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EDITOR

Stephen Connock

Paradise Remembered

The RVW Society is delighted and honoured to be able to publish Ursula Vaughan Williams's autobiography *Paradise Remembered*. The 225-page book was launched at a celebratory party held at Cecil Sharp House on Saturday 23 March 2002. Over 80 of Ursula's friends and family attended, including her sister Rosemary, Simona Pakenham, Eva Hornstein and Michael and Joyce Kennedy.

Vivid recollections

Lord Armstrong, son of the composer Sir Thomas Armstrong, congratulated Ursula on writing an autobiography which he found highly evocative,

wonderful times with Ralph and Ursula, of musical evenings, of RVW premières and of friends long gone. Lord Armstrong added that the book was an ideal accompaniment to Ursula's biography of her husband, full of insight and affection.

Ralph and Ursula

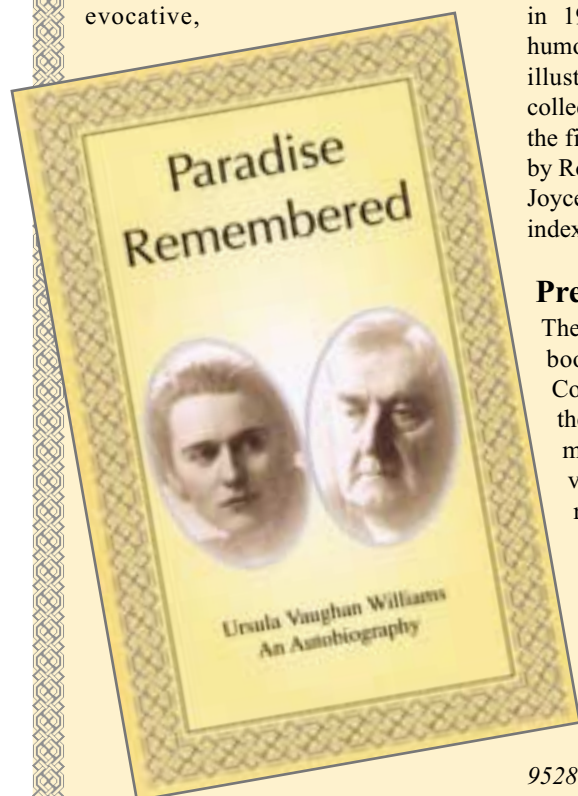
Ursula completed the autobiography in 1972. The early chapters of the book deal with her army life, marriage to Captain Michael Wood and the onset of war. Her life changed totally after meeting Ralph Vaughan Williams in 1938. Their friendship, close artistic collaboration and subsequent marriage in 1953 are described with candour, humour and affection. There are 40 illustrations from Ursula's extensive collection, many appearing in print for the first time. The book has been edited by Roger Buckley, with the assistance of Joyce Kennedy, who also compiled the index.

Press launch

The Society held a press launch for the book on Monday 15 April. Considerable interest was shown by the national press, as well as by the monthly music magazines. We all very much hope that national reviews will boost circulation of a book which celebrates Ursula's dedication to two husbands, as well as her own remarkable achievements as poet, librettist and writer.

Paradise Remembered (ISBN 0-9528706-3-0) is priced at £20.00 plus £1.75 postage and packing and is available from Stephen Connock at his London address.

taking him back most vividly to the atmosphere of the 1940s and 1950s. It reminded him of



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Conducting RVW

by Michael Kennedy

Today we live with music all around us. It is available for 24 hours a day on the radio. We can have a vast range of works from the earliest of early music to the most recent avant-garde experiment on our shelves as CDs or on LPs or on tape. There are up to 50 different recordings of certain individual works. A young composer today can expect to have his or her work performed, broadcast and perhaps recorded within a short period of time. True, it is not always easy, but subsidies and grants exist to smooth the path to performance. All this would have seemed unimaginable to the young composer in the year 1902. Something else was very different when Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst and others were trying to establish themselves as composers: there were scarcely any professional British conductors and, come to that, few British orchestras. The only full-time professional orchestra in Britain for the last half of the 19th century was the Hallé in Manchester, which supplied players also for the Liverpool Philharmonic and the Birmingham and other festivals. In London a pool of free-lance players supplied the personnel of the Queen's Hall Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Society's orchestra, Covent Garden's orchestra and some others. The London Symphony Orchestra was not formed until 1904. The London Philharmonic and BBC Symphony Orchestras did not exist until the 1930s, the Royal Philharmonic and Philharmonia until the 1940s. The Hallé was founded by a German émigré who conducted it for 37 years and was followed in 1899 by the Austro-Hungarian Hans Richter. In the interregnum between Sir Charles Hallé's death and Richter's arrival, the conductor was Frederic Cowen, better known as a composer. Richter had an orchestra (free-lance again) which had given an annual series of concerts in London and on tour since 1877. He was also conductor of the Birmingham Festival. There and at Leeds and the Three Choirs, new works were often conducted by their composers, in the case of home-grown works by Sullivan, Parry, Stanford and Mackenzie, or by cathedral organists.

But by 1900 there were signs of change. In 1896 Bournemouth had begun a weekly series of symphony concerts conducted by the 28-year-old Dan Godfrey. The previous year Robert Newman promoted a new series of Promenade Concerts at the Queen's Hall in London and engaged Henry J. Wood, then 26, to conduct them. Wood in 1889 had been a conductor with a touring opera company and three years later (with the Carl Rosa) conducted the first performance in England of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*. Wood could thus lay claim to being the first English professional conductor to learn his job in the time-honoured continental tradition of cutting his teeth on opera. Both these musicians, as will be seen, were to be early champions of Vaughan Williams, who was 25 before he essayed an orchestral work. This was the *Serenade in A minor* of 1898, described by the composer's teacher Stanford as "a most poetical and remarkable piece of work". Yet Stanford appears to have abandoned the piece after three rehearsals at the Royal College of Music and the score was sent to August Manns, conductor of the Crystal Palace concerts, with no result. However, it was accepted by Dan Godfrey at Bournemouth, where it was performed in the Winter Gardens on 4 April 1901. But this was not the first performance of a Vaughan Williams orchestral work. The distinction of conducting that event went to Stanford, with the *Heroic Elegy and Triumphal Epilogue* (1901-2) at the RCM on 5 March 1901. This work, later withdrawn, earned high praise from Vaughan Williams's close and candid friend Gustav Holst.

Godfrey conducted the *Bucolic Suite*, another withdrawn work, in Bournemouth on 10 March 1902, but no one else seems to have taken it up. A gap of four years followed during which Vaughan Williams was busily engaged in collecting folk-songs and editing the music for the new *English Hymnal* but he continued to compose. He began a Whitman setting which was eventually to become *A Sea Symphony* and he made use of the fruits of his folk-song expeditions around King's Lynn in 1905 to compose three *Norfolk Rhapsodies*. His original plan, soon abandoned, was for a *Norfolk Symphony*. The first *Norfolk Rhapsody* was given its

first performance on 23 August 1906 at a Queen's Hall Promenade concert conducted by Henry J. Wood. Thus Godfrey and Wood were the first full-time professional British conductors to champion Vaughan Williams's music. No more first performances went Godfrey's way, but he was always quick to include a new Vaughan Williams work in his Bournemouth programmes. His performance of *A London Symphony* in 1915 was the last but one to be given of the 1913 version until Richard Hickox conducted it in 2001 for the recent Chandos recording. He also made the first recordings of it with the London Symphony Orchestra for Columbia in 1926, using the first revised score which still includes some of the music that was eventually deleted and not heard again - or only once, as will be seen - until the Hickox recording.

