fourth*, more a kind of stable instability, as the dissonance thus formed does not strive to resolve onto something else: we are happy to go along with it. In this I completely agree with Hugh Ottaway that this chord is emphatically not a dominant seventh in G major. I have always heard this movement to be more in D than anything else, and the composer's reported uncertainty between G and D slightly mystifies me. The music is modal in character, yet the tonal centre is either D with a flattened seventh or sometimes C with a raised fourth, both representing the kind of modal writing found throughout Vaughan Williams' music. The violins play a fragment of a tune, then the same slightly extended and which is used at moments of transition, sometimes crucially, throughout the work. There then follows a longer melody played by the violins in octaves, a harmonised reprise of the opening melodic fragment then a return to the longer melody, fleshed out and with canons, again played by the violins. When played at the marked dynamics under a conductor with great control this passage communicates enormous serenity. Frequently, however, conductors take this passage louder than the composer's intentions, which introduces a yearning quality into the music which is certainly very affecting, but is it what the composer wanted?

The whole of this passage is underscored by the note C either held in the bass or continually recurring there, maintaining a gentle tonal ambiguity irrespective of the keys through which pass the upper voices. This instability remains until the magical moment when, at another statement of the opening fragment, the mists clear as the music modulates to a straightforward E major, the same key, incidentally, to which Vaughan Williams was to turn some years later for a related reason for the big first movement melody of his *Sixth Symphony*.

This E major melody is also of crucial importance. As Kennedy points out (p281), with minor changes of rhythm and the suppression of a single passing note the first eleven notes of this passage are identical in melodic contour to the "Alleluia" in Vaughan Williams' hymn tune *Sine Nomine*, "For all the saints who from their labours rest". The music rises to a climax and then subsides onto unison Es. At this point the music takes on a more rapid feel: the strings play a long series of quavers as accompaniment to a falling two-note phrase in the woodwind. This is later extended to three notes and then to a melodic phrase, also falling, which is reminiscent of the opening of the movement. The tension increases as the string quavers turn to semiquavers and the music again rises to a climax before slowing and subsiding to the return of the opening music, complete with pianissimo horn calls. The first phrase of the modal melody is repeated several times as a way of increasing tension until the second subject returns, now in B flat major and marked to be played "Tutta forza" and which leads to the real climax of the movement, marked by descending scale passages repeated in sequence. The coda is distant and mysterious, based on the horn calls, the first phrase of the modal theme and its development, first heard in the *allegro* section but now much slower. The music dies away to nothing, or rather to two held notes, a D in the violas, ostensibly the keynote of the movement and of the symphony, but with the omnipresent, destabilising C in the cellos too.

The Scherzo is in rapid three time, but the rhythm only settles down at the seventh bar, and this uncertainty contributes to the feeling that the movement begins in the same world as the previous one had ended. The music is made up of many short themes and fragments of themes, some muted and ethereal, others, later in the movement, more robust. A frequent presence is a scurrying accompaniment of quavers played by the strings and requiring considerable virtuosity. An important, short, slower melodic phrase first introduced by the horns is repeated many times, harmonised in the trombones and the higher winds. After a while the metre changes to two in a bar and the character of the music becomes

much more assertive and even spiteful. But within a very short time this is being undermined, subtly at first, by a syncopated figure in the strings which eventually becomes transformed into a yearning cantabile passage in longer notes which Wilfred Mellers has called “a song of infinite longing” (p263). The opening music returns and the movement, still rapid, subsides nonetheless into silence.

Out of this silence grow the six, sublime chords which begin the slow movement, and over a repeat of five of them a solo cor anglais sings a sad little tune in the key of C whose fourth degree is sometimes sharpened, sometimes not, modal colours once again. There then follows the first of three passages of polyphony, first on the strings alone, whose diatonic harmony is pure Vaughan Williams. Rising and falling chords, organum-like, accompany woodwind arabesques, before the polyphonic passage returns, more richly orchestrated now and rising to an Alleluia at its climax. The organum returns, the woodwinds too, extended this time, and the music dances, briefly, for four bars (at Figure 5) where the organum appears at double speed. The music becomes more agitated, but calm is restored for a moment by the solo horn who borrows the cor anglais’ original melody. The agitated music returns, however, leading to alarums which are positively heraldic in splendour and menace. But the calm polyphony once more returns, this time rising to a passionate Alleluia climax which creates the atmosphere in which the movement will close. Two short violin solos, further, hushed Alleluias – which Whittall calls “dangerously saccharine” (Frogley p207) – and the music sinks into A major silence.

A major is the dominant of D major, and at last the finale opens unequivocally in this key. It is also the first time a movement has begun in a totally different mood from the end of the previous one. It is a passacaglia, a series of variations on a repeated theme, usually first heard in the bass. And so it is here, except that the passacaglia is not very strict and the theme is no more important than a counter melody presented in the seventh bar by the first violins and flutes. This music is full of smiles and the sort of goodwill to be found in Haydn as well as in Vaughan Williams. It’s very moving, too: the Alleluia which has preoccupied the composer in the previous movement is back here as soon as the fourteenth bar.

The smiles turn to something like laughter – this music really is very jolly – before the metre changes to one in a bar festivities based on the counter melody. Twice more the same series of events takes place until held chords, trumpets and horns first, then trombones, herald a change in things. What happens next is a long, carefully worked-out passage to prepare us for the end of the symphony. The upper instruments develop the counter melody, the bass instruments the theme – their roles are thus reversed – with much rhythmic development, counterpoint and rising tension. When the high point has clearly been reached a fragment of the passacaglia theme is repeated several times to present the return, fortissimo, of the horn calls from the very opening of the symphony. As the tension calms after this moment of high drama the short melodic fragment with which the symphony also began is used for the last time to usher in the epilogue. This is music of quite extraordinary calm. In searching to describe it we might use words like tranquility and benediction. From the beginning of the epilogue to the end of the work there is not a single accidental, which explains some things, but not the remarkable spirit the composer creates here. Based on the counter melody and its Alleluia it gradually moves out in two directions, the basses finding their way eventually to the certainty of the lowest D, the upper strings climbing ever higher, overlapping each other in their successful search for a stratospheric A. Young players who resent having to practise their scales might pause and wonder at the last thing given to the first clarinet to play. It’s nothing more than a rising, two-octave scale of D major, supported by the second clarinet in the first octave, but how the player must look forward to that rising scale, a metaphor, like the strings’ music, a great church spire reaching towards heaven.

So simple seems the overall message of the Fifth Symphony that to ask questions as to its meaning seems impertinent. Yet we must not forget that this most radiant music first appeared at the height of the war. The

composer used a fair bit of existing music for his symphony, drawing on several different sources. Most notable amongst them was his as yet unfinished opera based on Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Why he drew so extensively on this music is unclear. It may simply be that he didn’t want such valuable material to remain locked in a project which he feared may never be completed. The music is often used quite differently in the symphony from in the opera, and any interpretation we might try to put on the symphony with relation to the opera should certainly be treated with caution. In any case, the links between the two represent a whole area of study and are beyond the scope of this paper. Let us just note two things. Firstly, the composer said that only in the slow movement was there any dramatic connection between the two works, and it was on the manuscript of the slow movement that he had inscribed “Upon this place stood a cross, and a little below a sepulchre. Then he said: “He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death.”” Secondly, Bunyan’s work, in essentially simple language, tells of a soul who sets out on a quest and, meeting numerous allegorical characters on the way, eventually achieves his goal. The Fifth Symphony may also be viewed in these terms, even down to the simplicity of its language.

In a fascinating paper in the *Journal* (No. 17) Arnold Whittall challenged a number of assumptions about the work, and in particular the meaning – how else can one express the matter? – of the epilogue. He quite rightly says that the optimism and triumph of the finale is compromised by the thunderous return of the music from the symphony’ opening horn calls. This “crisis”, as he puts it, “adds up to the fact that the ending could go either way.” Vaughan Williams was later to do something similar at the end of the first movement of the Sixth Symphony as already cited, but in the other direction. The music there seems to be verging on optimism, albeit unrealistic, to be striving for something positive and hopeful to latch onto, when the door is slammed in its face, as it were, leaving only disillusion and despair.

Whittall writes “...I find the closing stages of the Fifth’s first movement to be the most bleak and disturbing music the composer ever wrote.” We’ve seen that this coda is made up of a single, slower restatement of a tune first heard in the development section, plus the opening horn calls and lower string held notes. It would seem that if we find the coda “bleak and disturbing” we should perhaps find the opening of the symphony likewise, since it made up of essentially the same music. It’s true, however, that the composer adds, in the coda, a single note, F, which changes everything. The music now hovers between the sort of ambiguous D tonal centre first heard at the outset, and the note F played in unison by the oboe and cor anglais, a particularly strange, hollow sound. Whether this adds up to “the most bleak and disturbing” music seems to depend on the how the conductor reads it. Most conductors find mystery here, though some encourage their players to a warmer tone and miss it completely. Its true, now, that if the conductor does not find this bleakness by soliciting a colder, emptier sound, I feel short changed, as if an element of the symphony is missing, but whether it is present in the notes, whether it is right, is another matter. What I think essential is that the Scherzo should begin in the same world as the first movement ends.

Whittall supports his argument for a new reading of the epilogue by saying that the fact that the music allows for different interpretations is part of its stature. This seems to me a strange way of looking at the problem. A response I wrote to Whittall’s article was published in the following issue of the *Journal* (No. 18). As I wrote there, “I find [the closing pages] amongst the most unequivocal in all music, as straightforward in their own way as the closing pages of Beethoven’s Fifth.” Are we to argue that the closing pages of Beethoven’s Fifth can “go either way” (Whittall) and that that is a mark of the music’s stature. Or is that stature being called into question by those who argue that the end of Beethoven’s Fifth is simply an expression of triumph with no ambiguity of any kind?

What are the feelings that the closing pages of Vaughan Williams’ Fifth provoke? Well, for this listener, relatively simple things: profound calm; contentment; peace of mind; optimism in spite of the past. I believe the public reacted in this sort of way after the first performance which took place, let’s not forget, in the midst of war. No wonder, given the nature of

the music, they saw it as a message of how things would be “once this madness is over”.

A few general points now. This is a complex score, though less so than many. The composer gives relatively little guidance to his interpreters as to how it should go. Compared to an Elgar symphony, for example, or even others by the same composer, there is very little in the way of expression marks. Whole passages go by where the initial mezzo forte marking is modified by not so much as a “hairpin” crescendo.

As for the speed of the music, though meticulous, the indications are also sparing. The Preludio – each movement is given a title in Italian – is marked Moderato, crotchet = 80, with the central Allegro at minim = 75. No accelerando is marked in this passage, though almost all conductors make one, just they are all well below the marked tempo at the beginning of the movement. Rather more of them do as the composer asks in the Scherzo, originally marked Presto, dotted minim = 120, with the word misterioso added later, presumably part of the minor revisions of 1951 (Kennedy/Eulenberg), but they are hard put to avoid it becoming uncomfortably breathless. Not a single conductor on the list below launches the Romanza at the marked Lento, crotchet = 66, and many are close to half that speed. At each of the three appearances of the main theme the composer asks that the music should move on a little. A number of other tempo changes are indicated for the more agitated passages, but the indications in the score require the tempo of the main material to remain constant. The Passacaglia begins Moderato, crotchet = 120. Once again, rare is the recorded performance which begins at this speed, though several are not far short. Later indications suggest that the composer views this as definitely three in a bar, but at this tempo the music easily becomes more like one in a bar, and benefits accordingly in my view. It is clear, and bearing in mind that metronome marks are usually given for guidance only, that Vaughan Williams wanted his Fifth to be played faster than conductors want to play it. Even the recordings at which he was or may have been present are slower than his markings, yet he left them in place. He clearly wished that the music should keep moving, and even if conductors today find his marked tempi uncongenial, they should certainly wonder why they are so rapid, and adapt their interpretation accordingly. In listening to these performances I have come to the conclusion that the most successful are those which seek a simplicity of utterance, which avoid bombast, inflation, exaggeration; where the expression is kept within bounds, and crucially, where things happen – crescendos, decrescendos, accelerandos – at exactly the moment the composer marks them in the score. The more sparing the indications the more important it is to respect those which are there, and this applies also to questions of tempo.

A passage of particular interest in this respect is the one in the first movement which is marked “tutta forza” and leads some bars later to the movement’s climax. Only the timpani are silent at this point, and a composer’s marking of “tutta forza” is a clear sign that he wants the music to be loud. There is no indication that the music is to slow down, however; indeed, a crotchet = crotchet marking might be taken to indicate the opposite, though this is probably part of a different, though related, technical matter. Yet almost every conductor holds back, sometimes very much, occasionally to almost grotesque effect, and frequently to take up the original tempo four bars later. I would love to hear this passage as the composer seems to have wanted, and the following bars to move on impulsively to the climax of the movement, avoiding even very much in the way of ritenuto at the end of the passage. This is how I would do it if I were invited to conduct this symphony – concert promoters and record producers please note. Boult, in his second recording, comes nearest to the spirit of what I mean, and Menuhin too, at first, though he pulls back the tempo enormously into the coda.

The orchestra required is relatively modest: two flutes, one of whom also plays the piccolo, oboe and cor anglais, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, two trombones and bass trombone, timpani and strings. The basic sound is of the mass of strings, often, as in the first movement, doubled in the higher octaves by the flutes. Most of the really important material is heard first on the strings, and of course their

radiance totally dominates the close of the work. The near-constant presence of the cor anglais gives a particular colour to the wind choir. The orchestral writing in the first movement Allegro owes something to Sibelius, to whom the symphony was dedicated, though the passage can sound equally like Tchaikovsky in some performances. Some of the characters that our Pilgrim meets on his journey can perhaps be heard particularly in the Scherzo, where the orchestration in the spikier, staccato passages, is rather hard and biting. In the Romanza, the parallel, organum-like, dark chords heard in the lower wind and strings reflect perhaps the sepulchre in the deleted Bunyan superscription. And then a curiosity. At the high point of this movement the timpani are added to the texture to underline the drama. It would appear that in the mid-1980s it was discovered that an error had crept into the score, and that this passage should be played one bar sooner than marked. There is no doubt that this amendment makes musical sense, especially from the harmonic point of view, and all the conductors on record from Vernon Handley onwards have been convinced by the argument. Yet the first two recordings were made during the composer’s lifetime, he was probably present at the first Boult recording, and he conducted the work several times himself. Is it really possible that he never noticed this error? And if he did, why has it taken so long to come to light? I’d be grateful to any member with anything to contribute on this curious story.

I’d like to end my discussion of this wonderful piece by dealing for a moment with the question of the Alleluias. We have seen that the second subject of the Preludio is an almost note for note transcription of the Alleluia of Sine Nomine. The symphony ends, indeed its final cadence is composed of, similar references. But I hear more the other Alleluia, both here and elsewhere in the composer’s output. The hymn tune Easter Alleluia (Lasst uns erfreuen) from the Cölner Gesangbuch of 1623 and sung to several hymns, most notably “All creatures of our God and King”, was included in the 1931 edition of Songs of Praise as number 157. Vaughan Williams characteristically brushed aside suggestions that he had quoted this tune, but I find the argument for it very persuasive. We should bear in mind that it was also used by Holst in 1920 as the basis of his setting of Psalm 148. The Alleluias are simple downward scales first from tonic to dominant, then from subdominant to tonic, which corresponds exactly with Vaughan Williams use of the Alleluia motif in the Fifth Symphony but also in Flos Campi, as well as the most touching use made of it in Hugh the Drover (Kennedy, p.183).

PART 2

Perhaps a record company will one day be able to issue the private recording said to exist of Vaughan Williams conducting his own Fifth Symphony, but until then we must be content with the nineteen commercial recordings we have been able to identify. I have been listening to eighteen of them, having been unable to locate a copy of Alexander Gibson’s reading. Andrew Achenbach, writing in the Gramophone, referred to this as “...lacklustre, uncomfortably literal, at times even crude...” but Robin Barber, in the Society Journal, said it was “...a well-played, glowing and satisfying account.” If any member has a copy available, I should very much like to hear it.

A striking feature of the list is that of the nineteen recorded versions, no less than eleven form part of complete or, in the case of Boult/Belart, near-complete cycles. It’s wonderful to have the choice, but it’s hardly surprising that with so much choice available classical discs sell so few copies nowadays that the classical record industry as a whole seems to be in such trouble.

Those issues which seem to be currently unavailable are marked with a star.