Henry Wood also remained a lifelong propagator of Vaughan Williams's works and conducted some significant premières. The next after the *Norfolk Rhapsody* was in 1910 when, again at a Queen's Hall Prom on 1 September, he conducted the *Fantasia on English Folk-Song*, its only performance. Nothing of this score remains, so presumably the composer was thoroughly dissatisfied with it, although he wrote to Harold Child, librettist of *Hugh the Drover*, that the slow middle section was "a sort of study for what I should like my love scene, Act 2, to be like". Tantalising!

Wood championed *A London Symphony* and his recording of it, made for Decca in April 1936 and now available on CD on Dutton CDAX 8004, gives us the flavour of his interpretation. He uses the final revised version of the score but omits a repeat of the *scherzo*. He also recorded *The Wasps* overture and the *Fantasia on Greensleeves* and, most famously, the *Serenade to Music*, written in 1938 to mark his golden jubilee and first performed (sandwiched between Bax and Wagner) on 5 October 1938 by the 16 soloists whose initials Vaughan Williams inscribed in the score. The music itself is an incomparable tribute to a conductor but Vaughan Williams added a verbal one: "*I first heard of Henry Wood when I was a lad fresh from college. I met a slightly older friend who said to me: 'I have just been to a concert at Queen's Hall - that young fellow Wood did very well...' Two words give us the clue to his power; they are Method and Vitality - method in all the details of preparation, vitality in every moment of performance... Orchestral virtuosity is now a commonplace in this country and we are apt to forget to whom we owe it*".



Sir Henry Wood

The celebrated recording of the *Serenade* was made on 15 October, ten days after the première, and it was Wood who then suggested - ill-advisedly, in my opinion - that Vaughan Williams should make a purely orchestral version. He conducted its first performance on 10 February 1940. He was also offered the first performance of the *Fifth Symphony* on 24 June 1943 but the correspondence between Vaughan Williams and Wood suggests that the composer had agreed to conduct to take some pressure off Wood. VW would have had to conduct in any case, because Wood was ill on the day. Wood was also offered the first performance of the *Oboe Concerto* at a Prom on 5 July 1944 but the flying-bomb attacks on London forced cancellation of the concerts. Wood's other major VW première had been on 10 October 1925 when he conducted *Flos Campi*



Cover for EP 45 rpm recording of *Serenade to Music*, conducted by Sir Henry Wood

with Lionel Tertis the solo violist. One wonders what he made - with very little rehearsal - of this exotic and in some ways mystifying work. He was a sound and competent rather than a great - though exceedingly enterprising and catholic - conductor, as his *London Symphony* recording testifies.

But let us return to the first decade of the 20th century. Two orchestral pieces by Vaughan Williams, composed between 1904 and 1907 as *Two Impressions*, were *Harnham Down* and *Boldre Wood*. The first, which still exists, had an inscription at the head of the score from Arnold's *The Scholar Gypsy*, one of the early indications of Vaughan Williams's obsession with the poem which formed the basis of his *Oxford Elegy*. The second, no longer extant, was prefaced by a George Meredith quotation. Both were performed in the Queen's Hall on 12 November 1907 by the New Symphony Orchestra conducted by the Austrian Emil von Reznicek, remembered today as the composer of the opera *Donna Diana* (and that only by its overture). Full marks to him for taking on and learning two new works by a relatively unknown composer. Three months before beginning *Harnham Down*, Vaughan Williams had completed his first version of his symphonic impression *In the Fen Country* (it was to be revised twice in 1905 and again in 1935). This had its first performance in Queen's Hall on 22 February 1909 when Thomas Beecham conducted The Beecham Orchestra, which he had just founded (having founded the New Symphony Orchestra in 1905). Although he had conducted the *Hallé* in his home town of St Helens in 1899, Beecham fully erupted on to the scene in about 1905, backed by his father, the wealthy industrialist Sir Joseph Beecham.

We do not know what Beecham made of *In the Fen Country*, nor what Vaughan Williams thought of what he made of it, but his association with VW's music was decidedly ambivalent (if ambivalence can be decided). The only other première he conducted was of the *Flourish for a Coronation* on 1 April 1937 at a Royal Philharmonic Society concert. I doubt if the programme was Beecham's choice, for it ended with Elgar's *First Symphony*, a work that Beecham disliked and in 1909 had performed with savage cuts, much to the composer's ire. As far as I can discover, he conducted only two of the VW symphonies, *London* and *Pastoral*. The former he conducted several times, including a 1936 performance in New York and at a RPS concert on 22 February 1934, the eve of Elgar's death, and I imagine he



Sir Thomas Beecham

must have done it very well indeed. The *Pastoral* was in a 1931 Leeds Festival programme and is the subject of a celebrated anecdote, probably true. As the soprano voice died away at the end at the rehearsal, Beecham went on beating time. "Sir Thomas, it's finished", the leader stage-whispered. "Thank God! The city life for me". A Beecham performance of the *Eighth* would have been an enticing prospect and it is generally agreed that he conducted a memorable performance of *Hugh the Drover* at the Royal College of Music in June 1933. Margaret Ritchie, who sang Mary, told me it was the best performance of this opera she ever heard. It is perhaps surprising that Beecham, the great interpreter of such Delius works as *Brigg Fair*, *In a Summer Garden* and *Song of the High Hills*, should have had such difficulty with *A Pastoral Symphony*. Not lush enough, I suppose. Perhaps the Delius connection affected his choice of *In the Fen Country* or, since it was the first concert of a new orchestra, perhaps he just wanted to include a new work by a new British composer. But he conducted it again as late as December, 1948

Notwithstanding *The Wasps*, the *Tallis Fantasia* and *A Sea Symphony*, Vaughan Williams's first really ambitious wholly orchestral work was *A London Symphony* and it was typical of him that he entrusted this important piece, nearly an hour long in its original version, to the 25-year-old Geoffrey Toye, whose previous experience had been only with London theatre orchestras. Toye's brother Francis, a composer before he became a critic, was a friend of Vaughan Williams and of George Butterworth. Geoffrey Toye's conducting career after the war never really developed, although he made a famous recording of Delius's *In a Summer Garden*. He devoted himself mainly to the D'Oyly Carte company and ballet. *A London Symphony* has been the work to attract most conductors to VW's music. Albert Coates conducted the first performance of its final revised version (bar a few tinkering) in May 1920, but is not heard of again in connection with VW until the first performance in Huddersfield in October 1936 of *Dona Nobis Pacem*. Another (besides Wood) to take up the symphony after 1920 was the young Eugene Goossens. He was a much under-rated VW interpreter and during his time in Cincinnati and Sydney included several of the symphonies and other works in his programmes. His Cincinnati recording of the *London* is an example of how good he was and it was of special interest until the Hickox recording came out because it contained passages which were cut in the final revision (presumably the new parts had not been supplied to American orchestras).



Sir Adrian Boult discusses a technical point with RVW

But of course the conductor most closely linked to *A London Symphony* was Adrian Boult. He conducted it in London, during a zeppelin raid, on 18 February 1918, with the London Symphony Orchestra. This was its second London performance and the last in public of the original version. It was such a success that Boult, who was then 29, decided to repeat it a month later. The composer had attended the performance and, in the intervening month, made cuts in the second and fourth movements. The third movement was cut for Coates's performance. Thus began the long Boult-VW



Sir Adrian Boult

association which was to last for the next 40 years of the composer's lifetime and beyond. He was to conduct the first performances of *The Lark Ascending* (1921), *A Pastoral Symphony* (1922), the *Piano Concerto* (1933), *Fourth Symphony* (1935), *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* (1939), *Thanksgiving for Victory* (1945), *Sixth Symphony* (1948), *Partita* (1948), *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* (1950), *Concerto Grosso* (1950), *The Sons of Light* (1951), and many London first performances such as *Five Tudor Portraits* (1937). He recorded all the nine symphonies twice.