Barbirolli, 1944, Hallé (Avid etc.)
 Boult, 1953, London Philharmonic Orchestra (Belart)
 Barbirolli, 1962, Hallé (EMI)
 Boult, 1969, London Philharmonic Orchestra, (EMI)
 Previn, 1971, London Symphony Orchestra (RCA)
 Rozhdestvensky, 1980, BBC Symphony Orchestra

(BBC Radio Classics)

Gibson, 1982, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, (EMI)*
 Handley, 1986, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (EMI)
 Thomson, 1987, London Symphony Orchestra (Chandos)
 Menuhin, 1987, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, (Virgin Classics)*
 Previn, 1988, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (Telarc)
 Slatkin, 1990, Philharmonia, (RCA)
 Marriner, 1990, Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, (Collins)*
 Davis, 1992, BBC Symphony Orchestra, (Teldec)
 Haitink, 1994, London Philharmonic Orchestra (EMI)
 Previn, 1995, Symphony Orchestra of the Curtis Institute of Music, (EMI, USA only)
 Bakels, 1996, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, (Naxos)
 Norrington, 1996, London Philharmonic Orchestra, (Decca)
 Hickox, 1997, London Symphony Orchestra, (Chandos)

Vaughan Williams himself conducted the first public performance of his Fifth Symphony, but the first recording was made by **John Barbirolli**, in February 1944, barely eight months after he had more or less remade the Hallé Orchestra from scratch. It's a celebrated performance, and rightly so. The first movement is full of that particular kind of passion Barbirolli so frequently brought to the music he conducted. Listen to the passage before and after the great modulation to E major, for example. The first movement Allegro is very fast, the ensemble is not immaculate, but the passage rises to a climax that reminds us of the conductor's prowess in Sibelius. The "tutta forza" passage is very broad indeed, and there is a big ritenuto at the resolution before the final coda.

The Scherzo is faster and more urgent than any subsequent reading, with some quite brilliant playing, particularly incisive brass, but the portamento playing in the cantabile passage before the end robs the music of some of its purity.

The Romanza is very slow and solemn, with little change in tempo for the main themes, but the cello solo – Barbirolli was himself a cellist – is brought well out. The animato is very fast and brings a real contrast.

The finale opens with a real smile, quite fast, one in a bar. When the bass trombone leads us to the climax of the movement the conductor allows us more than most to hear Vaughan Williams' marvellous writing for this marvellous instrument. The coda is very beautiful, with Barbirolli squeezing the little crescendos to marvellous effect.

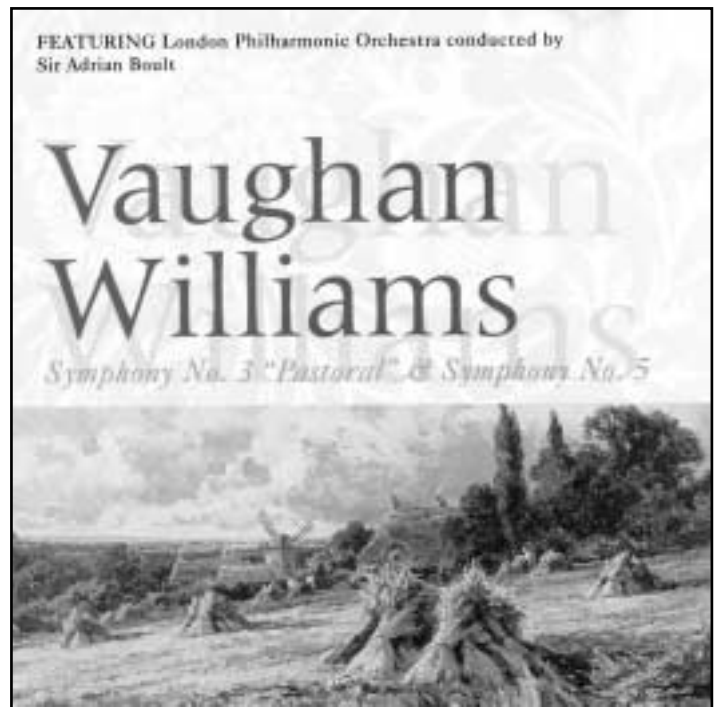
A magnificent performance, then, and an important historical document which should always be available. Whether one would listen to it for pleasure very often is another matter. The sound sometimes comes near to breaking up, and the quiet string lines in the first movement are particularly disappointing. It has been available in several different guises over the years, and I listened to it on the Avid label, but I can't think that others are likely to be superior. The grandeur of the performance is there, but experiencing it is not always comfortable.

Barbirolli re-recorded the symphony for EMI eighteen years later, still only the work's third recording and its first in stereo. He takes a little more time now over every movement except the first, but even there serenity has taken the place of passion and the music communicates less urgently than before. The Scherzo is now less frenetic, closer to the "misterioso" the composer asks for, and the brassy fanfares are less incisive. The Romanza remains pretty consistent with the original reading, but the Philharmonia wind soloists are particularly fine, encouraged by the conductor to a rhythmic freedom which is extremely persuasive. In the finale the tempo changes are now closer to what we are accustomed to in later readings, within the context, once again, of an overall slower pace.

It's true that compared to 1944 the newer reading seems to have taken on some weight. Only in the passage leading to the first movement coda, however, the passage marked "tutta forza", do I find the expressiveness excessive, in particular the very marked ritenuto – even more than in 1944 – with which Barbirolli leads into this coda. (Almost all conductors

do this, however.) It's also true that Barbirolli finds very little of the darker side of the music that later conductor's have done: the selfsame coda remains relatively warm in colour for example. And the end of the work is quite unequivocal: the string tone is wonderfully warm, with the solo cello – beautifully played – in the first paragraph at once prominent and perfectly integrated into the texture. The peculiar way that the final chords of the third and fourth movements resolve not quite together is pure Barbirolli, as are the groans he treats us to from time to time.

Like Barbirolli, **Adrian Boult** also recorded the Fifth Symphony twice, the first time in 1953. This, too, is one of the classics of the gramophone. Compared to Barbirolli the reading is straight, which does not mean straight-laced. Boult finds no less passion in the opening paragraphs of the Preludio, yet the whole thing is more restrained, the other extreme of Vaughan Williams performance. There is less lingering on individual details. Whether this is to be preferred is a matter of taste: there is more than enough room on the shelves for both approaches. What is certain, however, is that this movement demonstrates the conductor's wonderful mastery of pace and pulse. The music moves on, almost imperceptibly at times, but always with a clear purpose in view. The climax of the first movement Allegro section is particularly brilliant, and in the "tutta forza" passage Boult, surprisingly perhaps, moves the music on more impetuously than any other conductor, to quite sensational effect.



The same mastery of expression is found throughout the symphony. No conductor takes less time than Boult over the Romanza, but it remains of a piece with his view of the work. Only at the opening of the finale do I find his view of the music a bit literal, but it's difficult to say why, only that Barbirolli smiles whereas Boult sounds a bit sober. The brief clarinet phrase which launches the transition is superbly played, as is the flute music which follows, and the epilogue is a model of restraint and of devotion to the music and its composer.

By 1969 **Boult** had started to favour broader tempi, notably in the first two movements. In this respect there is a parallel between his two recorded versions and Barbirolli's. However, in Boult's case there does seem to be a lowering of the emotional temperature as well, which makes this version ultimately less satisfying compared to others. The first movement lacks much of the passion he found in his earlier version. There is less variety of pace, and the Allegro takes a dangerously long time to get going. At the climax of the movement, "tutta forza", he now broadens the tempo rather than pressing on as he did in 1953: a pity. There is a new bleakness in the coda. At the new, slower tempo the Scherzo sounds jaunty, lacking both Barbirolli's incisiveness and his own earlier "misterioso" qualities, and when the music passes to dupe time it

really does begin to feel too slow, and the bassoon and oboe at the end bring a further slight slackening. The Romanza is very beautiful indeed, but the beginning of the finale is again strangely literal, and the general tendency to broaden at climaxes continues as the first section comes to its close. The return of the first movement music sounds rather ponderous, and even the sublime epilogue is less affecting than usual, though this may be the result of the feeling of disappointment earlier. What is certain is that the “molto rit” in the final bars is less well managed than before.

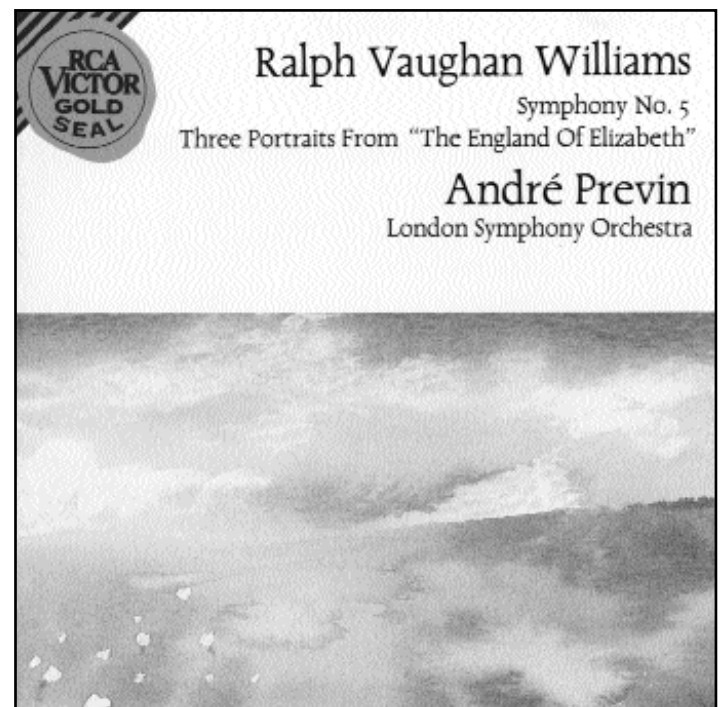
I'm very conscious of the enormous presumption which allows me to make comments like these about one of the finest of Vaughan Williams conductors. Please, these are my personal reactions. No member should turn down the opportunity to hear what were among Adrian Boult's last thoughts about the symphony.

André Previn recorded the first of his three versions of the Fifth Symphony with the London Symphony Orchestra in 1971. In common with many of my generation, it was from this recording that I got to know the Fifth, which was also one of the works which awoke my interest in the composer. It has rarely been out of the catalogue since its release, and deservedly so: it's a formidable achievement. At around forty minutes it's one of the longest recorded Fiftths. The Preludio is well under the composer's marked speed but Previn establishes such a remarkable serenity that we are happy to go along with him. The Allegro is also very measured, the climax powerful rather than exciting and thus a world away from Barbirolli's first recording. The conductor encourages a singing tone from the violins in the coda, and the final bars are mysterious rather than bleak. The Scherzo is a whole minute longer than Barbirolli, and though tempo is not everything, this is far from presto. Again, though, we are convinced, and thanks to superb playing from the orchestra, the accompanying string quavers are indeed misterioso. We can really hear them at this tempo, and they have a significance which few other conductors achieve. The Romanza is likewise very slow, but extremely expressive and intense, with wonderful woodwind soloists. The opening of the finale brings relatively little smile at this tempo, rather literal in expression, but the solo bassoon stands out nicely in the (slightly) jazzy variation. The epilogue is beautifully played and very affecting, if less cool than is now the fashion. Rallentandos tend to arrive sooner than the composer asks, even at the very end of the symphony, to go on longer and be more extreme. The orchestral sound is rather glamorous, and I find that this element lingers in the mind almost as much as anything. It's a remarkable performance, played an orchestra at the height of its powers, but in the light of more recent performances I believe there is more to the work than Previn finds here.

Seventeen years later **Previn** retains a very measured view of the symphony, but his tendency to linger and hold back is now less marked, and the reading as a whole is one of greater simplicity. He follows more closely the relatively few expression marks in the score, and on the rare occasions where he employs some license, such as the bar before figure eight in the finale, there is both logic and spontaneity about it. All in all the reading is refreshingly straightforward and more in line with the spirit of the score. If the muted string quavers in the Scherzo lack the extraordinary accuracy and unanimity of the LSO, the playing of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra is nonetheless of outstanding quality, with wonderfully reedy woodwinds in the Romanza. Two years after Handley, the news about the “mistake” in the timpani part seems not to have arrived in the Previn household. The epilogue is profoundly moving, again by virtue of simplicity of utterance and respect of the composer's indications. And – dare I say it? – the slight whiff of Hollywood has been entirely banished.

Compared to his years as director of the LSO, Previn's period at the RPO was less successful and his remakes of his own standard repertoire – Shostakovich and Walton as well as Vaughan Williams – were less favourably received. But I find him more in tune with the composer in 1988 than in 1971, and that, plus a recording of quite extraordinary richness and analytical quality, makes this one of my preferred versions of the Fifth Symphony.

Previn recorded the Fifth Symphony a third time some seven years later with the Orchestra of the Curtis Institute of Music at Philadelphia. He has worked with this student orchestra on a number of occasions, and has only praise for them. Their playing is quite outstanding, but next to professional groups the strings lack power – listen to the first movement Allegro – and inevitably the woodwind soloists, in spite of a superlative first clarinet, have neither the poise nor the character of the old lags. Previn's tempi have stayed very consistent, but where slow speeds in the past brought with them a remarkable concentration leading to serenity, all too often here the result is somnolent. I find this in particular in the very opening paragraphs of the work. Unsurprisingly, the student group is less successful in the rapid accompanying quavers in the first movement Allegro and in the Scherzo. More surprising is how often the conductor allows tension to sag dangerously. There are moments, too, where he seems not to have inspired his players sufficiently, the climax of the finale, for example, and the lead-in to the epilogue which follows it, with results which seem sometimes perfunctory.



By 1995 Previn seems to have been convinced by the arguments of those who say that the timpani are wrongly placed in the Romanza.

Gennadi Rozhdestvensky is an underrated conductor during whose period at the head of the BBC Symphony Orchestra many enterprising concerts of English music were given. He recorded the Fifth Symphony at the Royal Festival Hall in London in October 1980 at a concert to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the BBCSO. It is the only live performance on the list, and there are a few coughs from the audience and applause at the end. The recording is serviceable, though it is a pity that the sound doesn't open out as much as the playing at the climaxes.

It is an excellent performance. Rozhdestvensky's tempi, though below the composer's markings in almost every case, seem consistently right, and he keeps the music moving at all times, even in slower passages. He accelerates during the first movement Allegro, in fact his reading is marked by many such features at moments where the passion of the music seems to demand it. They are all unmarked, of course, but they are very convincing, even endearing, and the music comes alive in a satisfying way.

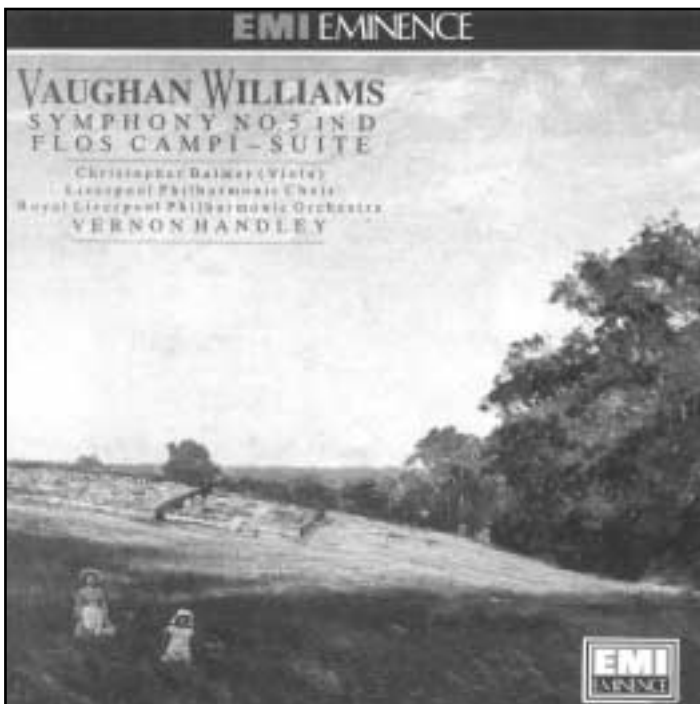
The Scherzo is accented and bracing, though rather too loud, reflecting the live conditions. The Romanza is very beautiful, with good control of tempo, and a rallentando at the end of the third statement of the main theme, before the solo violin passage, which brings to the music a wistful quality I had not heard there before. The finale opens well, and the faster sections are really triumphant in feeling. The build-up to and return of the

opening music is particularly well done, very dramatic, and the epilogue is autumnal, glowing, very slow yet slowing even more in the final bars: in short, extremely beautiful and moving.



There's a very good *Sancta Civitas* on the disc too. Don't hesitate if you see it in a second-hand shop.