Boult's services to Vaughan Williams's music are unequalled by anyone else and extend to his championship of the morality *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the concert-hall and recording studio. Although other conductors were and are finer interpreters of certain individual works, Boult's over-riding virtues of honesty, fidelity to the score and an innate sensitivity to the music's structure ensure that his interpretations stand the test of time. The finest tribute to him came from RVW himself at the time of the first performance of the *Fourth Symphony* on 10 April 1935. "Adrian created the slow movement", he said. "I didn't know how it should go, but he did".

Another young conductor devoted to Vaughan Williams's works was Malcolm Sargent. From the age of 28 in 1923 Sargent was on the Royal College of Music staff as a teacher of conducting and the following year he joined the conducting roster of the British National Opera Company which had been founded late in 1921 after Beecham's opera company had collapsed financially. Sargent was allocated the first professional performance of *Hugh the Drover* on 14 July 1924, three days after five "private dress rehearsals" had been given under S. P. Waddington at the RCM with a student cast. The BNOC performance was under-rehearsed and from all points of view a shambles, but Sargent's energy and drive were phenomenal and, according to RVW, he "saved the opera from disaster every few bars and pulled the chestnuts out of the fire in a miraculous way". Later that year he recorded some extracts. In 1925 he conducted *A Pastoral*



Sir Malcolm Sargent

Symphony at a RPS concert and, no doubt as some reward for what he had done for *Hugh*, conducted the first four performances of *Sir John in Love* at the RCM in March 1929. In 1934 he conducted the first performance of the *Suite for Viola*, the première of *Riders to the Sea* at the RCM in November 1937, the first public London performance of *Dona Nobis Pacem* in 1938, the first performance of the *Oboe Concerto* in 1944 in Liverpool (the Proms première having fallen through, as related above), the first London (Proms) performance of the *Romance for Harmonica* in 1952, the first (poor) London performance of *Hodie* in 1955 and the first (also poor) performance of the *Ninth Symphony* on 2 April 1958. That is a substantial body of achievement on behalf of one composer and it takes no account of the times he conducted most of the symphonies, the *Tallis Fantasia*, *The Lark Ascending* and other works. So it is more than a little surprising that he is rarely remembered among the outstanding VW conductors. This is principally because he has left very few recordings of this music, none of the symphonies and not much else. It is also because he was an erratic and wayward conductor, sometimes dazzlingly brilliant and often (usually when a choir was involved) inspired. But he relied too heavily on "pulling chestnuts out of the fire" when there had been too little rehearsal and, particularly in his later years, he was increasingly less able to do so. He was also prone to knowing better than the composer how a work should be scored. He nagged VW, successfully as it happened, to add an extra tune to the scherzo of the *Sixth Symphony* (he always insisted, with what authority I

do not know, that "he knew" this movement depicted the bombing of the Café de Paris when Ken "Snakehips" Johnson and his West Indian Dance Orchestra and many of the dancers were killed) and he tried a gimmicky dodge with muted horns instead of the wind machine in *Sinfonia Antartica*. (He messed about with Walton's scores, too, to the composer's fury.) Perhaps because of rehearsal conditions for London orchestras and therefore no fault of Sargent's, the first performance of the *Ninth Symphony* was disastrously under-prepared. I remember attending the run-through before the last Festival Hall rehearsal at which it was obvious the orchestra was sight-reading. VW came away quite distressed. He was always nervous before a first performance and would threaten to tear up the score. He had also been "spoiled" in the case of *Antartica* and the *Eighth Symphony* in that both first performances were the results of weeks of thorough rehearsal. After the run-through of the *Ninth*, he made some cuts in the finale which, I remain convinced, were not really necessary and which he may not have considered if he had not been unnerved.



Pye advert for the new Barbirolli recording of the *Eighth Symphony* (August 1956)

John Barbirolli's first Vaughan Williams première was on 13 March 1930 when the *Fantasia on Sussex Folk Tunes* was played at a RPS concert with Casals as soloist. After this performance VW withdrew the work, which was recorded after his death. It was at this concert that Vaughan Williams was presented with the Gold Medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society by Arthur Bliss. When I was writing my book on VW's music I asked Sir John about the occasion, but he had no recollection of it. Before going to New York in 1936, Barbirolli conducted relatively little VW although he included *Job* (cut) in one of his Scottish Orchestra programmes and he conducted it (complete) in New York (although never with the Hallé). He also conducted *A Pastoral Symphony* twice in New York (using a tonor soloist) and once in Manchester. I do not think he ever conducted *A Sea Symphony* although he prepared the performances that RVW conducted in Sheffield and Manchester. His arrival in Manchester in June 1943 coincided with the first performance of the *Fifth Symphony* and he took it at once into his repertory, making the first (and in some ways still the best) recording of it within a year. But it was his performance of the *Sixth Symphony* that brought him close to the composer, who admired it very much, and led to his being awarded the first performance of *Antartica* in January 1953 and of the *Eighth Symphony* in 1956. Barbirolli included all six symphonies (the complete cycle at the time) in the 1951-2 Hallé season (VW conducted the *Sea*) and conducted the first performance of the *Tuba Concerto* with the LSO in June 1954. He recorded *A London Symphony* twice, the *Fifth* twice and Nos. 7 and 8. He also recorded the *Tallis Fantasia* twice, his last version with the Sinfonia of London being regarded by many as the finest in

existence. Some leading critics of the 1950s regarded Barbirolli's interpretations of Vaughan Williams as too free and emotional, too colourful and impassioned, but this was what RVW himself liked about them and led him to dub his friend "Glorious John". Barbirolli regarded Vaughan Williams as a great composer, not just a great English composer, and he took his symphonies to Berlin, Houston and other big musical cities of Europe and the United States.

The above were the leading VW conductors of his lifetime, but there were others who deserve to be remembered. Basil Cameron, for example, who conducted the first London public performance of *Job* in 1931 and was a fine exponent of the *Fifth Symphony* in particular, as was Ian Whyte of the BBC Scottish Orchestra. Clarence Raybould was a regular conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra for broadcast concerts in Boult's régime and could be relied on for a trustworthy account. Nor should we forget the *Job* of George Weldon. But the outstanding figure in this secondary group was Boyd Neel whose Decca yellow-label recordings of the *Violin Concerto* and *The Lark Ascending*, both with Frederick Grinke as soloist, were ear-openers for a whole generation of listeners in the late 1930s and the 1940s. His 1936 recording of the *Tallis Fantasia*, supervised by the composer, was the first to be made, I believe, although the HMV red-label recording under Boult must have been not far behind.