The opening of **Vernon Handley's** celebrated version has an ardent, yearning quality about it which is very attractive, but the price to pay is playing which is often rather too loud. The first violins at the first statement of the main theme of the first movement are not playing mezzo forte, for example, and there are even crescendos within it. That said, control of dynamics is very good: things happen when they should and Handley always leaves power in reserve for climaxes. He holds back only a little at "tutta forza" and the music is all the more effective for that, but he does pull back significantly at the climax a few bars later. The upper and lower strings are not perfectly together in the Allegro.



The Scherzo is very well done, extremely biting where necessary, and beautifully affectionate in the cantabile passage.

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra cor anglais player is of the highest calibre at the opening of the Romanza, and if the movement rises to a less passionate climax than in some rival versions, the final pages, very simply expressed, very hushed, are magnificent.

The Passacaglia is genial and triumphant in its turn. I find the epilogue a little disappointing: slightly cool at the end with a hint of thinness in the high string tone that makes these final pages less affecting than in other versions. I note that not every one agrees with me here.

I only once had the pleasure of hearing the late **Bryden Thomson** in concert, conducting Elgar's First Symphony. It was the finest performance I have ever heard, and I consider his reading of the Fifth to be on a similar level. If there is a criticism to make, it is that here too there is a lack of piano and pianissimo playing in the first movement: Thomson is at pains to make the violins sing in the earlier stages of the movement, and he certainly stands accused, and found guilty, of disregarding the composer's markings. But what wonderfully seamless playing it is! And what power he unleashes in the first movement allegro! And what mystery he finds in the first movement coda!

But that's enough exclamation marks! Let's listen instead, how, though faster than many rivals, he contrives to open the Scherzo in the same world as the end of the first movement. The central section is very nervy, the trombones are superb. The brass is very strong throughout, with dramatic results, even in the faster sections of the Romanza. At the beginning of this movement the string chords are particularly carefully balanced: we hear very clearly the low thirds in the cellos. The more unruly sections of the finale again favour the brass; indeed, this is probably the weightiest recorded Fifth. Yet it is also one of the most human: at every turn this self effacing conductor puts himself at the service of the music with the result that the warmth and humanity with which it is filled is constantly brought forward. It is one of my very favourite Fifths.

Yehudi Menuhin's is a very personal view, quite different in many details from most others. The first movement opens at what seems to me a near ideal tempo, though still slower than the composer's marking, and at a proper mezzo forte which brings with it a simplicity of expression which is very convincing. He refuses to linger, moving forward even slightly more in places, yet the beginning of the Allegro feels very measured indeed. He is clearly concerned to maintain the tempo here as the sound of his tapping foot is clearly audible. The tempo for the recapitulation is noticeably slower than before, and uniquely he plays the "tutta forza" bars exactly in time. I find this hugely effective and satisfying. What a pity then, for this listener at least, to spoil it all by pulling back so much twelve bars later to deliver a climax to the movement which is terribly inflated. The music then subsides again into the slowest coda on record, becoming even slower at it reaches its goal.

If I have concentrated on tempo, something which, in itself, is not always of crucial importance (compare Klemperer and Toscanini in Beethoven for example) it's because some of these decisions seem just right and spontaneous, whereas others, such as the slower tempo for the recapitulation and the coda, seem studied, pasted on, and therefore less convincing.

The other movements are less idiosyncratic, but the cor anglais player seems ill at ease at the very beginning of first solo in the Romanza – his two quavers are rushed – and throughout this movement Menuhin seems frightened to relax his grip in case the music seems to drag. When the first movement music returns in the finale it is at the second, slower speed, and the epilogue, also slow, seems in some curious way to be delivered one note at a time, the seamless legato achieved elsewhere seeming to escape these players on this occasion.

All in all, it's a challenging interpretation, very well played and recorded, and everyone ought to hear it if they can.

Leonard Slatkin has given some remarkable Vaughan Williams performances over the years but his Fifth is a disappointment. Ironically, in many passages he is the conductor who most approaches Vaughan Williams' marked tempos, but either a lack of flexibility, as in the



Scherzo, or an apparent determination to let the music speak for itself, mean that much of what we have come to hear in the work goes for nothing. He finds no rapture in the Preludio, and even the Allegro rises to a climax with lots of bluster but little real power. The coda is simply perfunctory. Much the same can be said about the finale, where the playing seems sometimes forced, occasionally even crude, and with quite the most detached epilogue I've ever heard. Slatkin takes a more interventionist approach in the Romanza, his reading, with one exception, being the slowest on record. Unfortunately, this is how it feels: ponderous, heavy and grim, even funereal. During the second of the two woodwind passages the music seems on the point of grinding to a halt altogether. Slatkin is a fine conductor, and this was clearly what he wanted. All the same, by the side of his other Vaughan Williams discs, a superb *Pastoral Symphony* for example, this seems clinical and stylistically perverse.



Neville Marriner, in his 1990 recording for the now defunct Collins label, takes a few liberties with the score, modifying marked phrasing here and there, and even in one case, at the end of the Scherzo, a few notes. He makes one very curious tempo decision too, in the finale, where he takes the whole of the passage leading into the reprise of the first movement music at a funereal pace which makes the already difficult task of integrating the return of the first movement music all the more so. I don't believe he succeeds here. Elsewhere, especially in matters of tempo he is close to the composer's markings. Thus the Scherzo is taken at a near identical tempo to Slatkin, yet is more convincing thanks to greater flexibility of pulse and an altogether less aggressive attitude. The first movement conveys a calm inevitability which is very affecting, though which is slightly undermined by a frequent reluctance to count the two beats before the horn calls. The Romanza is particularly well done, with a good control of tempo. As for the contentious timpani passage, well, the player begins at the revised moment, but for some inexplicable reason becomes inaudible thereafter.

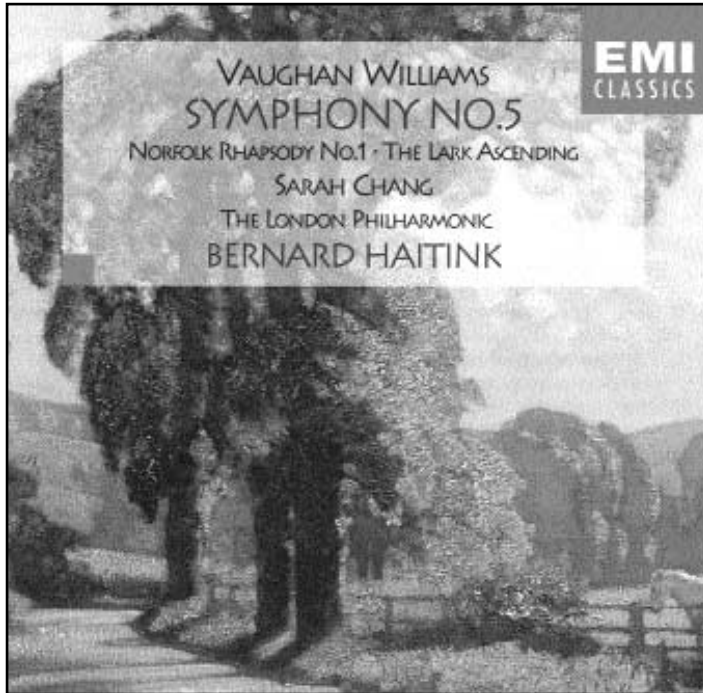
Marriner's reading was not particularly well received in the musical press, but I found it communicative and well prepared, with a particularly moving epilogue, and I'll certainly be returning to it in the future.

I'm a great admirer of **Andrew Davis**, especially in English and twentieth century music, so I was incredulous, not to have enjoyed his Fifth more than I did. The Passacaglia comes off best, very jolly and with an epilogue which almost turns into a sad procession, so slow, stately and dignified is its progress. The Preludio is very calm and pure at the outset, perhaps even a little understated, but it doesn't stay like that for long: weak beats are heavy, strong beats delayed, impeding the forward progress of the music just enough to transform it into something tired and sleepy. The Allegro section comes to life, with a real accelerando, but in the "tutta forza" passage and the movement's climax the tenutos and rallentandos are so extreme as to become, to my taste, intolerably grandiose. The Scherzo fares better, and in the song at the end Davis is more affectionate, more flexible and expressive than any other conductor. This too is a matter of taste, so having hoped for more freedom from all those who let this passage by with scarcely more than a nod, I was disappointed to find Davis' approach went too far. As for the Romanza, it is too slow, too dirge-like, with playing that does not compensate for it. There is little or no feeling of forward movement when the composer asks for it, so that, almost incredibly, as in Slatkin's case, this Romanza outstays its welcome.



In my opinion, **Bernard Haitink** is one of the truly great conductors and I'm delighted that he admires Vaughan Williams' music enough to want to perform and record so much of it. That said, his version of the Fifth is

not for those who know already how they want the piece to sound, because he challenges most preconceptions. His is a very dark reading, even grave. One way in which he achieves this is through tempo: at over forty-three minutes this is the slowest Fifth on record. Only Previn takes more time than Haitink in the first movement, but his view is serene rather than grave. Haitink displays even more freedom of tempo, even more tendency to *ritenuto* and *rallentando*, leading us across an important and imposing landscape at a pace which is emphatically not, may it be said, *moderato*. His *Allegro* is not fast either, but contrasts well with the preceding section all the same. There is little or no acceleration as he makes his way to a quite stunningly powerful central climax, followed by a “*tutta forza*” freer in tempo than usual and a climax held back in an extreme way which I would usually resist but which, perhaps perversely, I find totally convincing here, in the context of Haitink’s overall view of the movement.



Gravity there is in plenty in the Scherzo too, the little, frequently repeated melody in duple time especially so. At other times the music sounds like a nocturnal folk-dance. The “song of infinite longing” is exquisitely wistful.

The Romanza follows after a long pause – excellent production values are to be found on this disc, and an exceptionally beautiful recorded sound – and is again extremely slow, monumental in its effect, reflecting more than most, perhaps, Bunyan’s “sepulchre”. Haitink is scrupulous in respecting the composer’s markings, except in matters of tempo, of course: listen, at the climax of the movement, how skilfully he reserves the real fortissimo for exactly the right moment, one bar before figure 10. The effect is as sensational as Vaughan Williams surely intended.

The Passacaglia opens in sunshine and progresses magnificently through its various landscapes before arriving at the return of the opening music with a stupendous inevitability. The epilogue is again grave, reflective, yet confident and full of hope. Never has the final rising clarinet scale been so audible nor so beautiful: we even hear the player’s beautifully controlled final diminuendo.

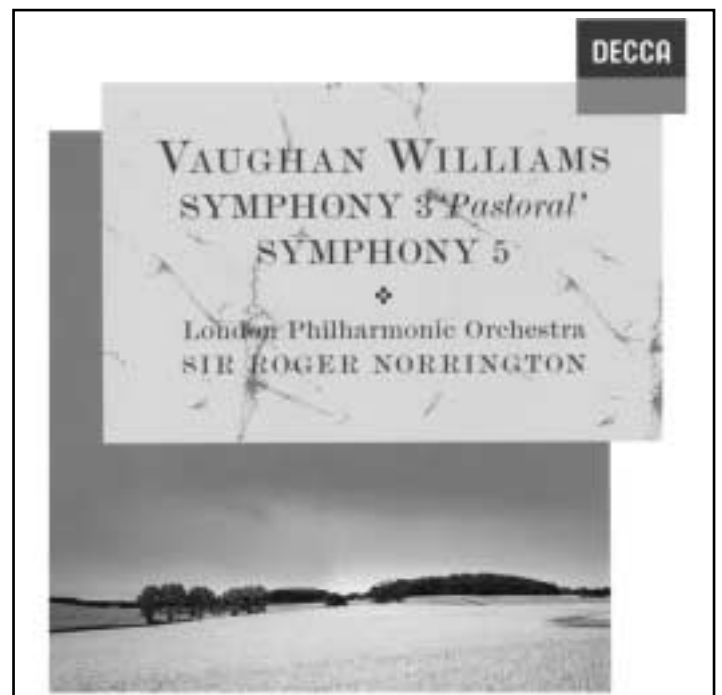
Haitink makes of Vaughan Williams’ Fifth Symphony a bigger piece than we are used to, with even a certain Teutonic grandeur which makes one think of Bruckner. It is an interpretation which will probably divide, has already divided, people. I wouldn’t want to hear the Fifth like this every time, but in a concert I think one would not want to applaud at the end, but to sit on in silence. It remains only to say that the orchestra seems totally convinced by and committed to their ex-chief conductor’s view of the piece. Their playing is a miracle of control and concentration. A great performance.

Kees Bakels, like Haitink, is Dutch, but his version for Naxos is as far removed from the previous one as could be imagined. Whilst just as scrupulous in his respect for the composer’s markings, perhaps even more so, he is much closer to the marked tempi and the result is a Fifth which is not only much shorter but also less weighty than his compatriot’s.

The *Preludio* is impeccably paced and executed, with a kind of rapture at the E major passage rarely achieved by a conductor who also respects the piano dynamic marking. My only quibble is the huge slowing up for the “*tutta forza*” passage: Haitink is the only conductor who convinces me of the merits of this. For the rest, the Scherzo is perhaps rather less individual, but the Romanza is very successful. The manner is very simple, and though the great climax is less overwhelming than elsewhere, the final bars rather dry-eyed, the movement as a whole is beautifully played and paced and all the more moving for it. Neither conductor nor orchestra seem as engaged by the first part of the finale as they are by the rest, and I even found myself turning up the volume here in the search for more body to the sound. The recording favours the wind and brass at the expense of the strings, but only at the climax of the first movement *Allegro* did I feel a slight lack of weight in the string playing itself. On the other hand the timpani are surely too prominent throughout. The epilogue is very well paced and played, however, the mood beautifully caught and sustained.

If Bakels’ manner is essentially simple and straightforward, it is rarely plain, and if this were the only Fifth in your collection it would not disgrace itself there.

Roger Norrington’s performance demonstrates very well what happens when a fine conductor and an orchestra of world class set out to present as closely as possible the wishes of a composer.



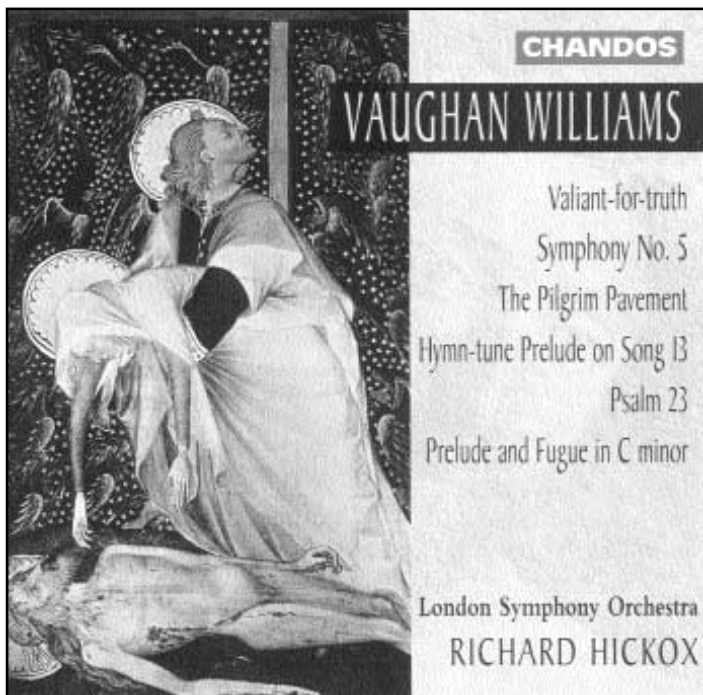
Along with Slatkin, Norrington comes perhaps closest of all conductors to Vaughan Williams’ tempo markings, and the result is certainly a Fifth which doesn’t linger. Add to this some rather individual ideas about tempo at certain points and the result may surprise some listeners.

Norrington launches the symphony by asking his violinists to play their two opening phrases with a very dead tone, and I would say that of all these conductors he is the one who most subscribes to the ideas of bleakness and ambiguity exposed by Arnold Whittall and discussed earlier. But the E major section is ravishing, and the movement as a whole is extremely successful. A pity, I think, that he seems impatient with the bassoons when they take up the horn call in the bars before the development section.

The Scherzo is very fast, but the carefully controlled orchestral balance allied with playing of the utmost virtuosity ensure that the scurrying string quavers always mean something. The louder passages are very powerful, and I find Norrington's way with the string song just before the end of the movement very moving, though some will find it an intrusion. The final bars are a little scrappy and might well have been retaken.

I imagine some will find certain of Norrington's incidental tempi in the Romanza surprising too – the dancing bars really do dance here – but I find it all wonderfully convincing, and once again, where something is marked in the score the performers respect it. Norrington is less concerned about sheer beauty of sound than others have been, and in his striving for clarity we have the impression sometimes of Vaughan Williams' orchestration stripped to the bone, particularly in the more triumphant passages of the finale. Norrington keeps the epilogue moving too – at this tempo it could easily be conducted in two beats in a bar – but the concentration and dedication of the players, the iron grip, the control of phrasing and dynamics, all this communicates a profound acceptance and contentment.

Andrew Achenbach, writing in the Gramophone (and to whose sharp ears I owe the discovery of Neville Marriner's adjustment at the end of the scherzo – have you picked this up yet?) makes reference to "Norrington's plentiful textual "tweakings"". Now I don't know what he means by this – who could? But if he means, here too, wilful changes in the notes which Vaughan Williams wrote, I solemnly swear, here and now, that I can't hear any. His summary of this performance is that "...poor old VW doesn't get much of a look in, I'm afraid." This is tosh, of course, and might simply be dismissed as such if it were not so dangerous. If, after reading this kind of lazy journalism, a single person were put off investigating this deeply moving and often revelatory performance, well, that would be a pity, wouldn't it?



The most recent recording, from **Richard Hickox**, is a reading which for me stubbornly refuses to add up to more than the sum of its parts. It is often extremely beautiful, but not totally convincing as an overall interpretation. Hickox is surprisingly free from the point of view of pulse, moving forward here, holding back there, and I think he goes so far in this that the basic pulse of the first movement is fatally undermined. He is also subject to many of those ritenutos at the ends of sections which anyone who has had the courage to read this far will know I find easily resistible. The reading of the Romanza is consistent with this approach: the second time the main theme is presented is faster than the first. It's a very concentrated reading however and ends with a superbly long and controlled diminuendo. The Scherzo and Passacaglia both go very well,

with the Scherzo's cantabile passage presented in as beautiful a manner as any. But although the orchestra plays superbly well, I do sense a lack of fire in this version for which it is difficult to give examples and which is therefore difficult to justify. The return of the opening music in the finale seems to be one such place, though others may not find it so. And I don't feel the sense of a journey so much as I do in the finest versions, a journey in which the last notes of the epilogue are the only possible destination.

I presented this survey at the outset as a simple report of my reactions to the eighteen recorded performances of Vaughan Williams Symphony No. 5 I have been listening to over the last few weeks. It's not for me to make recommendations, and in any case I know already that people whose opinions I respect, not to mention some I don't, have reacted very differently to certain of these discs. All the same, my report would be incomplete without revealing my favourites.

Barbirolli (1944) and Boult (1953) should, for historic reasons, be in every Vaughan Williams collection. They are both searing performances too, but the rotten sound for Barbirolli is discouraging. The only versions I wouldn't choose to give as presents are Slatkin, Davis and Previn at Philadelphia, but I believe members would be happy with any one of the other readings. Of these, my personal favourites are Boult (1953); Barbirolli (1962), for Barbirolli; Rozhdestvensky, for an endearing directness and simplicity; Thomson, for his warmth, humanity and the beautiful sound he encourages from his magnificent orchestra; Previn (1988), for the simplicity of utterance he didn't find elsewhere; Haitink; and Norrington, for his steadfast and bright eyed optimism, a direct line, so it seems to me, from the composer. And the greatest of these, though probably not the safest, single library choice, is Haitink.

*William Hedley,
France.
william.hedley@libertysurf.fr*

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¹ Letter to R G Longman, December 1937, quoted in Kennedy, p247

² Mellers, p270

³ Booklet note accompanying Andrew Davis' recording of the Sixth Symphony (Teldec)

Ursula Vaughan Williams

in discussion with Stephen Connock

on the Second World War

- SLC** Where were you when war broke out?
- UVW** I was living with my husband, Michael. We had a flat in London. Ralph was in Dorking and I went down there quite often. We weren't surprised when war was declared. Ralph had hated Hitler from the beginning – he heard so many terrible stories from Jewish refugees. We were frightened, but also strangely excited. It was an extraordinary time.
- SLC** You mentioned refugees. Ralph was very active in helping them wasn't he?
- UVW** Yes, he would take them into his home, mainly Jewish refugees. He found a tenor woman on one occasion, and was delighted! They were mostly Jewish musicians, and Ralph and Morris (R.O.Morris) would go on long walks with them, talking music all the time. He became involved with the Dorking Refugee Committee which was a good thing to do. He also became Chairman of a Home Office Committee, I think in 1940, to help refugee musicians
- SLC** The Government had issued a handbook in 1939 on part time jobs people could do to help the war effort. (See page 2) What did Ralph do?
- UVW** He was incredibly active! He did fire watching. He would crawl about all night for 2-3 nights a week, getting terribly dirty. Genia (Genia Hornstein) and I would help. We all wore tin hats. It could be dangerous as there was such a blackout in the early days. Ralph loved gardening and he decided to offer his garden to Dorking District Council. He'd put all his vegetables into bags for people to collect. He collected salvage material, too. He gave many lectures at The Ship Hotel in Dorking. He was trying to be normal, to show that everyday life could go on. It gave a sense of normality in difficult times. It was the same with music.
- SLC** What was the worst experience for Ralph in the war?
- UVW** Honorine's death, without doubt. She was R.O.Morris' cousin and she had been close to Ralph and Adeline for years. Adeline loved her, as did Ralph. She had only been married for six months and gone to live in West London. Her house took a direct hit. A wall collapsed on her, killing her outright. It was absolutely frightful. She had been such fun, we were all devastated. Her husband was not in the house at the time, so he was alright. Poor man. Ralph and Adeline took it very badly. Dorothy Longman's death was another sad blow for Ralph. She had been a very close friend. Her death inspired Ralph to write *Valiant for Truth* in 1942.
- SLC** You had your own personal losses in the war. Can you tell us a little about them?
- UVW** My first husband, Michael, who was in the Army, had died of a heart attack in 1942. I received a telegram of unspeakable brevity. Shortly after Michael's death, I went with Ralph to hear the first performance of *Valiant for Truth* at St Michael's Church in Cornhill. The words were so right for Michael at that moment. Then, on April 4, 1944, my father telephoned to say that my brother, John, had been killed in Burma. John had been wounded in the face. When his unit came under attack he came out of hospital where he was being treated for this wound to join

his fellow gunners. He was killed clearing a trench just beyond a gun pit. The news of John's death shattered my parents. John was just 29 when he died.

- SLC** In the midst of such sadness, was Ralph inspired by Churchill?
- UVW** He thought Churchill was marvellous! He said to me: 'he's going to save us'. Later he met him but all he said to Ralph was 'Very good, Sir'. That was it. Quite simple really.
- SLC** In all this music was the most important subject for Ralph. Did this keep his spirits up?
- UVW** O Yes! Concerts at the National Gallery were very uplifting. He also talked so much about his *Fifth Symphony*, and was very excited by its first performance in 1943. I had worked with Ralph on the Shelley songs (*The Six Choral Songs – In time of War* – see page 17) and he enjoyed setting these. His film music was also important to him. He felt he could contribute to the war effort through his music. This is what he believed in. Music was our lifeline.

Stephen Connock met Ursula Vaughan Williams on 20 December 2000



John Lock, Ursula's brother, in the early years of the war

Ursula's poem written for her
brother John in 1944

Do not say you cannot see
spring's white and green, being blind with tears,
nor hear the yaffle in the wood
because your grief has sealed your ears.
Look now for those who will not see
budding branch and flowering tree;
listen because they cannot hear
the early birdsong of the year

L.A. - E.V.



ONE PENN

The Daily Telegraph

and Morning Post

LONDON, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1939

BROADCASTING—Page Three

LIBERTY'S FOR GIFTS

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NAZIS AGAIN BOMB & GUN TRAWLERS

SCAPING CREW FIRED AT FOR 15 MINUTES

THREE MEN KILLED WHILE ASLEEP

R.A.F. SAVES FISHING VESSEL FROM TWO PLANES

Further instances of Germany's latest phases of frightfulness, the bombing and machine-gunning of defenceless vessels, mostly fishing craft, were reported yesterday.

Ten ships are known to have been attacked in some cases with loss of life. After one vessel was sunk by a bomb, the Nazi plane machine-gunned the crew, who were trying to launch a boat, for an hour.

Less than 40 hours after being bombed and machine-gunned on Sunday, the Liverpool steamer *Grimsby* was sunk by a mine or torpedo in the North Sea on Monday night.

Eighteen survivors have been landed at a port. They said that they had every reason to believe that the remaining 50 members of the crew, including the *Grimsby* trawler *Etrecia* was towed to a battered condition. Three of her crew were killed.

SUPREME WAR COUNCIL MEETS

TIGHTER BLOCKADE DECISION

POLICY ON RUSSIA DISCUSSED

The Supreme War Council of the Allies met in Paris at 9.30 a.m. yesterday and sat throughout the morning. The meeting was held in the presence of Mr. Braden, British Minister in Paris, Mr. G. B. Roberts, British Ambassador in Paris, Mr. C. G. Duffell, British Ambassador in Moscow, Mr. G. B. Roberts, British Ambassador in Moscow, Mr. G. B. Roberts, British Ambassador in Moscow.

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THE BLAZING GERMAN POCKET BATTLESHIP.



In flames from bow to stern, the Admiral Graf Spee presented a wonderful spectacle as she was scuttled off Monte Video.

NAZI ECONOMIC SYSTEM BREAKING DOWN

SMALL FIRMS RUINED BY LACK OF RAW MATERIALS

FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

COPENHAGEN, Tuesday. The high degree of centralization worked out jointly by the Nazi economic war machine by Friedrich Goetz, Minister of Economic Affairs, and Dr. Goetz, Minister of Economic Affairs, has caused the breaking down of the Nazi economic system in the last few days. According to the official statistics, the raw materials available in Germany were to be pooled in the hands of the Government in order to be distributed to the various industries in accordance with the needs of the war.

As revealed by the *Wirtschaftswoche*, the Admiral Graf Spee has not only been scuttled but is partially crippled, light cruizers and destroyers, which the food and other supplies are being sent to the *Wirtschaftswoche*, which explained that the *Wirtschaftswoche* is a weekly magazine published in Berlin.

Reports from Berlin indicate that Hitler might follow the precedent about the scuttling of the *Wirtschaftswoche*, which explained that the *Wirtschaftswoche* is a weekly magazine published in Berlin.

BATTLESHIPS MANY DISGUISED

MADRID, Dec. 19.—(AP)—

FINNISH PORT IN FLAMES

RUINED IN THREE HOURS

CRUICER DROPPED

DESTRUCTION

HELSINKI, Tuesday. Four vessels in the port of Helsinki were destroyed by a heavy bombing raid on Tuesday. The *Wirtschaftswoche*, which explained that the *Wirtschaftswoche* is a weekly magazine published in Berlin.

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A NEW HYMN

To-day THE DAILY TELEGRAPH publishes on Page 10 a new Hymn of Freedom, composed by Dr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, O.M., on words by Canon G. W. Briggs, of Worcester Cathedral.

KING HONOURS 5 NAVY MEN

O.S. FOR MINE WAR EXPLOIT

NEW "HYMN OF FREEDOM"

**A
HYMN OF FREEDOM**
written in this time of war

1939

G.W. BRIGGS R. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Andante maestoso 4/4

PIANOFORTE
ORGAN

1 O Thou whose righteous judgment stand
Un-changing as thy champion
This day our high re-ward is won,
The free-dom of man-kind is

2 Who fail not with im-part-i-al hand — To thee we our con-
fess; Our foes not rescue from the power — Of darkness that men

3 Yet keep us, lest we drift apart
From the high calling we confess,
Till pride and vengeance rule our hearts,
And thou our cause no more canst bless,
Try justice risen on thine side;
Thou judge all men righteously,
Grant, Lord, that we may still abide
Thy judgments in the days to be.

4 This only be our steadfast aim,
When clash of steel war shall cease,
From our man's sacrifice and shame
To build with thee one Realm of peace,
Where lust of power shall have no place,
Nor fear and hate, nor proud disdain;
But man with man, and race with race,
Shall serve, and thou alone shalt reign.

A NEW HYMN, written specially for use in war-time by Canon G. W. Briggs, of Worcester Cathedral, with music by Dr. R. Vaughan Williams, O.M. It will be published immediately by the Oxford University Press, by whose permission it is here reprinted. (Copyright in U.S.A. and all countries.)

Hymn of Freedom

RVW wrote a *Hymn of Freedom* in the opening days of the war in 1939 which was first published in the Daily Telegraph on Wednesday 20 December 1939. The RVW Society has secured an original copy of this newspaper. The front page flags up the score which is printed on page 10 of the newspaper. Both pages are reproduced here with the very kind permission of both The Daily Telegraph and Oxford University Press.

Six Choral Songs (In Time of War)

by Stephen Connock

On Boxing Day, 1939, Vaughan Williams asked Ursula Wood whether she could 'search Shelley for me for some lines to set'. He was engaged in writing a cycle of wartime songs to words by the poet both RVW and Ursula admired. He had already set the following famous lines from *Prometheus Unbound*:

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
To love, and fear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory.

Shelley's moving hymn of rejoicing became *A Song of Victory* – number IV of the *Six Choral Songs (In Time of War)*. Vaughan Williams was to use these words again as the quotation heading the Prelude to *Sinfonia Antartica* (1952), once again shortening line 576 which in Shelley's original reads:

This, like thy glory, Titan! is to be

Vaughan Williams had also found some earlier lines from *Prometheus Unbound* IV, (557 – 562):

Love from its awful throne of patient power
In the wise heart, from the last giddy hour
Of dread endurance, from the slippery, steep
And narrow verge of crag-like Agony, springs
And folds over the world its healing wings

This became Number III – *A Song of Healing*. Vaughan Williams wanted more settable lines. As he put it to Ursula, he wanted material on the subjects of courage and hope.

By the end of the first week of 1940, RVW had himself found the lines for what became the first song – *A Song of Courage* in which Shelley refers to man's 'courage of soul' despite 'the stormy shades of thy worldly way'.

Ursula Wood knew Shelley well, so it did not take long for her to find suitable words for Nos. II, V and VI. Two of these three additions came from *Hellas*, Shelley's poem on the early years of the War of Greek Independence. *The Song of Liberty* (no. II) begins:

Life may change, but it may fly not
Hope may vanish, but can die not;

However, it is in the final chorus of *Hellas* that Shelley's sympathy for the plight of Greece is at its most intense. To Ralph and Ursula, in the early days of 1940, Shelley's famous final stanza must have seemed deeply relevant and poignant:

O Cease! Must hate and death return?
Cease! Must men kill and die?
Cease! Drain not to its dregs the urn of bitter prophecy
The world is weary of the past,
O might it die or rest at last!

How appropriate that Vaughan Williams called this *A Song of the New Age*.

Ursula's other find was from Canto V of *Revolt of Islam*, which was originally titled *Laon and Cythna*. This epic poem was Shelley's longest and is an idealised portrayal of the French revolution. It ends:

A hundred nations swear that there shall be
Pity and Peace and Love, among the good and free!

This became Song V – *A Song of Pity, Peace and Love*.

The cycle was first performed on 20 December 1940 with the BBC Chorus and Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Leslie Woodgate, and has been little heard since. This is a pity for the work has that sense of nobility and lofty idealism so characteristic of Vaughan Williams. Hubert Foss referred to the music as 'stark and noble', adding that:

The music is bare, simple and direct, the words are
declaimed with clarity and precision.

Frank Howes admired the 'patriotic aspiration' of the work, with its express hopes for a fairer future. Michael Kennedy felt that the style was 'perhaps severe' although he found an echo of the *Serenade to Music* in the closing bars of the third song.

For members of the Society not familiar with this music, the following analysis may prove helpful:

I *A Song of Courage*

There is certainly nobility in the broad trend of the opening brief *Allegro moderato*

The image shows the musical score for the opening of 'A Song of Courage'. It is marked 'Allegro moderato' with a tempo of quarter note = 108. The key signature is E-flat major (three flats). The score is for voices and piano/forte. The lyrics are: 'man! hold thee on in courage of soul'. The piano part features a 'marcato' dynamic.

Example 1: Opening of Song I – *A Song of Courage*

After a gentler style at the references to *sleep in the light of a wondrous day*, the song ends triple *Forte*

II *A Song of Liberty*

This song is marked *Andante alla marcia*, and maintains a steady pulse. The most moving moment is at the words 'Hope its iris of delight' which is set in the following way:

The image shows a musical score excerpt for 'A Song of Liberty'. The lyrics are: 'Hope its iris of delight'. The score is for voice and piano/forte. The piano part features a steady pulse.

Example 2: excerpt from *A Song of Liberty*

III A Song of Healing

A short movement, *Andante con moto*, which frames a dramatic middle section of more lyrical passages reflecting the themes of love and healing. The song concludes as follows:

Example 3: Closing bars of *A Song of Healing*

IV A Song of Victory

Another *Andante con moto* marking, the famous words build to a powerful climax at

This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory

Example 4: Last part of *A Song of Victory*

V A Song of Pity, Peace and Love

The opening is reminiscent of the fourth movement of *A Sea Symphony*.