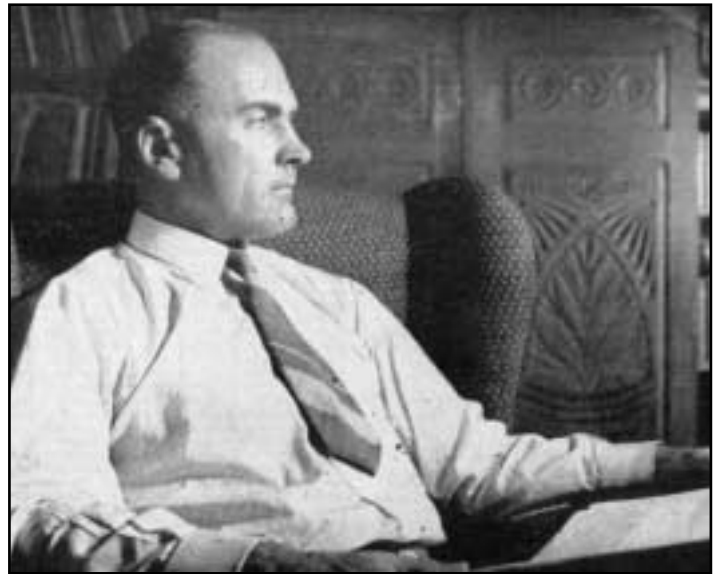
George Weldon

Vaughan Williams was always willing to entrust his works, often first performances, to young unknown or rising conductors. Thus Arthur Bliss conducted *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* at its première in July 1922, Anthony Bernard the *Violin Concerto* in 1925 and the suite from *On Christmas Night* in 1929, Leonard Hancock *The Pilgrim's Progress* in 1951, John Churchill the first London performance of *An Oxford Elegy* in 1953, and Richard Austin *Epithalamion* in 1957. He would always trust "the man on the spot", for example his teacher Charles Wood for *The Wasps* at Cambridge in 1909, Boris Ord for *Old King Cole* at Cambridge in 1923, C. B. Rootham at Cambridge for *The Poisoned Kiss* in 1936, Sir Hugh Allen for *Sancta Civitas* at Oxford in 1926 (and the first London performance of *A Sea Symphony* in 1913) and Edgar Cook for the *Three Choral Hymns* at Southwark Cathedral in 1930.

But what of the composer himself, a very experienced conductor (50 years at the Leith Hill Festival, seven years with the Bach Choir and conductor of smaller groups) and yet generally regarded as a bad conductor? Technically that may have been true, though not everyone will be convinced that is fair. Anyone who heard him conduct *A London Symphony* (and surely a BBC recording must exist), the *Five Tudor Portraits*, the *Pastoral Symphony*, the *Tallis Fantasia*, *The Lark Ascending*, *A Sea Symphony* and *Hodie* will agree that these were among the finest, if not the finest, they heard. His recording of the *Fourth Symphony* holds its place as the most exciting of all - yet he was never coaxed back into the recording studio. Admittedly he would have needed a lot of persuading, but surely some gramophone executive should have realised the historical importance of recording him in the *Sea*, *London* and *Tallis*!

The list of first performances of his own works that he conducted is impressive, beginning with the *Norfolk Rhapsodies Nos. 2 and 3* in 1907, *Toward the Unknown Region* at Leeds in the same year and *A Sea Symphony* there in 1910, the *Tallis Fantasia* at Gloucester in 1910 and London in 1913, the *Five Mystical Songs* at Worcester in 1911, the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* at Hereford in 1912 and London in 1913, the *Wasps Suite* in 1912, *Sancta Civitas* at its first London performance in 1926, the *Benedicite*, *Hundredth Psalm* and *Three Choral Hymns* at Dorking in 1930, *Job* at Norwich in 1930 and on the BBC in 1931, the

Magnificat at Worcester in 1932, *The Running Set* in 1934, the *Five Tudor Portraits* at Norwich in 1936, *The Poisoned Kiss* (first London performance) in 1936, the first broadcast performance of *Dona Nobis Pacem* in 1936, the *Fifth Symphony* in 1943, the *Flemish Farm* suite in 1945, the first public performance of the *Partita* in 1948, the *Prelude on an Old Carol Tune* at King's Lynn in 1953 and *Hodie* in 1954. Forty-seven years, and of course there were many other performances which were not "firsts".



Boyd Neel

This article has dealt with those conductors who worked in this country during the composer's lifetime. On a future occasion, one could look at his overseas interpreters such as Stokowski, Bernstein, Koussevitzky, Mitropoulos, Previn and Slatkin. Then there are his leading post-1958 interpreters, Richard Hickox, Sir Andrew Davis and Bernard Haitink, and perhaps one might inquire why such leading conductors as Sir Simon Rattle and Sir Colin Davis have, on the whole, left Vaughan Williams out of their mainstream repertoire.



Sir Adrian Boult

Glory, Pity and Anger

British conductors in the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams

by William Hedley

Philip Heseltine, otherwise known as the composer Peter Warlock, said it was “like a cow looking over a gate.” Constant Lambert, in his book *Music Ho!* wrote as follows: “...it is no exaggeration to say that the creation of a particular type of grey, reflective, English-landscape mood has outweighed the exigencies of symphonic form.” And then Sir Thomas Beecham, in a bon mot I have been unable to corroborate, is said to have declared “A city life for me!”

I wonder to what extent these comments on *A Pastoral Symphony* were related to the nature of the earliest performances, beginning with the première, conducted by Boult in 1922? And how would those same people react today listening to Sir Roger Norrington’s reading of the work?

Decca has issued five symphonies under Sir Roger’s direction, plus the *Serenade to Music* and the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. All these works were recorded within a short space of time, but worryingly the most recent recordings took place as long ago as December 1997. I do hope this doesn’t mean that the projected cycle has fallen foul of the accountants, and urge all members to go out and buy these discs in an effort to convince those who make the decisions to continue.

These readings encourage us to look in a new way at music we think we know. The fact that this new way may not please everybody is relatively unimportant. Critical opinion has been divided on the merits of Haitink’s cycle too, but in the case of Norrington’s, some sectors of musical opinion seem to want us to think that his readings are dull. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I must admit to some surprise when I saw the Vaughan Williams symphonies begin to appear in Sir Roger’s discography. I have a rather lukewarm attitude to the period performance movement – reprehensible, perhaps, but true – and it was only as the conductor’s sphere of activity began to advance in time, even as far as Berlioz, that I became more interested in his work. (There is, in my defence, an awful lot of music available to listen to.) Even then, I would never have thought of him as a Vaughan Williams conductor. Yet in a touchingly honest introduction which appears in the booklets accompanying all these RVW discs, he explains that he has loved the music all his life, and that recording the symphonies has been a long-held wish. He refers to the composer as “...the greatest man I am ever likely to meet” and, most interestingly for us, sets out his aims in recording these works, thoughts which are interesting enough to quote at length and in which all the italics are mine: “I want to portray a major international figure of twentieth-century music. I want to hear a marvellously individual composer, who just happened to be English: a composer who chose his tonalities as freely as Debussy and Ravel, his unique rhythms as deftly as Stravinsky and Bartók. I want to celebrate a master who may have worn tweed and enjoyed cream buns...but whose soul was ablaze with glory, pity and anger. I want to do honour to a man whose sense of social duty made him seek to write music for everybody.”

Norrington’s strategy in trying to communicate these ideas in performance seems to be based above all on clarity. There is no wash of sound anywhere in these readings. Ensemble is impeccable, tuning likewise, and control of orchestral balance is so masterly that everything can be heard. On this last point, sometimes we hear things we hadn’t heard before, sometimes surprising things, but there they are in the score. This is not to say that Norrington is self-effacing. On the contrary, there are a number of rather idiosyncratic touches to these readings, particularly in respect of tempo, but they rarely seem wilful; of a piece, rather, with the reading as a whole and as such, even when we may not like them, convincing.