Example 5: Opening of *A Song of Pity, Peace and Love*

There are moments of wonderful poetry, especially in the setting of 'To

mutual smiles'. There is nobility in the last bars as Vaughan Williams contemplates Peace and Love. It is an impressive movement.

VI A Song of the New Age

This last song is the most impressive, its spirit closer to the *Fifth Symphony* or *Pilgrim's Progress*. The *andante moderato* marking yields moments of added expressiveness, especially at 'Another Athens shall arise'.

Example 6: Passage from *A Song of the New Age*

The cycle overall ends in that transcendent, aspirational spirit which Vaughan Williams has made uniquely his own.

Example 7: Closing bars of *A Song of the New Age*

The music is simple and direct. As Foss put it, it is 'music of and for the people'. It does not deserve its current neglect – let us hope that the Chandos recording, due out in 2002, will gain the work new admirers.

Stephen Connock

(Editor's note: The *Six Choral Songs (In Time of War)* will be coupled with the *Fourth Symphony*. The London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus are conducted by Richard Hickox)

Vaughan Williams

on the composer in Wartime, 1940

Vaughan Williams contributed *The Composer in Wartime* to *The Listener* on 16 May 1940. The article was reprinted in *Heirs and Rebels*, edited Ursula Vaughan Williams and Imogen Holst, OUP, 1959, and is reproduced here with the kind permission of Ursula Vaughan Williams and the Oxford University Press.

What is the composer to do in wartime? There are three possible answers. Some lucky devils are, I believe, able to go on with their art as if nothing had happened. To them the war is merely an irritating intrusion on their spiritual and therefore their true life. I have known young composers refer with annoyance to this 'boring war'. Such a phrase as this I confess, shocks me, but it set me wondering what their point of view was and whether it was a possible one.

Whatever this war is, it is not boring. It may have been unnecessary, it may be wrong, but it cannot be ignored: it will affect our lives and those of generations to come. Is it then not worth while even for the most aloof artist to take some stock of the situation, to ensure at least that if and when the war ends he will be able to continue composing, to consider whether the new regime which will inevitably follow the war will be good for his art or bad and to bestir himself, even at the risk of losing a few hours from his manuscripts to help forward a desirable end?

How much does the artist owe to himself and how much to the community? Or, to put it in another way, how far is it true that the artist in serving himself ultimately serves the community? This is possibly the case in normal times; unless the artist is true to himself he cannot but be false to any man. But times at present are not normal. I suppose that even the most self-absorbed composer would hardly go on writing music if his house was on fire; at all events he would gather up his manuscript sheets and take them to a place of safety. The artist must condition his inspiration by the nature of his material. What will be the musical material on which the composer of the future can count? It will be no use writing elaborate orchestral pieces if there are no orchestras left to play them, or subtle string quartets if there are no subtle instrumentalists available.

One thing, I think, we can be sure of, no bombs or blockades can rob us of our vocal chords; there will always remain for us the oldest and greatest of musical instruments, the human voice. Is it not possible that the quality of our inspiration and the nature of our material will meet here? Surely the most other-worldly composer must take thought for these things.

At the other end of the scale are those composers who feel that music in wartime is just an impossibility, either because the present unrest inhibits for them that serenity of mind which is essential for artistic invention, or because they are obsessed with the idea that they must do something 'useful' and that composing music is not 'useful'. It is to me, a doubtful point whether this salving of one's conscience by 'doing one's bit' is not a form of cowardice, but if the necessary calmness of mind can be obtained

in no other way let the artist by all means drive an ambulance or sit in a telephone box for a sufficient number of hours to enable him to return with an untroubled mind to the things of the spirit.

I have up to now taken it for granted that music is not 'useful'. How far is this true? It is certainly, to my mind, one of the glories of the art of music that it can be put to no practical use. Poets can be used for propaganda, painters for camouflage, architects for machine-gun posts, but music is purely of the spirit and seems to have no place in the world of alarms and excursions. Would it not indeed be better for music to keep out of the struggle and reserve for us a place where sanity can again find a home when she returns to her own?

Nevertheless, the composer feels that he would like to be able to serve the community directly through his craft if not through his art. Before a man can become a good artist he must have become a good craftsman.

Are there not ways in which the composer without derogating from his art, without being untrue to himself, but still without that entire disregard for his fellows which characterises the artist in his supreme moments, use his skill, his knowledge, his sense of beauty in the service of his fellow men?

Composers are, perhaps, too apt to think only in terms of the very highly skilled executant, but cannot they in present circumstances think of the needs of the modest amateur, the parties of A.R.P. workers who have to spend long hours waiting for an

ambulance call that never comes, the group of nurses eating their hearts out in an empty hospital, the business man and his family forced by the black-out and the petrol ration to spend their leisure hours at home. Would it not be a worthy object of the composer's skill to provide for these modest executants music worthy of their artistic imagination, but not beyond their technical skill? These very limitations may be the salvation of the composer.

It is right even to learn from the enemy. There has been in Germany of late years a 'Home Music' movement. Some of the best-known composers have occupied their time and their talents in arranging and composing music for the amateur to play in his own home. I should like to see this idea developed here—music for every fortuitous combination of instruments which may happen to be assembled in a parlour or a dug-out, with a part for anyone who happens to drop in. Why should we confine ourselves to the stereotyped string quartet or pianoforte trio? Why should the voice be always accompanied by the pianoforte? There seem to me great possibilities in voices and instruments in combination. Our old Madrigalists marked their works 'Apt for voices or viols', we could develop this; that rare bird the tenor could be replaced by a viola or



One bomb made this crater, at Malden

clarinet, a weak soprano could be doubled by a flute and - (I hardly dare to breathe it) - the contralto part might be played on a saxophone. New material stimulates new ideas. Might not all these possibilities be a source of inspiration?

Art is a compromise between what we want to achieve and what circumstances allow us to achieve. It is out of these very compromises that the supreme art often springs; - the highest comes when you least expect it. There is a delightful phantasy by Maurice Baring in which he imagines Shakespeare and his Company rehearsing *Macbeth*. The principal actor complains there is not enough 'fat' in his part, whereupon Shakespeare goes into a corner and hurriedly scribbles a dozen more lines for him beginning 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow'. That is how great art often grows, by accident, while we think we are doing something else often as a supply to meet a demand.

The great English Madrigal school grew up because singing round the supper table was fashionable and people demanded something to sing. Nowadays with our War limitations upon us, with concerts few and far between, with the B.B.C. ration of one symphony a week, home music will again come into its own. Is it altogether beneath the dignity of the young composer to meet that demand? These young composers are having a bad time now, no one seems to want them - there seems to be no midway between Beethoven and Sandy Macpherson. This may be true as far as public music is concerned, but how about the musician in the house? To write for the amateur may limit the scope, but it need not dim the inspiration of the composers. The amateur player, also, has his duty toward the young composer. Let him welcome and encourage him. In so doing, who knows that he may not entertain an angel unawares?



How about that Victory Anthem?

Stephen Johnson discovers how Vaughan Williams' relations with the BBC reached their lowest ebb during World War II. This article is reproduced from BBC Music Magazine of July 2001, with the kind of permission of BBC Music Magazine.

Vaughan Williams's relationship with the BBC lasted from the late Twenties (the BBC's first decade) through to the composer's death in 1958. Most of the correspondence is preserved in the BBC's written archive at Caversham, and it makes entertaining reading - provided you can decipher Vaughan Williams's notorious handwriting.

During the years when Adrian Boult was BBC music director (1930 - 42) he and the composer kept in touch most of the time. The only recurring complaint from Vaughan Williams, apart from concern at the apparent neglect of some of his composer friends, was about the quality of sound in music broadcasts - especially transmissions from abroad. 'I heard bits of the *Sea Symphony* being floated on the air between shouts from Rome and howls from Paris - from what I can judge it was a fine performance. Thank you very much.'

When war broke out in 1939, Vaughan Williams was keen to do his bit. In October 1939, just a month after hostilities began, an unusually neat Vaughan Williams letter was passed to the director general [Frederick Ogilvie]. 'It has, I think, been a great pain to many people to find that in the early days of the war it was apparently the opinion of your programme-makers that the English people when their hearts and minds were strung up to great endeavour only wanted to listen to the loathsome noises of the so-called cinema 'organ' ... to Judge from this week's *Radio Times* things have taken a turn for the worse again and the so-called 'serious' programmes are filled with second-rate material which nobody wants.

'In times like these when so many people are looking for comfort and encouragement from music, surely we ought to give them something that

will grip. I believe that really great music, especially if it is familiar, will grip everybody (in a category of great music I include a Beethoven symphony, a Schubert song and a fine marching tune), but this half-way-house stuff grips nobody. The result of this policy has been that the discriminating listeners were tuning in to *Germany* for their spiritual sustenance while the indiscriminating are perforce falling back on the unspeakable Mr Sandy Macpherson.' (On the declaration of war, the BBC had closed all its national regional programmes and substituted a 'BBC Home Service', with news, gramophone records and 'Sandy Macpherson at the Theatre Organ'.)

Boult responded immediately. 'I think you will guess I do not think resignation would be any use or threats of that kind because I have reason to believe ... that a certain amount of the instructions that came to us in regard to these emergency programmes had emanated from Whitehall, and I do not think Whitehall - or that part of it that is capable of giving instructions that the public is to be amused at all cost, even when they have just been told that a battleship has been sunk - cares whether ABC or XYZ is director of the BBC.'

But before long there were signs that even Whitehall had begun to take this issue seriously. A document, endorsed by the Ministry of Information, began to circle the BBC Music Department: 'Note on a scheme for commissioning patriotic songs'. Instructions are set out for the commissioning of composers - and poets for texts - each divided into three classes, A, B, & C, plus 'reserves'. It is interesting (to say the least) to find Siegfried Sassoon, Hilaire Belloc and TS Eliot pushed into the 'reserves' by the likes of Herbert Read and Lord Dunsany.

Amongst composers, however, Vaughan Williams was clear favourite.

Boult dispatched a commissioning letter: would VW be interested in providing, 'a "Song or lay-hymn" with orchestral accompaniment on a patriotic (but not necessarily warlike) theme'? Before long Vaughan Williams had found and set a text, by the Victorian poet W E Henley. There was one slight snag though, as a BBC memo reveals: 'I regret to say... that contrary to all written instructions to the effect that the word "England" should not be allowed to occur, he has used the poem "England, My England".'

This was nothing to the fracas that followed. Reading through the *Times* in March 1941, a few weeks before the projected first performances of 'England, My England', Vaughan Williams found something that made his blood vaporise. 'I learn from the *Times* of March 8 that the British Broadcasting Corporation has banned the musical compositions of Dr Alan Bush on account of his political opinions. So far as I know Dr Bush's political views I am strongly opposed to them. Nevertheless I wish to protest against this victimisation of private opinion in the only way possible to me. You may remember that the British Broadcasting Corporation has lately done me the honour to commission from me a choral song. I now beg leave to withdraw my offer of this song to the BBC.'

'I return the fee which was paid me and ask you to give directions that all manuscript material of the song be returned to me. I will, of course, be responsible for the expenses incurred in its production, and broadcast, in November 1941, but not as an official BBC commission. That the affair still rankled with Vaughan Williams is obvious from a letter to Boult after the second performance. 'I cannot pretend I was not rather dismayed by the performance. Do you not think the BBC with all its resources would have done better to cut it out altogether rather than give an unrehearsed performance! I was particularly sorry because the tune is rather a ewe lamb of mine, and I feel that if it got a proper send-off it might hit the nail on the head. But I felt on Sunday night that it had been strangled at birth.'

Matters improved as Vaughan Williams's 70th birthday approached. The BBC proposed to mark the date – 12 October 1942 – with a Vaughan Williams week. The inclusion of a musical tribute to VW by Alan Bush in the birthday concert has to be significant. The relationship was soon back on reasonably friendly terms. When, in September 1943, a piece by William Walton was substituted at the last minute for Vaughan Williams's *London Symphony* in a BBC concert, the composer wrote to Boult: 'I didn't even know the *London Symphony* was down for performance. So I didn't ramp [sic] round the room when I found that my hated rival had been preferred to me!' A confidential memo from Boult attached to this letter, addressed to various managerial persons, adds: 'I think this letter is worth your notice. It is interesting to compare Vaughan Williams's attitude with Walton's in this matter.' (Though I searched the Caversham archives for evidence of Walton's response, I never found it.)

Meanwhile, in high places, thoughts were turning towards the possibility of victory. Who better to provide a rousing victory celebration than Vaughan Williams? Once again, the composer agreed. He proposed a composite text, with words from the Bible, Kipling's 'Land of Our Birth' from *Puck of Pook's Hill* and appropriate passages from Shakespeare's *Henry V* spoken by an actor: 'As regards the spoken words – my reason is purely practical – the sung words over the wireless are never heard unless they are well known – and I want to make sure that certain key passages in the anthem are heard.'

The BBC recording, made in advance of the broadcast, went well; but the official premiere brought all kinds of problems. The new director of music, Victor Hely-Hutchinson, received a long letter from Vaughan Williams. He had, he said, fulfilled his commission to the letter. 'I then waited and wondered what was happening, and I am afraid improper pride came into the question: I had done my bit, and it was up to the BBC to make the next move. About June 1944 I had an agitated telephone call from Adrian Boult. "How about that Victory Anthem? It may be wanted any minute, please get to work on it," I replied, "You've already had it for nearly six months." So a hue and cry was made, and it was, I believe, found forgotten in a drawer. So then after wasting six idle months, I had



D-day troops entraining at Waterloo Station

to revise, partly rewrite, and wholly orchestrate the work all in a hurry, which was the one thing I did not want to do for such a great occasion. However it got finished soon. I went to Bedford and we had a very successful recording.

'While I was there I talked with some BBC officials and the objection was raised that this was not an anthem, and would I change the title? This I willingly did, and called it "Thanksgiving for Victory". I understood, at the same time, that it was to be made into a big feature... I had discussions as to how best to announce it in the *Radio Times*, whether the words could be printed, etc from which I gathered that the BBC did the honour to consider it work of some importance. Did the BBC authorities change their minds and come to the conclusion that it was not worthy of the occasion? In this case they should have told me so, and given me the chance to withdraw it. What happened was, as you know, the [RT] announcement was shoved away in the corner of the ordinary 9.30 am service, where it was only by accident that I noticed it: just the bare title was wrong, "Victory Anthem".'

Apologies and explanations were offered. It seems it was 'a political must' to take Vaughan Williams's allotted *Radio Times* space for an article on the St Paul's Thanksgiving Service and picture of the Foreign Secretary.

With the war over, Vaughan Williams's relations with the BBC settled back into something like their old cordiality. On one issue, however, neither war nor peace would make him budge: he would not talk on the radio about his own music. One producer came close to persuading him... but no - as he told a BBC colleague: He says he loves us very much - but not that much.'

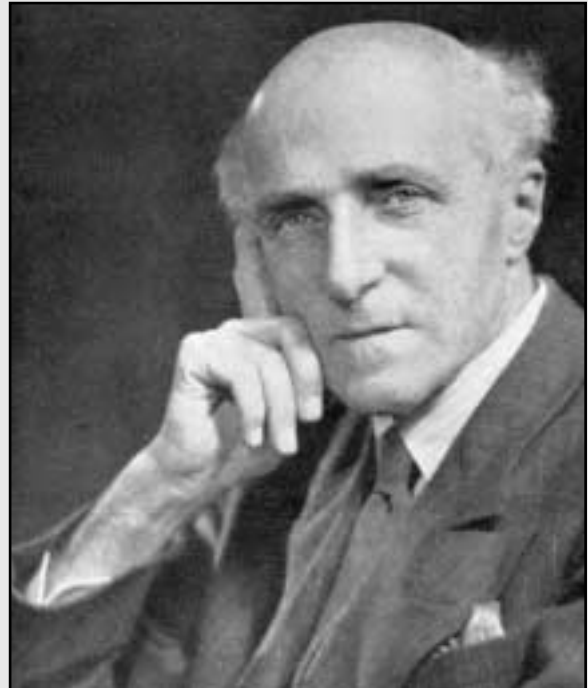
Wartime premiere of *Valiant for Truth*

The year 1940 had been a sad one for Vaughan Williams. His close friend Dorothy Longman had died and Honorine's death from a direct hit on her West London house was a terrible blow to Adeline as well as her husband. As Ursula Vaughan Williams put it in her biography:

"few weeks passed without news of someone they knew being killed or wounded and they lamented again that other generation of young musicians lost twenty five years before in the other war"(p. 237)

Against this background, Vaughan Williams wrote *Valiant-for-Truth*, a brooding, powerful work for a *cappella* musical chorus using moving words from Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The work was first performed on 29 June 1942, at St. Michael's Church, Cornhill, London, with Harold Darke conducting the St Michael's Singers. Ursula and Ralph attended; the church was full.



Harold Darke



St. Michael's Church, a Wren church in the heart of London, can be traced back to 1055. William Boyce was Director of Music in the eighteenth century. Harold Darke was appointed organist in May 1916 and quickly formed a choir to sing Choral Evensong. By 1919 the choir had 80 members. The first of many RVW works in the choir's repertoire, *Toward the Unknown Region*, was performed on Thursday 17 November 1919. The St. Michael's Singers gave the first London performance of Parry's last great work *The Vision of Life* in 1923 with both Vaughan Williams and Holst sharing a chair in a side aisle. In 1929, the choir gave their first performance of RVW's *Mass in G minor*, a work with which they were to become closely associated. They repeated the work in the London Music Festival in May 1939, shortly before the war brought all music to a standstill.

The first performance of *Valiant for Truth* was one of several wartime concerts at St. Michael's Church when the choir was able to muster together enough singers to give a performance. Vaughan Williams, the choir's President since 1934, showed his gratitude to the choir, and to Harold Darke, by contributing the following introduction to *A History of the St. Michael's Singers (1916-1939)* published in the late 1940s.

Stephen Connock

It is gloomy evening in winter. We turn out of the turmoil of the City streets to the mystical peace of a City church. We sit in the church, not with the frivolous fuss of a fashionable concert audience, but in quiet contemplation, waiting till the music begins unobtrusively to complete the vision of a world beyond ours.

That has been the task of the *St. Michael's Singers* for nearly 30 years, guided by their leader, Harold Darke. Long may these inspired evenings continue.

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

A SONG OF THANKSGIVING

Vaughan Williams celebrates the end of the Second World War

by Lewis Foreman

One of my first purchases when I started collecting records, bought when I was still at school, was a 10" Parlophone LP (PMB 1003) of Vaughan Williams's *The Lark Ascending*, with Jean Pougnet as soloist, still a favourite version. It was coupled with a mysterious choral work called *A Song of Thanksgiving*. I bought the LP for *The Lark* but on playing it I was hooked by the choral work, which seemed to me to have a wonderful impetus and a fund of memorabilia invention. The mystery deepened when I expressed my enthusiasm to others and found them remarkably snooty about it. Did they deprecate the music because it was patriotic, including such familiar words as a brief quotation from Act IV of *Henry V* after the Battle of Agincourt; for the heart-on-sleeve nature of the invention or for the fact that RVW crowned his victory salute with a children's choir singing Kipling? Indeed, I never got to the bottom of it. Yet what is clear is that it is a unique work which no other composer could have achieved. I guess many felt that writing victory anthems in 1945 was best left to the Soviet Union.

Soon after this I first encountered Simona Pakenham's enthusiastic exploration of Vaughan Williams's music (Ralph Vaughan Williams: a discovery of his music), which for several years I tried to emulate, and found her extended account of coming to grips with RVW's music quite illuminating, a splendid first-hand guide. Simona Pakenham discusses *A Song of Thanksgiving* at length and clearly articulates the reservations that I was encountering. She wrote:

"I am never more conscious of my own 'poverty of heart' than when I consider the texts Vaughan Williams compiled for such works as Donna Nobis Pacem and its successor . . . Song of Thanksgiving . . . It is my 'poverty of heart' that makes me shy of its 'moral atmosphere', that makes me faintly uncomfortable when the words from Henry V are declaimed by the speaker, when the Kipling poem 'Land of our Birth' is sung. Vaughan Williams does not suffer from this form of self-consciousness . . . the children's voices, accompanied by those six clarinets with their ineffable chastity of tone, embarked on the first of their five verses of Kipling:

*Land of our birth, we pledge to thee,
Our love and toil in the years to be.
On a first hearing, I admit it, I felt exceedingly sick. 'Poverty of heart' again? I am afraid so.*

As early as 1943 the BBC Music Department were giving thought to the eventual need for a victory anthem. What they were commissioning was somewhat hazy, and Vaughan Williams's acceptance merely placed the commission in safe hands without there being a clear idea on either side what was going to be delivered. The text that RVW assembled for this occasion is surely a triumph. That characteristic anthology text extracted from English literature and the King James Bible is taken to its most varied usage here, juxtaposing words from *Puck of Pook's Hill*, Shakespeare and the Bible. The sources of the fragments Vaughan Williams juxtaposes, almost all short, run as follows:

Song of the Three Holy Children vv 29-31, 33
Henry V, Act IV sc 8

I Chronicles XXIX v2
Song of the Three Holy Children v 67
Isaiah LXI vv 1-3
Isaiah LXII vv 10-12
Isaiah LXI v 4
Isaiah LX v 18
Kipling: *Puck of Pook's Hill*
Isaiah LX v 20

Particularly from the *Old Testament* this is favourite Vaughan Williams territory.

What RVW delivered was a miniature cantata, requiring not only considerable (if elastic) orchestral forces and organ, but as well as soprano solo and SATB chorus, a children's choir. For the broadcast the orchestra included 6 each of trumpets and clarinets. Yet the finished work is not bombastic or jingoistic, but strikes an almost fervent note of supplication, a unique note of thanksgiving. Vaughan Williams clearly put a lot of research into assembling the text which is remarkable, for what are in most cases brief extracts flow as an almost seamless whole. This all took place late in 1943, when, in fact, victory was far from secured. Later on 8 September 1944 RVW wrote to the BBC's religious adviser, Dr Welch,

'I am glad to understand that you approve of the words of my Victory Anthem. May I venture to make one or two suggestions about the music for the rest of the service! I hope we shall have 'O God our help' and 'All people' and I hope the Old Hundredth will be sung in its proper version with the long notes at the beginning and end of each line.'

Not knowing when the music would be required, the BBC were clearly intending to make a big impact with it. For example exploring the BBC Written Archives at Caversham we find the following account of the Director of Music's Weekly Meeting on 23 October 1944:

'The question of a suitable speaker for the 'Victory Anthem' was discussed at length & it was finally decided that Valentine Dyall should be the first choice, with Robert Speaight next and Frederick Grisewood third.'

It was decided to record the music well in advance of the occasion, and in fact this took place in the BBC's Studio 5 in London on 5 November. This minute is for 27 November 1944:

'for archive purposes, it was intended to press & process the discs. The LTS [London Transcription Service] was interested in this work. Discussion took place as to the advisability of issuing records to various Embassies etc prior to the first Home broadcast. It was felt, however, that this was unavoidable if other countries were to be able to follow up the original broadcast immediately.'

It was decided (4 December 1944) that records would be flown overseas immediately after the first broadcast. In fact, thanks to the wide-dissemination of the discs this performance was preserved in

MUSIC IN WARTIME

by *Simona Pakenham*

One of the pleasures of life in the later decades of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries is the arrival of each new edition of the *Journal of the RVW Society*. Inclined to look first at the Record Review, I was struck by a sentence in last October's edition – 'this is only the fourth recording of *Along the Field*'. Four recordings of a piece I had never even heard of by the time I had written my book about RVW's music and then did not manage to hear for several more years! How lucky we are now, and how spoilt!

In 1942, when I was stricken all of a heap by an extract from his *Symphony in F minor*, there were only a handful of records of his music – that symphony, in the splendid performance he conducted himself, the *London Symphony*, the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* and a small quantity of shorter pieces. These records were, of course, the highly breakable and scratchable 78s we had been enduring ever since I had been born. It took about eight sides to get through a symphony and the music was generally accompanied by an unpleasing hiss. It is hard to believe that we got any pleasure from it at all, especially in the days when the gramophone had to be rewound by hand between each side – but there is no doubt that we did. I was fortunate to have progressed to an electric radiogram by the time I began the pursuit of RVW's music. I thought it was a miracle.

My next move, on discovering the name Vaughan Williams, was to go to the Public Library in Guildford where we were living in digs at the time. My husband, Noel Iliffe, only spent three nights out of every nine here, the other six being passed in Broadcasting House, occasionally on the roof, firewatching in case of air raids. I was introduced to Grove's Dictionary by a kindly librarian. From it I learnt that the composer of that extraordinary symphony was the author of a vast catalogue of works – a promise of delights to be explored – but that he had been born in 1872 and was therefore soon to be seventy years old. 'Oh bother!' I exclaimed in my youthful ignorance, 'only four symphonies'. (I had established that those amazing noises came from his latest) 'I don't suppose, at his age, he is likely to write any more'.

My first week's search for music labelled Vaughan Williams revealed that I had, in fact, been living with some of it most of my life. An exploration of my copy of *Songs of Praise* revealed him as composer of *Sine Nomine*, the tune for my favourite hymn – 'For All The Saints'. At school on Empire Day, an occasion that brought forth stirring music, we had sung his anthem *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. I had never been quite happy about another work I found to be his, *The Vagabond* - a splendid tune, but not heard at its best sung by a score of teenage girls in white silk dresses.

As wife of an employee of the BBC I found copies of the *Radio Times* and *The Listener* lying about the house. The latter sometimes included illuminating articles on English composers, while the R. T. proved a veritable mine full of wonders. There being no television in wartime the entire publication was given

over to our radio stations - the Home Service and the Forces Programme. In those happy days there was space for complete casts of plays and full lists of concerts, great and small, with ample notes. The BBC Singers' Daily Service listed every psalm and anthem, together with hymn numbers, first lines and the title of the tune – would that it were so today! There was Choral Evensong every weekday. From these I discovered anthems and canticles by RVW, as well as the fact that there were other English composers alive and worthy of attention. I listened eagerly to all that came over the air but had, in those days, no means of recoding my discoveries. It might be months or even years till chance provided a repeat of something exquisite I had heard. It was like a painful love affair. I began to bore Noel on the subject – the only one I wanted to discuss. He endured it patiently enough, then caught the bug himself when I came up with the suggestion that the Tallis *Fantasia* was the perfect music to accompany his radio production of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. I still think it the ideal choice. Money was short in those days but Noel had the freedom of the BBC's record library and did not scruple to borrow anything he could find for me, so it was not long before I had added *The Lark Ascending* and the *Concerto Accademico*, both exquisitely played by Frederick Grinke, to the works I could hear again and again. I devoured all these things but yearned for the unobtainable delights of mysterious titles like *Hugh the Drover*, or *Job* and the unrecorded symphonies.

Of live performances there were a few, often in places hard to reach in the blackout. One did not go to London during the early bombing except to work, but I managed to get, on unreliable public transport, to concerts in some very out of the way places. A number of these were distinctly odd. I vividly remember a performance of *Sancta Civitas* in which a choir consisting mostly of plump women in white struggled to deliver this elaborate work accompanied only by an organ. I was later to discover that VW preferred not to have his music performed at all than to let people listen to such botched versions. But I was good at imagining perfection. Sometimes I found it. I think it was in Streatham that I heard a rendering of *Five Tudor Portraits* which will remain in my mind for ever. In some school hall we sat on wooden chairs packed so close you could not move your knees. VW would have wept at the accompaniment – an indifferent piano – or was it two? The mezzo soloist was young, dark-haired and pretty. Rising to her feet on cue she became Elinor Rummung

Droopy and drowsy,
Scurvy and lowsy,
Her face all bowsy,
Comely crinkled,
Wonderously wrinkled,
Like a roast pig's ear
Bristled with hair.

At the end of the movement this hag resumed her seat and with it her young and pretty appearance. This she kept as an enchanting Jane Scroop, commanding all our tears for the murder of Philip

Sparrow. I went home and told Noel I had discovered a singer whose name we would be hearing many times in the future. The name was Janet Baker. Alas, she gave up singing that particular piece!

When bombing ceased for a period I found myself in London acting in Rep in the West End. I would struggle home on the Underground trying not to trip over rows of people preparing to sleep on the platforms which had inspired the Henry Moore drawings. We had rented a flat above somebody who played the piano late into the night. I would go to bed enraptured by the sounds that reached me – unlike any I had heard. In the end I had to go down and ring the bell. A youngish man came to the door bursting with apologies for disturbing our sleep. I explained it was quite the contrary. He led me to his grand piano where, on the music stand stood a thick blue book – the vocal score of something called *Sir John in Love*. ‘Good Heavens!’ I cried, ‘Not Vaughan Williams!’ The ravishing music had been somehow familiar, and yet so different from any I had met so far that I had not made the connection. I spent the next few weeks, whenever there was time, sitting beside the pianist devouring every note, so that when, long after the war had ended, I heard it properly at Sadler’s Wells I knew words and tunes by heart.

I think I heard my first On Wenlock Edge at one of those wonderful lunchtime concerts organised by Dame Myra Hess, probably sung by Eric Greene. My first *Dona Nobis Pacem* was made more vivid by the sound of a V2 descending uncomfortably near to Southwark Cathedral. I detested the things even more than Doodlebugs but in that work it made less disturbance than the inevitable accompaniment of passing trains. I heard the marvellously comforting *Symphony in D* shortly after my idol’s seventieth birthday, but I had only managed to catch it on the radio. VW’s works began to be recorded more promptly after the celebration.

I am not sure when I began to write or, indeed, quite why, but it was partly to stop myself boring people, partly to try to capture on paper some work I had no prospect of hearing again for ages and because, in the early 1940s, there was remarkably little written about the music of RVW. I would write in the train, or in theatre dressing-rooms between entrances.

By the time the *Symphony in E minor* was performed I had stopped wondering if each would be the last. It was recorded very soon after its first performance and Noel promptly seized the first movement to serve as incidental music to his production of O’Neill’s *Mourning Becomes Electra* in the Gateway, Edinburgh. It gave us satisfaction to hear an elderly Scottish lady muttering, as she emerged into the foyer, ‘I dinnae care for this cacophonous modern music’. We loved it. By the time of the *Sinfonia Antartica* I had written such a sheaf of descriptive notes that I felt I had to try to make it into a book, despite the absence of certain works I despaired of hearing. It was about this time that I was introduced, somewhat against my will, to the object of my studies. It was at the Royal Festival Hall, where I had been taken by a BBC colleague who was an old friend of the VWs. The last thing I wanted was for him to know I was writing about him. Finding ourselves isolated in a corner during the interval I racked my brains to find a topic on which to address him. ‘Why Dr. Vaughan Williams, do we never hear your Piano Concerto?’ The moment the words were out of my mouth I knew I had put my foot in it. He uttered a strangled explosion out of which I could extract nothing intelligible. On asking for clarification I managed to make out – ‘Harriet can’t play it!’ I gathered eventually that Harriet Cohen, for whom it had been written, was unable to manage the notes and that we would have to wait until she retired or passed away before it could be performed. When I mentioned the two-piano version he brushed the idea aside, ‘I do so long to hear it’. I persisted rashly. ‘So do I!’ he replied with emphasis. I was delighted to be rescued by Ursula.

So, bit by bit, I put a sort of book together, and was persuaded to send it to a publisher or two. Nobody could have been more astonished than I when the second of these accepted it. I was able to insert extra items in the text as I came to hear them, even when it was a galley proof – publishers were more accommodating in those long-ago days. When it was about to go into page proofs the announcement came that an eighth symphony was almost finished so I had to beg for time to add it at the end. To my astonishment I was given it.

Have I written all this to rejoice that all the music we want to hear is now available at the push of a button – that I may play *Sancta Civitas* or *Flos Campi* several times a day if I feel like it; that if I desire a particular symphony I may have a choice of half a dozen conductors to play it to me; that suddenly I can even listen to Sir John in Love as it ought to be heard, without having to depend on a neighbour to play me the piano score? I do not wish to seem perverse but I have to admit that I think we were happier in those benighted days – winding up the gramophone and struggling to remote concert halls. It is a dreadful thing to admit! Of course it is wonderful to be able to indulge our every desire without delay, but at my advanced age – the age (I suddenly realize) that RVW was when I published my book about him, I would not really want to go back to that situation – but! I put this to Ursula and she said – ‘I agree. There are no treats anymore’. This is not quite true. Sometimes there is a splendid treat – *Pilgrim’s Progress* at the Barbican was one of the best of all. Yet I know that I do not enjoy music with quite the rapture and excitement I felt when travelling in an over-crowded train and getting home from Cambridge at dead of night in pouring rain after seeing Dennis Arundel’s production of that same opera in the Town Hall there, where John Noble made his name.

Well, we are never satisfied. But I am glad that I came to the music of RVW (and through him, to the whole spectrum of 20th century music) in the way that I did. It took me fifteen years to hear enough of his music to make up that book and I enjoyed every minute of them.