Let’s look at the recording of the *Pastoral Symphony* as an example. The very opening is a case in point: the tempo seems very rapid at first, but those quavers are marked *Molto moderato*, crotchet=80. Now metronome markings are not always helpful, the composer himself regularly ignored them and they are frequently ignored in recordings made in the composer’s presence, but they are there, and examination of them is instructive. Norrington is at crotchet=84, as near as makes no difference to the composer’s marking, and how wonderfully he eases back the tempo at the arrival of the solo violin, marked *Poco tranquillo*. The control of texture in these opening pages is remarkable: solo violin, horn and oboe perfectly balanced; tutti violins

at their first entry, so right, *pp cantabile* (singing) with just the right mix of rapture and yearning. In the second movement, when the main theme begins (at B in the miniature score: is there anywhere any sadder music than this?) we have an excellent example of Norrington dissecting Vaughan Williams’s orchestral writing. The solo viola is the constant factor, joined at various moments and for varying lengths of time, by the first flute, a bassoon, solo violin, solo cello, oboe. Scrupulous attention is paid to all these duets to bring out as much as possible the very particular instrumental colours produced by them. And here we come to the major difficulty involved in this kind of discussion, because of course every conductor does this – it’s his duty. All the same, the orchestral colour seems more carefully controlled by Norrington than by almost any other conductor. The orchestral writing seems reduced to its essentials, and this applies even in more densely scored passages such as the third movement where again, every strand seems audible. (Part of this, it must be said, is also thanks to the truly outstanding recording quality delivered by the Decca team.) And the fleet-footed coda demonstrates another Norrington characteristic, rhythmic precision and perfect control of ensemble. I’m trying to show here that Norrington’s point of departure seems to be to render Vaughan Williams’s orchestral writing as truly as possible. Again, I’m aware that even making this observation is fraught with difficulty, if only because every other conductor, not to mention their various advocates, would argue the same thing. As a final example I would point to the main melody of the finale, after the solo soprano’s introductory passage, which first appears played by the wind choir accompanied by the harp. This is marvellously balanced by the conductor, and when the theme is then taken over by the strings, beginning with the violas, cellos and basses, we still hear the individual wind soloists. And when the theme rises to its climax the conductor relies on orchestral weight and balance, rather than *rubato*, to force home the message. When it suits him, however, Norrington uses just as much *rubato* as he wishes. An example of this is to be heard toward the end of the scherzo of the *Fifth Symphony*, where in the *cantabile* passage for strings just before the final coda Norrington holds back in a more expressive, even extreme way, than almost any other conductor. But if you want an example of his orchestral and rhythmic clarity you only have to listen to the lively passage just preceding this, or even to the last movement epilogue, not at all slow, totally under control, yet to my ears at least as successful as any



Sir Roger Norrington

conductor in conveying the mood of the composer's marking at that point, tranquillo.

The opposite approach to Norrington is, I would submit, Sir John Barbirolli, a conductor whose work I love even when I find it a little extreme. (How could I not when Barbirolli and the Hallé gave some of the first concerts I ever went to?) My heart warms to his later readings of the Elgar symphonies, for example, when my head (for what it's worth) tells me that they are too slow, with too much lingering over incidental detail. His way with the closing pages of Vaughan Williams's *Fifth Symphony* is totally different from Norrington's: here we find a deliberate lack of attention to perfection of ensemble - note that I am not presuming to cite a lack of skill or care - when large numbers of instruments resolve onto crucial chords. Several examples of this characteristic tendency are to be heard in his wonderful recording of Ravel's *Shehèrazade* with Janet Baker. And the best example of this difference of approach is perhaps to be seen in the *Tallis Fantasia*. Barbirolli's is of course the classic recorded version of this work, so well known as to



Sir John Barbirolli

need no introduction from me. He takes more than sixteen minutes over it, whereas Norrington is content with fourteen and a half. But there's much more to it than tempo: Barbirolli has his players dig their bows deep into those strings in a way Norrington might even find abhorrent, in short, a passionate, highly overt expressive style. In atmosphere, Norrington is far closer to Tallis than Barbirolli is. (On a personal note, for this listener at least, the heart rules the head for once.)

Neville Marriner, in his recording of the *Fantasia*, steers a middle way in terms of tempo, and indeed his view of Vaughan Williams's music in a number of well-known recordings seems similar to that of Norrington, aiming for clarity of execution before immediate emotional expression. Yet to my ears the result is sometimes lightweight, lacking not only in overt emotional content but also in emotional commitment, which is not at all the same thing. His recording of the *Sixth Symphony* is a good example of this, as is, curiously, that of a slighter piece such as the *Fantasia* on "Greensleeves", a world apart from Sir John's view of it.

I took Sir Roger Norrington as my starting point in this piece because it helped me overcome the problem of trying to identify in a convincing way the characteristics of approach of different British conductors in Vaughan Williams's music. How can one do this in the case of Vernon Handley, for example? Listening to his performances of, say, the *Fourth* and the *Sixth Symphonies*, I would be tempted to say that his way with Vaughan Williams is characterised by a certain freedom of tempo and rubato, a preference for a homogeneous rather than analytical orchestral blend and a slight reluctance to take advantage of the more abrasive aspects of the composer's writing. But if one listened instead to the two outer points of the series, the *Sea Symphony* and the *Ninth*, most of these

observations would be rendered invalid; indeed, in many cases, the opposite would seem more appropriate. And in the case of *Job* there are important differences even between the conductor's two recordings of the work.

Mention of *Job* inevitably brings to mind Sir Adrian Boult. He was perhaps Vaughan Williams's most trusted interpreter, and one can easily understand why. Sir Adrian's tempi always seem almost instinctively right. If he tended to favour faster tempi, there are, all the same, few extremes. Many commentators argue that tempo is not important; I believe that it is of crucial importance to each individual interpreter. Klemperer tended toward slow tempi in Beethoven, Toscanini the reverse, and each policy is right for the conductor concerned. Some musicians adopt tempi that are not right for themselves, and therefore give the impression of having chosen tempi which are not right for the music. Boult was the master of the tempo giusto. He invariably found the atmosphere of the piece too, but although his music making had a powerful, passionate aspect to it in his younger days, one does sometimes find towards the end of his life that the undoubted nobility of spirit and technical control sometimes got in the way of a comparable emotional content. His two recordings of the *London Symphony* and the *Fifth Symphony* are excellent examples of what I mean by this, but not, curiously enough, his two recordings of *Job*, where, in spite of generally broader tempi in his later version, plus a certain loftiness born of experience and maturity, the emotional temperature is just as high as in the earlier one. Thus it is that even with Sir Adrian, drawing general conclusions is difficult.

The case of Andrew Davis is equally so. Listening to his *Sixth Symphony* reveals a conductor at one with the composer's idiom, brilliantly well equipped to bring out the nature of this extraordinary music - the horror of it, the defeat, the nothingness: words are even more inadequate here than elsewhere. But in the *Fifth Symphony*, it has to be said, one would credit him with little interest or understanding of the composer.

There are other conductors on record whose approach to Vaughan Williams seems reluctant to submit itself to any kind of definition. Bryden Thomson's cycle of symphonies is widely admired, and rightly so, but apart from a quite extraordinary humanity and integrity of purpose - qualities which made him a particularly suitable interpreter of this composer - I find it difficult to identify anything which might be called a policy. Similarly with Richard Hickox. It's true that one might cite a freer than average attitude to tempo, with a



Bryden Thomson

greater variety and wider range of tempi within individual movements. Yet there are many examples, whole stretches of music, where even such a general observation doesn't really hold water.