Concert Reviews

A Pastoral Symphony at the Proms

Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra, Sir Roger Norrington, with Sibylla Rubens (soprano), Royal Albert Hall, 23 July 2001

Full praise to Sir Roger Norrington for programming *A Pastoral Symphony* alongside Schubert's *Great C Major* symphony at the proms on 23 July. He performed RVW's war-inspired lament with the Leipzig Gewandhaus in Leipzig last year, coupled on that occasion with Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*. The Prom performance with Stuttgart was the more accomplished. Despite a curious lack of intensity about the opening bars, the performance quickly gathered in stature. Sir Roger's familiar emphasis on clarity of texture revealed new dimensions to the work, without any loss of emotional expressiveness. The offstage trumpet solo was moving and dignified and the final movement tender and poignant in its understated yet powerful way. The wordless soprano solo, singing from high up in the Gallery, was beautifully realised. At such moments, music transcends time and place. A wonderful experience.

Stephen Connock

Vaughan Williams in Brisbane

The Queensland Youth Symphony/The Queensland Orchestra

Like Sydney and Melbourne, Brisbane experienced an invasion of multi-coloured British Rugby fans in June which may have masked two important Vaughan Williams events.

A 100-piece youth orchestra under an Australian conductor of Italian origin might not seem the most likely combination for a dazzling performance of RVW's *Job*. How wrong such a pre-supposition would have been.

The Queensland Youth Symphony Orchestra – like all youth orchestras – changes members every year as age creeps upon its members. Yet this orchestra has a tradition of performing *Job*. This performance in June 2001 in the Brisbane Concert Hall was the third in recent years. Conductor John Curro, who has taken his orchestra abroad many times and most recently to Germany for the Hanover Expo happens to be a confirmed Vaughan Williams enthusiast and is able to create the most authentic RVW sound in the concert hall.

For this performance he projected Blake's illustrations from the Book of Job on a large screen suspended above the orchestra. The horror of Job's fate visually matched the blazing energy of the music and served to remind the audience that *Job* is a theatre piece even though I know of no stage performances in Australia.

The sight of a line of shaven-headed young brass players who might have looked more at home in a rock band exulting in the great swelling climaxes of the music was a reminder of how gripping this music can be to any audience once they get to know it well. There was an almost raw energy in the playing that was totally engaging.

Nor were the gentler reaches of the music slighted. The violas in the Job's Dream section were lovingly caressed and the violin solos which Vaughan Williams used to represent the handsome young Elihu were played with understanding by leader Daniel Salicich. First-desk players handled their solos so affectionately that this was one of the most satisfying RVW performances I have ever heard. The stately *Pavane of the Sons of Morning* and the dance of Job's comforters had a real nobility that went directly to the heart.

It was an English dominated program since the Frankel Viola Concerto was also included. Brett Dean, a former viola leader of this orchestra, left it to spend fifteen years with the Berlin Philharmonic. He excelled in this gentle enigmatic music which repays repeated listening to the CD he has made of it on the CPO label.

A few days later, Brisbane's larger Queensland Orchestra also ventured into VW territory with the Fourth Symphony, a work written not long after *Job*. The QO is a large orchestra recently formed by merging two existing orchestras though the union has not yet been wholly consummated. So when Stephen Barlow took over for the VW Fourth (paired with Honegger's Fourth) in a series of twentieth century symphonies, one might have expected a tentative performance. Instead, the players rose to the challenge and if the music at times had a roughness even more abrasive than RVW always intended, the lines of this most powerful of his symphonies were always clear.

The astringency of the score often masks many relaxed and even jolly passages such as the hornpipe in the third movement. However cataclysmic the brass eruptions, the pastoral side of the aural landscape shines through more audibly in a live performance than on disc. There are gentle dialogues in this symphony that can be overlooked when one hears a recording. In a drawing room, if one sets a reasonable volume to allow for the sensitivities of neighbours, the tremendous passages stand out. Yet such is the dynamic range of most CDs that so often the quieter moments do not emerge. The lonely flute solo at the end of the second movement became an emotional peak when isolated from the surrounding violence. Even though I have heard the Fourth Symphony many times both live and on record, this performance made me more aware than ever of the quiet moments of contemplation in the midst of the storm and fury. Barlow's direction was notable for emphasising the greatness of both sides of this turbulent score. The bolts of aural lightning that so disturbed early listeners still have the power to shake the imagination.

The concert was held in a very large broadcasting studio (inaugurated by John Culshaw) and Barlow used its clarity to make the most of the music. It was memorable in spite of some blemishes that were part of the settling down process of this new orchestra.

Donald Munro

Answers to crossword No.8

Down: 1. Abi Sunflower, 2. Opus, 3. Daily, 4. new, 5. Pots, 6. Old Hundredth.
Bloody (Gardener), 19. Pans, 22. This Day, 24. meadow, 28. the
Four, 13. painful (Plough), 16. Orpheus, 17. chaucer, 18.
Across: 1. A London symphony, 9. Urtula, 10. Wassail, 12.
You, 7. Macconchy, 8. six, 11. Aberystwyth, 13. Pastoral, 14.
gray, 15. Well, 20. EHG (E H Geer), 21. Tenor, 23. Seal, 25.
Dead, 26. Cat, 27. Fen.

Letters

We are always pleased to receive contributions for this page

Fourth Symphony

As a footnote to Geoff Brown's article on the origins of the *Fourth Symphony* of RVW in the last issue can I make my own tentative suggestion about the solo flute passage accompanied by muted trombones at the end of the slow movement? It is simply that in the first edition of Gordon Jacob's book *Orchestral Technique*, originally published in 1931, in his chapter on "The Brass" he stated that:

"The use of very quiet sustaining chords on muted trombones has not yet been done to death and is recommended as a luxury in which the orchestrator might very occasionally indulge.

There followed a brief Lento passage for solo flute and 3 muted trombones, of less than 3 bars duration, taken from an overture of his own."

Then in the second edition, dated 1940, he actually adds that

"A similar effect is to be found near the end of the slow movement of Vaughan Williams' *Symphony in F minor*."

There were definite links between the two composers, firstly in that Jacob had been a pupil of VW in the 1920s, then that he had orchestrated RVW's *English Folk Song Suite* from the wind band original. He was to become a Professor of Composition and Orchestration at the Royal College of Music and was evidently respected for his skills by the elder composer. RVW would most likely have seen his new book and, I feel, may well have 'cribbed' the idea of that instrumental combination, but not the notes, for his own new *Symphony* taking shape at the same time. If that were the case, Jacob must have been sufficiently gratified by it to make his own reference to it in turn, come the revised edition of his book.

Robert Allan

Douglas Lilburn

I wondered whether members had read of the death of Douglas Lilburn, a composition student of RVWs at the Royal College of Music in the late 1930s, who went on to become a key figure in music in New Zealand and an interesting and

accomplished composer in his own right? I note that the obituary notice from *The Daily Telegraph* of 22 June 2001, comments that all three of his symphonies were recorded 'just before he died' – as if they had never been recorded earlier – although I know of at least two earlier recordings of the complete cycle that have previously been issued on CD. The first and second symphonies do, I feel, have something peculiarly Sibelian about them, although (to my mind, if one can accept the subjective notion of landscape in music) they generally reflect sunlit open vistas and big skies with racing clouds rather than the brooding mystery of the northern forests. I had, indeed, thought of producing a piece on these works for the *Music you might like* series – except that I know that (the last time I checked) the Continuum CD with excellent performances by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, under John Hopkins, had been deleted from the catalogue.

Charles Long

Enigma of third movement of A Pastoral Symphony

I write this letter in response to, and in admiration for, Jeffrey Aldridge's detailed essay 'Some notes on a Pastoral Symphony' in the *Journal of the Society No. 21* dated June 2001.

In 1999 I wrote an essay for my Birkbeck College music course on the subject of Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Third Symphony*. Amongst the quotations I selected for my assessment was the one used by Mr Aldridge in his analysis of the Third Movement: James Day 'Master Musicians – Vaughan Williams', OUP, page 194 "If this is a dance, it is surely a dance of the elements rather than a ballet of oafs (sic) and fairies from which it apparently evolved".

Simona Pakenham in 'Ralph Vaughan Williams - A Discovery of His Music' Macmillan 1957, page 63, states "Ralph Vaughan Williams has confessed to fairies" (flitting through the 'presto' section) "in his scherzo though he denies the human element most people are convinced they hear".

From the programme notes for 'A Pastoral Symphony (No 3)' CD – EMX 2192, EMI Eminence, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Vernon Handley 1992' came these comments by Andrew Burn "The scherzo is the most puzzling movement; Vaughan Williams said it was 'in the nature of a slow dance'".

A further dilemma arises when we consider whether Ralph Vaughan Williams meant elves and fairies, since oaf is a

seventeenth century variation from the word elf. This gives further scope for the imagination!

After my own consideration of the enigma of the Third Movement, and bearing in mind that 'scherzo' is the Italian word for joke, I arrived at the notion that the 'moderato pesante' part may have been a dance of agricultural equipment and tools. I expressed my ideas in some detail as to how these implements danced in celebration at the restoration of the land after the chastening experiences of battle. About 55 seconds into the Third Movement as the harp, flute and violin entered, I wondered if this represented the sowing of new seeds to repair the land, as the music suggests a scattering motion.

I submitted my work with some caution and thankfully both my excellent tutor and the Birkbeck examiner did not dismiss this possibility.

*E Anne Webb
London*

Praise for David Mellor

Congratulations to David Mellor who featured the music of VW in two editions of his Sunday programme "If you like that, you'll like this" on Classic FM, during May. Listeners were treated to about four hours of VW's music, including a number of works which are rarely heard. There must be thousands of listeners of Classic FM who as a result of David Mellor's programme have discovered the music of VW for the first time. How about honorary membership to Mr Mellor of the RVW Society?

*Chris Cope
Kings Nympton
Devon*

Finzi and RVW

Strangely, it is not the music of Vaughan Williams that prompts me to write this note but that of Gerald Finzi whose centenary is celebrated this year. These have kicked off in fine style with a beautiful recording of his wistfully wonderful violin concerto (which I recommend to all Vaughan Williams fans) lovingly performed by the equally wondrous Tasmin Little under the faultless tiller of Mr Hickox. The CD (on Chandos) is full of gems.

There is of course a strong connection between Vaughan Williams and Finzi and both of course are championed by Richard Hickox. Finzi too had strong connections with the Three Choirs Festival which this year sojourns at Gloucester. This is by way of a convoluted introduction to my

own work which will be on display at the Cathedral during the Festival. My two (very large) pencil drawings of the Crucifixion (presently on display at Worcester Cathedral) will be mixing it – so to speak – with all that great British music. And it is appropriate too in so much as most of my work is inspired by music – a lot of it by Vaughan Williams. Which leads me on to one last connection. I notice that the Down Ampney exhibition is to go ahead which cheers me greatly as I sketched a view down the lane from the church towards the village a few years ago and there is a kind of loneliness present (be it fancifully) in the sketch which I remember feeling at the time, due in part to what was then the lack of any memorial at the place of his birth befitting his artistic and humane achievements. It is good to see this has been finally set to rights.

Finally, can I say (and I know there will be many who disagree) that today I purchased numbers 8 & 9 in, what I consider to be, the best ever recorded cycle of Vaughan Williams' nine symphonies. EMI's recordings are also wonderfully engineered, the sounds so spacious, the details so fine. Haitink's vision is steady fast and architecturally sound, the ninth in particular, glorious. It has taken a long time, but I think it has been worth the wait. A great achievement. The icing on the cake.

Michael J Westley
Birmingham

Thought provoking

RVW is quite well represented on A (Australian) BC Classic FM, especially *The Lark Ascending*. In a recent broadcast, there was an extract from an interview with Peggy Glanville-Hicks (1912-1990), an Australian composer, and apparently one of RVW's favourite students. She had shown him a *Sinfonietta* that she had written, in which there was a theme that he liked, and said he would steal, saying "only steal from the little people" (were those really his words?) "then you won't get found out". This theft allegedly kick-started the 4th Symphony. She said she would steal it back later, which she did! I know nothing of this *sinfonietta*, nor whether this story can be verified, it is however of interest in the light of Geoff Brown's article in JRVWS 21.

The series of articles about the Antarctic film and symphony rang several bells for me. I was at the first London performance of *Sinfonia Antarc(t)tica* a memorable experience. Also present, shortly before his untimely death, was Ronald Sylvester, another of RVW's students, and for me a much valued music teacher at Highgate School. I wonder if any other readers

know anything of him and his compositions.

In 1976, I moved into 73 Stanmore Hill, a Georgian house in Stanmore, Middlesex, where Edward Wilson had lodged in 1899 and 1900 while completing his medical studies. I then found out all I could about this remarkable polymath-physician, ornithologist, artist, explorer – and saw his fine drawings and painting of the Antarctic, which are held at the Royal Geographic Society's HQ. I was impressed by the integrity of his character. I was intrigued by his (possibly only) poem, "The Barrier Silence" and set it to music:

"The silence was deep with a
breath like sleep
As the sledge-runners slid on the snow
And the fateful fall of our fur-clad feet
Struck mute like a silent blow
On a questioning "hush" as the settling
crust
Shrank shivering over the floe
And the sledge in its track sent
a whisper back
Which was lost in a white fog-bow.
And this was the thought that the
silence wrought
As it scorched and froze us through,
Though secrets hidden are all forbidden
Till God means man to know,
We might be the men God meant
should know
The heart of the barrier snow,
In the heat of the sun and the glow
And the glare from the glistening flow
As it scorched and froze us through
and through
With the bite of the drifting snow".

The exuberant alliterations are reminiscent of Poe, but the scenery described, and the atmosphere created has parallels in the symphony. Wilson's death at 39 cut short what would surely have been a distinguished career, although of unpredictable direction.

I wonder if the time has come for a new film on Scott's expedition, giving a more honest portrayal of the people and events. Maybe Vaughan Williams' music could again be used, including material composed for, but omitted in the actual film.

I have not yet had a chance to hear Maxwell Davies' *Antarctic Symphony*, also his 7th, and presumably some sort of tribute to its predecessor. Any reaction from members?

I was delighted to read that we shall soon be able to hear some of RVW's early works. And I strongly support Angus Duke's plea for the completion of Thomas the Rhymer and the cello concerto. K D Mitchell (JRVWS 20, p30) referred to Britten as the 2nd greatest (British) composer of the next generation".

Britten's contribution to English music-making, e.g. the Aldeburgh Festival (comparisons with the Leith Hill Festival tell us much about their respective presiding geniuses) is undoubtedly the most important by a major composer since RVW's. I much prefer Walton's music to Britten's – personal opinion apart, it is surely arguable that these are two composers of equal distinction.

My strong reaction to Mitchell's assertion is prompted by references often encountered, especially abroad to Britten as "the greatest English composer since Elgar" (or even "since Purcell" –thereby bypassing Delius and Holst as well as RVW. These are three great and profoundly original composers. The international opinion formers have a great influence on what gets performed and heard, and their assumptions need challenging from time to time.

Tony Noakes
Stanmore, Middx.

More on Peggy Glanville-Hicks

A bit of trivia which I thought interesting was mentioned in a radio programme yesterday on our ABC classic channel. Andrew Ford's "Dots on the Landscape" about Australian composers included interviews including one with Peggy Glanville-Hicks who, like most, went to study in England and was a student with RVW. Her interview included this exchange:

"I had written this tune which I played for RVW and he particularly liked it. He said, 'I will steal this tune, and be advised only to steal from unknowns, as from anyone well known it will be detected'. I said, 'I will steal it back one day'. The tune went into *Symphony no. 4 in F minor*. I took it back for the finale of my opera 'Transposed Heads'."

I had listened to her work previously and I could hear the VW sound and now this recount of her experiences gives the explanation as to why.

Cathy Bryant
New South Wales
Australia

Class and classical music

I'm very sorry if my comments in the February Journal were open to mis-interpretation and provoked an angry response from Stephen Friar of Sherborne in the June Journal. When I said in my article that "After all, classical music is not (I would sadly contend) listened to with much enthusiasm by those of the working class", I certainly

did not mean that classical music is an 'elitist' music to be listened to by an elitist clique of society. Conversely, I meant to say that at the moment classical music is listened to mainly by people who like it and who are sociologically termed as the middle class. A visit to any classical concert would I'm sure support this. Most are moreover attended by older people; the average age often I'm sure being over 50. It would be great if more young people or ordinary working class people plugged into classical music. Classical music is often seen by outsiders as stuffy and elitist, and as you may have seen in my previous articles: that's not an image I seek to enhance – far from it.