I think in the end, if it came to a kind of no names mentioned blind tasting, one might, just might, recognise a Barbirolli or a Boult interpretation. As for most other British conductors, I'm far less easily convinced. Which brings me back to Sir Roger Norrington who, in spite of certain inconsistencies - for example, a tendency to linger here and there where at other, similar points, he presses on - seems, in the works so far recorded, to present a most coherent view of the music he so clearly, perhaps surprisingly, loves so much.

Malcolm Sargent, Vaughan Williams and the Ninth Symphony

by Robin Barber



Malcolm Sargent was undoubtedly a great conductor and champion of Vaughan Williams as well as other 20th century English composers. The music of Elgar, Walton, Holst, Britten and Howells** in particular, was very close to his heart and his advocacy probably allowed more people to hear their music than any other conductor of the time. He was the “great ambassador”, concert tours to Australia, North America, Europe and Asia with the RPO and BBC Symphony Orchestras were full of programmes containing 20th century English music. In addition he conducted many foreign orchestras introducing them to modern English symphonic repertoire.

For example, in 1950 on a South American tour he conducted the noted Colon orchestra of Buenos Aires in a performance of VW’s 6th Symphony. Realising that to the Latin temperament this symphony could be incomprehensible, he attempted to talk it up by referring to it as “A frightening symphony”. Expanding on this remark, Reid quotes Sargent’s comments to a pre-concert press conference:

“For a symphony to be frightening is perhaps a good thing. Here we have the testament of a man who, in his seventies, looks back on the human sufferings of his time. I never conduct the Sixth without feeling that I am walking across bomb sites....Chaos, despair, desolation and the peace that flows from desolation...”

Evidence, I feel, that Sargent had a deep empathy with Vaughan Williams, though perhaps he went just a bit too far when he went on to say:

“A city which can’t understand the Sixth Symphony of Vaughan Williams deserves to be bombed”.

Vaughan Williams entrusted him with a number of important first performances, including, *Hugh the Drover* (1924), *Sir John in Love* (1929), the *Suite for Viola and small orchestra* (with Lionel Tertis, 1934) *Riders to the Sea* (1937) and the *Symphony No. 9 in E-minor* (1958). In addition he premièred other important English composers music, notably Holst’s *At the Boar’s Head* (1925) and Walton’s *Belshazzars Feast* (1931) and *Troilus and Cressida* (1954)

Sargent ranked RVW with Sibelius as the greatest living composer and perhaps a measure of the depth of his respect for RVW can be gleaned from Charles Reid’s biography of the conductor, when describing his reaction to the sudden death of the composer:

“...the deprivation he felt at Vaughan Williams’s passing went deep and lasted long. He had taken half of the symphonies to many parts of the globe. He tenaciously believed in them. They were part of his mission on earth; certain of them were high among the adventures and fervours of his early manhood. The grief he felt was far outside the compass of ordinary concert goers”.

RVW recognised Sargent’s talent, commenting on the first performance of *Hugh the Drover**:

“he saved it from disaster every few bars, and pulled chestnuts out of the fire in a miraculous way” (UVW p155).

So Sargent would appear to have had impeccable credentials for the honour of conducting the first performance of VW’s *Ninth Symphony*. Through the sheer significance of the number, any great composer’s ninth essay in the form, is bound to be of historical interest. What then went wrong? I would suggest personality clashes, poor preparation, and the prevailing critical mood were the reasons for the cool reception, at the time, of this magnificent music.



Sir Malcolm Sargent at the 1957 Proms

By 1958, Malcolm Sargent was a household name, famous not only for his musicianship but for his charm and dapper looks, epitomised by the slicked back hair and white carnation. A showman at the Proms, fêted everywhere as a great maestro and a man of forthright opinion, evidenced by his frequent appearances on the BBC’s Brains Trust programme. Though enjoying the company and friendship of high society and royalty, he was often despised by the musicians he conducted. A reputation for arrogance and disdain for the opinions of orchestral players led to the nickname “Flash” which he carried to the end of his career. The origin of this sobriquet was none other than Sir Thomas Beecham, who, on learning that Sargent was dashing off to conduct in Tokyo, wryly remarked, ‘Ah, Flash in Japan’.

Roy Douglas, a very thorough musician, composer, arranger and orchestral player was at the time, RVW's right hand man. He was privy to the preparation of the new symphony and it is clear from his book, that he disliked Sargent. Here he remembers a piano play-through:

"To my disgust, and to Ursula's intense displeasure, we were all three obliged to go to Sargent's flat near the Albert Hall. RVW himself did not, apparently, see anything unacceptable about this arrangement, but Ursula and I deemed it contemptible and typically self-regarding that Sargent should expect a man of RVW's renown - and advanced age - to go to Albert Hall Mansions, when Sargent could (and should) have easily taken a taxi to Hanover Terrace".

He then continues and this in my view, is crucial to the way Sargent conducted the symphony:

"When Sargent returned, I played the last movement, and he decreed that this should go more quickly than marked, in case the music dragged - implying, without actually saying so, that he thought it could get boring.....he gave no opportunity to RVW to make suggestions as to the interpretation of the work".

Charles Reid, however, tells a different story:

"He (RVW) had chosen Sargent for its première, with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Sargent first gave the symphony a run-through with the RPO at St.Pancras Town Hall. This rehearsal, three hours long, cost £250 and was paid for by the composer: a severe judgement on English musical economics. There was only one other rehearsal. It was held on the morning of the concert and all that can be said is that Sargent did the best he could".

The first performance on the 2nd April 1958, was of course a great occasion, the Festival Hall in London was packed and the composer was given enormous and affectionate applause, but the symphony was not a hit with the critics, neither was Sargent's performance with Roy Douglas:

"I use the words "first hearing" deliberately, rather than "performance", because this may indicate how intensely I disliked what Sargent did with the Ninth Symphony. He conducted the correct number of beats in the bar efficiently and elegantly, but clearly the nobility and grandeur of the composer's conception meant nothing to him; in particular, he had decided that the music was a bit dull in places, so he quickened the speed here and there (where no quickening was indicated in the score). This was just one of many faults in a most unmusicianly account of the entire symphony...we should not enjoy a truly faithful interpretation of the composer's intentions until we heard the symphony conducted by Sir Adrian Boult".

However, the distinguished English composer Patrick Hadley, in a telegram to the composer, quoted in Ursula Vaughan Williams's book commented:

"Came over marvellously - the saxes and flugel contributed a strange unearthly magic to that wonderful score".

Listening to a BBC recording of the première was to me a surprise, for it has power and nobility but the outer movements and in particular the finale are just taken too quickly. As a result the impact of the visionary and searching ending is lost as Sargent hastens the music to an end.

When he conducted a second performance of the symphony on the 5th August 1958, at an Albert Hall Promenade concert, there was a more favourable reception. The composer was present; he had but seven days left of this life. Neville Cardus, in a Manchester Guardian notice quoted by Kennedy wrote:

"At the end of a strong, convincing interpretation of the *Ninth Symphony* by the BBC Orchestra and Sir Malcolm, the composer walked down a high stairway, bent precariously on his stick, as he made his way to the platform to acknowledge tumultuous applause - applause led by young people standing in the arena. It was a very moving sight; and somehow it

epitomised all that we had just been hearing from the symphony".

Subsequently Sargent dedicated a Proms performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* to Vaughan Williams's memory and told Ursula :

"At the end of the concert there was no applause and the whole audience rose to their feet. The house was packed. They stood for an unbearably long time before they made a move to depart". (Aldous p.208)

In retrospect, I don't believe we can blame Sargent for the Ninth's seeming failure at the time. In the late 1950s, RVW's music was regarded as passé by many influential music critics, notably Donald Mitchell. I doubt it would have fared better if Sir Adrian Boult or even if Bernard Haitink with the modern LPO had given the first performance. That being said, Sargent's fast tempi in the last movement did the work's première no favours. Forty-three years and nine recordings later the symphony speaks to a new and appreciative generation.



Sir Malcolm Sargent - a classic pose

A Select Discography:

*Hugh the Drover** 1924 recording (abridged) Pearl GEMMCD 9468

Symphony No.4 Carlton Classics 15656 91312

Tallis Fantasia / Harmonica Concerto (Larry Adler) EMI Classics CZS 5 74782

Sources:

Aldous, Richard, *Tunes of Glory* -the life of Malcolm Sargent, 2001 Hutchinson.

Douglas, Roy, *Working with Vaughan Williams*, 1988 The British Library
Kennedy, Michael, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 1964 OUP
Reid, Charles, *Malcolm Sargent, A biography*. 1968 Hamish Hamilton
Vaughan Williams, Ursula, *R.V.W., A biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* 1964 OUP

****Note:** Herbert Howells and Malcolm Sargent, were friends, united perhaps by an awful shared experience, the distress of watching a child die from poliomyelitis. In Howells's case it was Michael ("Mick"), in Sargent's his daughter and only child, Pamela. *Hymnus Paradisi*, Howells's great masterpiece was written in memory of his son. It was given its first London performance by Sir Malcolm and he conducted many others.

Barbirolli on V.W.

When two authorised biographies of RVW were published in 1964, The Sunday Times asked Sir John Barbirolli to write about his old friend and collaborator. The article, published on 15 November 1964, is reproduced with the kind permission of The Sunday Times

THE FIRST THOUGHT uppermost when thinking of V.W. is the bigness of the man. Not only physically, but in mind, heart and thought. This showed in his insatiable curiosity about any new works, and any possibility of utilising instruments not currently used in, one might say, the classical armoury. I remember, for instance, when he was criticised for the use of the vibraphone in his *Eighth Symphony*; he said to me, with that marvellously subtle twinkle in his eye: 'Why not, John? It makes a lovely noise.' And there was the care he took in mastering the technical possibilities of the harmonica when he wrote that charming piece for Larry Adler.

Then there was his eternal sense of youth, and his enchanting sense of humour about things and people - not always quotable, for it was salted at times with his own particular brand of rabelaisian wit. With all his big and shaggy grandeur, there was also a little of the sprite in him. I remember well that adorable remark he made to his wife Ursula, when they acquired the house in Hanover Terrace. V.W. was in his early eighties. She said: 'I'm afraid we can only get a twenty-year lease,' to which he replied: 'Never mind, my dear; we can renew it.'

He had great kindness and sensitivity towards others. When he had completed his *Seventh Symphony* (the Antarctic), he thought that he

would like me and the Hallé - of which orchestra he had become very fond - to give the first performance. I only got to learn much later that he was hesitant to show me the score, for fear of the embarrassment it might cause me if I did not like it. Can true nobility of spirit and greatness go much further?

Then came the lovely *Eighth Symphony*, written for me, and its beautiful *Cavatina* with the first theme announced by the cellos: a charming allusion to my early days as a player. Talking of this I am reminded of an incident which may not be generally known. I had invited V.W. to conduct some performances of *A Sea Symphony* in Manchester and Sheffield. At the rehearsals in Sheffield one of my cellists (the sub-principal) was ill, and I thought I would substitute, just for my own pleasure. I had no thought of playing in the evening, in case it flavoured of some sort of publicity stunt.

But after the rehearsal V.W. came to me and said: 'John, would you play for me tonight?' I said that of course I would be delighted, and he added: 'I'll tell you why: I once conducted an orchestra with Kreisler in it, and would like to be able to say I once conducted an orchestra with you in it.'

It appears that as a young man he was conducting a work of his at one of the *Three Choirs Festivals*; and, terrified as he already was, he turned to the first violin section and to his



consternation saw Kreisler playing at one of the back desks. This, he said, completely shattered him; but the explanation turned out to be simple and really very logical. The next item was a concerto to be played by Kreisler, and since there was nowhere to 'warm up' in the cathedral, Kreisler had taken the obvious course of joining in the first violins to do so.

Very happy memories my wife Evelyn and I have of V.W. at the Cheltenham Festivals, which I conducted for so many years. He was a constant follower of them, whether any works of his were being played or not. This, I think showed one of the finest facets of his character. There every morning at ten o'clock was this great old man, eagerly waiting to hear the works of young men, some of them comparatively little known, without prejudice and always with kindly interest. I remember that before each Festival, he would quiz me with, 'John, who's the latest wrong note man?'

Evelyn and I always remember with great gratitude the last Cheltenham Festival he attended: it must have been only a month or so before he left us. In fact Evelyn was really the architect of an unforgettable evening. The Festival was to close with his *London Symphony* ('which,' he always used to confide in

me, 'really is my favourite.') Then with a really *gamin* look he would add: 'But don't tell anybody - I gather it's not quite the thing to say so.')

He had a wonderful ovation that night, and I remember how deeply moved we all were to share the great moment with him. I say that Evelyn was the architect of the occasion because she had had the inspiration of asking him to supper after the concert, at a hotel where we were staying at the top of Cleeve Hill. It was a lovely moonlit night, and coatless and hatless, his hair gently waving in the breeze, V.W. stood up there gazing at his beloved Malvern Hills.

With us were Ursula and his two dearly loved young friends, Michael and Eslyn Kennedy.

His affection for these two dear people was touching to behold, and I am sure all of V.W.'s admirers will eagerly welcome the 'double' biography, so to speak, which has just appeared from the pens of Ursula and Michael.

Not long after that, I looked on him for the last time. It was a summer morning, with sunlight flooding the room; the noble lines of his face, and the beauty of his hands, were just as might be the effigy of some medieval prelate.

Vaughan Williams and his interpreters

by Sir Adrian Boult

The Musical Times invited Sir Adrian Boult to comment on conducting RVW's music for the VW Centenary in October 1972. The article is reproduced here with the kind permission of *The Musical Times*.

It is obvious that the interpreter who takes up a work to start preparation for its performance looks at it from many points of view, but it is possible that he may forget that the extra-musical temperament of the composer is also a factor of some importance. If for instance, the composer has a tidy script like Elgar and Strauss, if his MSS are impeccably neat and readable, showing that his mind is always made up before he starts to write, then the performer can comfortably follow his instructions without question. But if like Beethoven and Dvorak, his MSS are messy and he can be seen to change his mind as he writes, or even after going into print, the interpreter can tell that he may have many problems to solve. For instance, in the third movement of the 'New World' Symphony the major tune comes three times, first on flute and oboe, last on cellos; in between the clarinets play it with one note altered (the triplet in the second bar). Many interpreters, particularly those of Germanic descent, will make the clarinets conform to the other statements and even, I believe, the publisher of one of the miniature scores has gone so far as to correct this 'error'. I don't agree Dvorak was an untidy person (did he ever comb his beard?), so I feel sure he meant that altered note and I always play it as originally printed. Am I right?