Finally perhaps I should add that I've got very wide musical tastes too; last year I attended a Tina Turner concert in the Millennium stadium Cardiff, (but perhaps I should stop before I delve more into one-down-man-ship!)

P.S. I think I feel an article comparing the music of RVW and Tina Turner coming on!

*Rob Furneaux
Yelverton
Devon*

Update on our Website

By now many of you will have visited the society's web site: www.rvwsociety.com and hopefully approve of the image it presents of the society. The refinement of the site continues. It is very much an on going task. As well as the design aspect we have had to overcome many technical issues. By the time this issue comes out we hope to offer secure on-line membership and renewal applications. If not, don't worry it soon will be! Minor tweaks and improvements will continue in the future although it is difficult at this stage to predict how much further. It would be wonderful to present the site in different languages as the Elgar Society do but unless we find a linguist, designer, web site builder, come-programmer and sorry the salary is nil, we don't have much chance!

In the last issue Robin Barber touched on the function of the web site. The site is not meant to be a tribute site, nor is it an academic resource. As Robin Barber explained, the function of the site is to announce concerts and to increase membership. It is a window for the world to look through at our organisation. In doing so we hope to further links and understanding of Vaughan Williams and his music. There are no plans as far as I am aware, to develop the web site into an easy to plunder academic resource. The society offers academic resources and information through the journal or through personal

contact. At present we dovetail nicely, through a reciprocal link with member Jarron Collis' site, which is extremely highly regarded. Anyone searching for detailed information on pieces of music will find it there. This isn't to say that our site should be barren of information. Far from it. but its function at present is to point to the right direction.

On March 6th, we installed a web counter. Up until this time we had no idea whether anybody was actually visiting the site. Any feedback coming only from David Betts and Robin Barber via emails etc. So it was encouraging to discover that the site WAS being visited. At the end of July we have had over 4000 visits with more than three quarters of them 'unique'. While these figures don't compare with the likes of the Paul McCartney (MACCA) web site, it is nevertheless exciting to see the interest in Vaughan Williams. Naturally many people are just browsing but we have visitors from all over Asia and Europe as well as more obviously the USA and Australia.. No other medium so selectively points potential members to our organisation. Occasionally we have highs. When Classic FM reported our site as 'excellent' the 'hits' went up significantly. A recent link from the BBC should help us further.

The News page is a resource which we would significantly like to develop. Please all members don't assume that we know everything that is going on. The web site relies on a network of just a handful of people. We have at times been almost caught out. We rely on your information. Even if you think something is trivial or we already know, please, please let us know. We want to become the first stop for information on Vaughan Williams. So for instance if you know that a statue is being erected in Dorking or that Larry Adler has recently died, do let us know. We would rather be emailed with that information a hundred times than be caught unawares.

Tadeusz Kasa

That Chord in Hodie

While reading Roy Douglas' excellent book *Working with Vaughan Williams*, published by The British Library, I was intrigued by a letter from RVW to Roy Douglas on page 61. It concerned *Hodie*, which was the piece that first introduced me to the wonderful music of Ralph Vaughan Williams. I have had the privilege of singing *Hodie* several times, as a choir member in the tenor section. Singing that music was a magnificent and enlightening experience that will stay with me always, and has helped shape my views and values as a musician and composer.

In the letter RVW wrote to Roy

Douglas...'I have altered "the chord that nobody loves" except in one or two places.' I was then very keen to find out about this "chord". So, I wrote to Roy Douglas and was very happy to get a letter back with an explanation. The following is an excerpt from that letter:

Dear Mr. Staneck,

Many thanks for your letter which gave me much pleasure, especially to know how much you enjoyed reading my book. It is always gratifying to an author to be told that his work has been appreciated, and you have obviously gained from the book just what I hoped to convey to readers: a picture of R.V.W. the "human being": as you say "a wonderful person to know".

The "chord that no one likes" in Hodie is one which appears frequently in various forms: it is what I would call a kind of "squashed whole-tone chord". Page 44, bar 10 of the vocal score: (G, B, C#, Eb) and lots of it on page 51, and on page 96 at figure 12.

*Roy Douglas
(1994)*

Page 44, bar 10 is from VI. Narration: Sopranos & Altos singing "glory to God" with prominent harp and celesta accompaniment.

Page 51 is from VIII. Narration: As before, Sopranos & Altos singing "glory to God" with prominent harp and celesta accompaniment.

Page 96 Figure 12 is from XVI. Epilogue: just after the chorus sings "the waves their oozy channel keep" where the brass enters and builds to a fortissimo passage with bells and timpani leading to the chorus' return with "Yea, truth and justice then".

This last example is one of my favourite moments in the Epilogue. Out of the dark "oozy channel" RVW's music propels us, with ever increasing momentum, triumphantly towards the "gates of her high palace hall". Certainly one of his most dramatic and grand endings, and very fitting for *Hodie*: a choral masterpiece.

I have become rather fond of "the chord that nobody loves".

*Frank James Staneck
Collingswood, New Jersey
U.S.A.*

Record Review

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

A London Symphony (original version, 1913)

BUTTERWORTH

The Banks of Green Willow

London Symphony Orchestra

Richard Hickox

Recorded 18-19 December 2000, All Saints' Church, Tooting

Chandos CHAN 9902 (67.42)

By now anyone interested in the music of Vaughan Williams will be aware of this splendid recording, even if they have not yet bought it and heard it for themselves. When the awards are made for the 'recordings of the year' in a few weeks' time, there is no question that this disc will feature strongly. It has already reached the top of the 'best seller' lists, and since it would probably not have been made without the existence of the Vaughan Williams Society, it is right to give credit where credit is due.

Although the original version of *A London Symphony* is a long piece, more than an hour in duration, there is still room on the disc for a highly appropriate additional item, *The Banks of Green Willow* by George Butterworth. It was Butterworth who encouraged Vaughan Williams to write the symphony, and he was rewarded with the dedication. This short item features as track 1 on the CD, and it is beautifully performed by Richard Hickox and the London Symphony Orchestra, setting the standard for the whole disc.

The ways in which Vaughan Williams revised *A London Symphony* are explained in the extensive and illuminating booklet notes by Stephen Connock and Michael Kennedy, and they scarcely need to be outlined in detail here. Suffice it to say that the various revisions meant cutting, and the composer always intended that the final version was the one which should be heard. The terms of contract have stipulated that this recording was an appropriate venture, but other performances should not take place.

In listening to the new recording, anyone who knows the familiar version at all well is bound to be surprised by the extent of the additional material, which comes in movements two, three and four. The first movement was unaffected by the revision process, and Hickox performs it with an admirable sense of drama and attention to orchestral detail. The warm acoustic of All Saints' Church, Tooting suits the VW string sound particularly well and the choice of tempi is absolutely right, allowing details to be heard while maintaining the music's dramatic momentum. The introductory phase is also wonderfully atmospheric, a particularly important consideration, given the fact that the symphony closes with this imagery in recollection.

The slow movement opens with the familiar cor

anglais tune, most evocatively performed with subtle accompanying textures. But as it proceeds, the music moves into evocative regions, including some fine melodic material which VW must have been reluctant to lose. But the cause of symphonic tension was certainly valid, and the passionate intensity of the revision's main climax is not experienced in the original version.

The differences are also felt in the third movement, and they come chiefly in the later stages. The LSO plays this tricky rhythmic music very well indeed, and because the main agenda is so sparkling and vital, the contrasting trio material makes a strong impression. VW referred to aspects of this movement as 'horrible modern music - awful stuff' (he would speak in similar terms of the Fourth Symphony), and it is interesting to consider this in relation to 1913, the year of composition. The Scherzo was pointedly given the subtitle 'Nocturne', a very particular description which calls to mind the music of another symphonist who called Scherzo movements 'Nachtmusik': Gustav Mahler, and Mahler's Seventh Symphony, in which this description is used, was introduced to London by Henry Wood in 1913. Was Vaughan Williams there? Is all this a coincidence? It makes it very tempting to put forward a hypothesis.

The finale has many changes from the revised version, including a remarkable theme which VW called 'a bad hymn tune', which disappeared completely from view. Since this material seems almost independent of the main symphonic thrust, its excision is easy to understand, even if it is an appealing invention in its own right. The movement is notoriously difficult to bring off, not least because its changes of direction have to be reconciled with the larger symphonic agenda, and - as ever in a large symphony - that agenda includes the need to bring the whole work, not just the individual movement, to a conclusion. The glorious march theme has to my ears sounded more noble than Hickox's phrasing allows here, though my misgiving was soon swept away as the symphonic progression continued. The drama is intensified by the revision process, but the major difference is found in the later stages. For the original epilogue is much more extensive, some seven minutes in duration, with much reliance on the atmospheric recollection of familiar material. The effect is wholly convincing, both atmospherically and symphonically.

Vaughan Williams was a visionary symphonist, who was never content to follow a conventional path if his imagination led him elsewhere. Had he not revised *A London Symphony*, he would still have left us a wonderful score, but surely one which would have been performed less frequently by virtue of its more extensive performing time. These issues lie at the heart of the excellent documentation provided in the thorough booklet notes by Stephen Connock and Michael Kennedy. I do feel that the booklet suffers from the blight of being 'over-designed', printed in white on a patterned blue background, and consequently the notes are more difficult to read than they should be.

What is wrong with black on white, I wonder; or do Chandos believe the medium is more important than the message?

This excellent new recording is clearly an important document, which enhances our understanding of one of the greatest of symphonic composers. And it is hugely rewarding as a musical experience in its own right. While the familiar revised version will always maintain the repertory position which the composer intended, knowing the original can only enhance our awareness of the music's greatness.

Terry Barfoot

Rune of Hospitality

Four Last Songs, Four Poems of Fredegond Shove, Silent Noon, Mark Chambers (counter-tenor), David Mason (piano), The Caractacus String Quartet on Deux-Elles DXL 1012 (full price with Rubbra Two Sonnets of William Alabaster, Preludes 1-8, The Mystery, Rosa Mundi, Ave Maria Gratia Pletia, Orpheus with his lute, Rune of Hospitality, A Duan of Barra, Three Psalms)

An enterprising new CD from Deux-Elles, a company I have not come across before now. Mark Chambers is a young counter-tenor who has studied with Michael Chance and James Bowman. He has a special interest in 20th century song and on the evidence of this CD he has a very bright future indeed.

The counter-tenor adds an even more remote tone to the sparse *Four Last Songs*. Something of the valedictory warmth of *Tired, or Hands, Eyes and Heart*, is missing here. The *Four Poems of Fredegond Shove* are similarly rather thin-lipped.

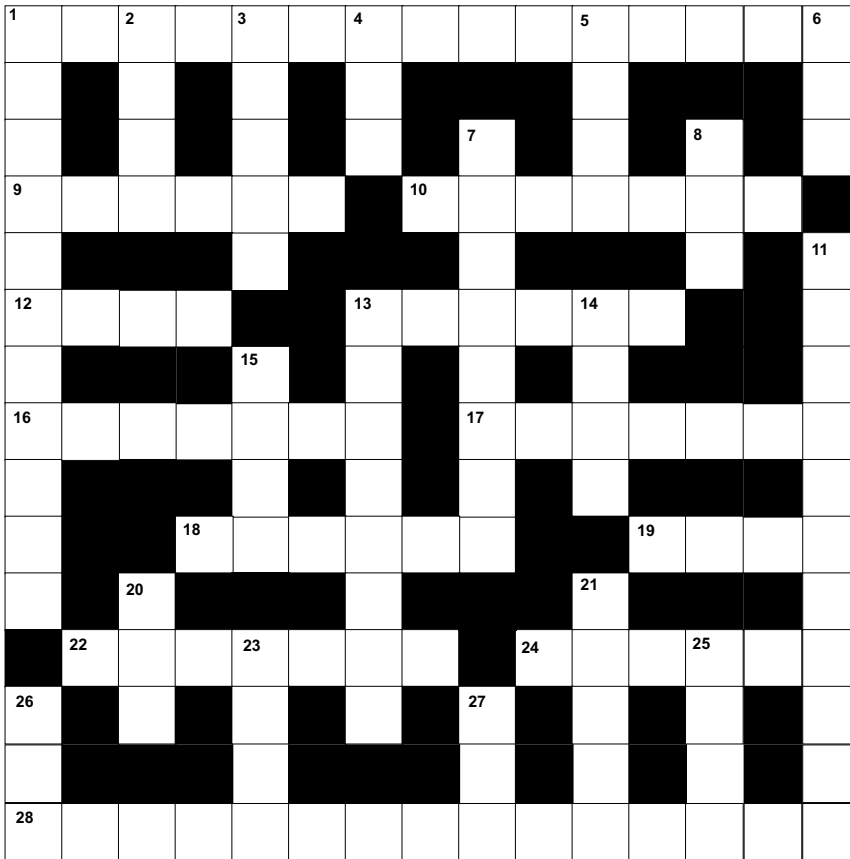
The majority of music on this CD of 77 minutes duration is by Edmund Rubbra, ranging from his earliest published song, *Rosa Mundi*, of 1921 to the 1955 settings of the metaphysical poet William Alabaster. Rubbra's first significant work for solo piano, the *Eight Preludes*, provides welcome contrast between songs which can lack variety or melodic distinctness. Try as I do, I cannot warm to Rubbra's music which achieves considerable intensity without being memorable. The emphasis on a complex contrapuntal texture can be unyielding. How refreshing to come across *Silent Noon* amidst all this neoclassical gloom!

Only recommended to those who respond to Rubbra's inward looking style or who want to hear a promising counter-tenor in RVW's songs. Excellent notes and full texts of the songs, even if permission from Albion Music Limited should have been sought for the reproduction of Ursula Vaughan Williams' poems.

Stephen Connock

(Editor's Note: Perhaps a member will contribute a feature on Rubbra to our *Music you might like* series)

RVW Crossword No. 8 by Michael Gainsford



Across:

1. O! You nympho lands! (*anag*), second of the nine (1,6,8)
9. RVW's widow (6)
10. RVW set two of these, one from Yorkshire, one from Gloucestershire (7)
12. F minor symphony's number (4)
13. Agonising as applied to agricultural implement, in folk song collected in East Horndon by RVW (6)
16. There are two settings dealing with this chap with his lute. (7)
17. Possible author of words set in *Merciless Beauty* (7)
18. Sanguinary as applied to horticulturalist from a Canadian province (folk song 1934) (6)
19. No doubt figured in the *March past of the Kitchen Utensils* (4)
22. *Hodie* (4,3)
24. Where the pretty maid was bound when accosted by The Layer (6)
28. First performed at the Coronation of the present Queen (3,3,9)

Down:

1. Greeting to the helianthus in the seventh Blake Song (2,9)
2. VW works don't have these numbers (4)
3. A cleaner comes every 24 hours (5)
4. Age of Shove's Ghost (3)
5. These would have been in the *March past* as well! (4)
6. Down in the forest (Derbyshire carol set in 1919) (3)
7. Anglo-Irish Elizabeth, a pupil of RVW (8)
8. E minor symphony's number (3)
11. Last set of variations of *Household Music* (11)
13. Third of the nine (8)
14. Alan the dedicatee of *Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn Tunes* (4)
15. Two holy ones appear in *Twelve Traditional Carols from Herefordshire* (4)
20. Initials of the man who arranged *On Christmas Night for female voices* (1, 1, 1)
21. This voice enters at the end of *Sancta Civitas* (5)
23. Set me as this on thy heart (*Flos Campi*) (4)
25. When I am this, my dearest (song) (4)
26. Foxy, one of RVW's favourites (3)
27. *In the *** Country* (1904) (3)

Some Future Performances

The RVW Society's website, www.rvwsociety.com carries full details of future performances. The following concerts are noteworthy:

Leeds Town Hall

Toward the Unknown Region
and *A Sea Symphony*,
RLPO/Hughes
on 3 November 2001
(0113 224 3801/2)

Symphony Hall, Birmingham

A Sea Symphony
CBSO/Robinson
on October 27 2001
Job CBSO/Oramo
on 5 and 6 December 2001
(0121 780 3333)

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<i>The collected poems of Ursula Vaughan Williams</i>	£15.00 plus £1.65
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<i>Vaughan Williams in perspective</i> (edited by Lewis Foreman)	£20.00 plus £1.75
125 th anniversary set of six cards with watercolour views of VW's houses by Bridget Duckfield (blank for own message)	£ 5.00 plus 50p
<i>Vision of Albion</i> poster, with Blake imagery (a superb memento of the 125 th anniversary) (measures 28" x 23")	£10.00 plus £2.00
<i>RVW - A full discography</i> by Stephen Connock (75 pages, 1995)	£10.00 plus 65p
<i>RVW: A Bibliography</i> by Graham Muncy and Robin Barber	£ 6.00 plus 50p
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