I cannot claim that this kind of problem is never found in Vaughan Williams's writing. There is a legend that he only bought a metronome quite late in life, and no one knows how he determined the earlier tempo figures. Already with the *Pastoral Symphony* he was continually pressing me to do every movement faster than I had felt it when studying the work. I hoped the first performance had satisfied him, but it was not until six or seven years later that he again heard me rehearse it. 'Everything is much too fast' was the alarming comment. I reminded him of the first performance and got this wonderfully characteristic reply:

'Oh that, yes, it was years ago, but I have heard it a good deal and conducted it myself several times since, and I now know it isn't as boring as I thought it would be, so I like it slower'. I thereupon happily reverted to my original conception.

I think the story of the *F minor Symphony* should be retold here. The work was published in 1935. The slow movement is in F. It closes with an unaccompanied flute passage finishing, rather obviously, on F. 20 years later he wrote 'I always felt that the F was wrong and the Lord came down one day and told me that it ought to be E natural'. E natural it now is.

It has often been my task to direct first performances after I have had the composer's help at rehearsals. It is to be expected that even when composers have a very clearly detailed picture in their minds of what they expect to hear, they may be mistaken, and indeed may change their minds sometimes. I have always allowed more rehearsal time for a new work with the composer present than if I am alone in the direction,

provided of course that I have had time to digest the work and make up my mind about it. Here Vaughan Williams was one of the easiest composers to please, not I think because his mind was not clear, but simply because he did not demand rigid adherence to any of his directions. He felt, I am sure, though he never would say so, that his music was big enough to convey its message through a wide divergence of interpretations. This can be seen by anyone who cares to compare the composer's record of the *F minor Symphony* with either of my own, preferably perhaps (for this purpose) the earlier mono which was made with the composer sitting in the studio with us and making any criticisms he wished, resulting, I had hoped, in a performance he could approve, though it differed so very much from his own record.

The first performance of the problematic *Sixth Symphony* was given by the BBC SO, and I remember that he asked us to arrange a rehearsal some little time before the concert date as he had several alternatives to test (in matters of scoring, usually). He had both versions available in the score and parts, and was able to make his choice in time for the first regular rehearsal. This reminds one about the creation of Brahms's *Fourth Symphony*, when the composer stayed at Meiningen with the Grand Duke and every morning the Duke's orchestra rehearsed whatever the composer wished to hear as he developed the work.

Many of my colleagues in interpretation can be heard to express critical views: they prefer this Brahms symphony to that; and have favourites among the Beethovens. Somehow I cannot do this: the work I am doing at the moment is the greatest of all, and only gives way when I open the next score. If I detect any weakness in a work I try to forget it at once, because I feel my audience will sense it too if it is in my mind. Thus it is that I rarely criticise a new work, except possibly a detail of scoring, if the composer cares to ask. But for some reason I made an exception to this on the last occasion I spoke to Vaughan Williams. About a fortnight before his death I had an appointment to go through the *Ninth Symphony* which we were due to record soon. As we came to the end of the last movement I felt I must jump in with a request for 20 or 30 more bars; the end struck me as abrupt. He stopped and said 'Do you think so? I'll think about it; but in the meantime why not play it a bit slower?'. This I did when we came to the recording, which took place on the very day of his death.

So we see that the interpreter of Vaughan Williams need not feel too closely tied up to the details of the score. His ambition should be directed towards the structure of the music, the inevitability of its rise and fall, to its underlying moods, and the glowing force of the messages (often so far from anything that can be put in words). Above all he should aim to convey to his audience the power and integrity of its inspiration.

(Photo: Ralph Vaughan Williams in 1921)

STOKOWSKI & VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

by Edward Johnson

The recent Classic Record Collector Award to the Cala CD of Stokowski's 1943 NBC broadcast of Vaughan Williams's 4th Symphony prompts this survey of the Maestro's other performances of the great English composer



"When I was a student at the Royal College of Music in London, Vaughan Williams was teaching, so I knew him then as a teacher. But later I learned to know him more intimately and found him to be a remarkable man - very profound, very warm". These were Leopold Stokowski's words on hearing of Vaughan Williams's death in 1958. As it happened, Stokowski's memory was playing him slightly false: he and VW had indeed been at the RCM during the Spring Term of 1896 - they were both studying the organ under Sir Walter Parratt - but they were simply fellow students. Stokowski, however, was thirteen years old and the youngest pupil at that time to have entered the College, so he must have been recalling VW as a helpful older student.

After several years as a church choirmaster, notably at St. James's, Piccadilly, Stokowski went to America and soon commenced what was to become an illustrious conducting career, first with the Cincinnati Orchestra (1909-1912) and then - for the next quarter-of-a-century - with the Philadelphia Orchestra. It was this orchestra which gave the North American première of *A Sea Symphony* when it accompanied the Mendelssohn Choir on a visit to Toronto in 1921. Although Stokowski was listed as the conductor, the press reviews reveal that he presided only over the purely orchestral numbers - Wagner's *Parsifal Prelude* and Sibelius's *Swan of Tuonela* - handing the baton to the Choir's own director, Mr Herbert A. Fricker, for the Vaughan Williams choral work. Happily, Mr Fricker scored a striking success: "The wealth of melody and the fertility in variation and contrast which mark the score from first to last are amazing," wrote the *Toronto Daily Star*, "unquestionably *A Sea Symphony* is a work of genius." Incidentally, Fricker had prepared the chorus for the very first performance in Leeds under RVW's own direction. He later took over the Mendelssohn Choir, and with them and the New York Philharmonic he gave the US première of *A Sea Symphony* on 5 April 1922.

Stokowski was an inveterate giver of "first performances" in America (they number in their many hundreds) but he missed out on *A London Symphony*. This had its US première under Albert Coates's baton on 20 December 1920 with the New York Symphony Orchestra. The first American performance of *A Pastoral Symphony* was given by Vaughan Williams himself with what appears to have been amateur forces at a Festival of the Litchfield County Choral Union in Norfolk, Connecticut on 7 June 1922.

Eighteen months later, Stokowski introduced VW3 to his Philadelphia audiences in December 1924. In those days his programmes were often curiously upside down, with a symphony in the first half, followed after the interval by a concerto and an overture or other short piece to finish. So *A Pastoral Symphony* was heard first in the concert, and the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* wrote: "One fairly glimpses 'Old England' with its folk tunes in verdant country lanes, and throughout there is evidence of imagination and inspiration, even if there is some tonal wandering and vagueness at times . . . It is withal a skilfully written and melodiously beautiful work and was superbly played, the

interpretation under Mr. Stokowski's very sympathetic reading well meriting the ovation of applause."

Two years later, in October 1926, Vaughan Williams's celebrated masterpiece, the *Tallis Fantasia*, made its Philadelphia debut. Stokowski's programme began with one of his Bach arrangements and this was followed by Brahms's 1st Symphony. After the interval came the *Tallis Fantasia* and the concert ended with the US première of Ernest Pingoud's symphonic poem *The Prophet*. The critic of *Musical America* found RVW's music to be "rather grave, sombre and melancholic. . . The work, despite its form, was suggestive chiefly of a single mood - that of gravity and calm. Sincerity of workmanship, both in original material and adaptation, is a marked merit of the score, which builds up to a solemn and impressive climax."

Vaughan Williams's 4th Symphony received its US première on 19 December 1935 in a Cleveland Orchestra concert conducted by Artur Rodzinski. Two years later, Rodzinski was engaged by the National Broadcasting Company to enlarge their existing 'house orchestra' to full symphonic strength so as to lure Toscanini out of his recently-announced retirement. The great Italian maestro was immediately sold on the idea and duly conducted his first NBC concert on Christmas Day, 1937. But Toscanini was not the only one to conduct the new orchestra, and many guests were invited onto the rostrum, including Sir Adrian Boult, who featured the Vaughan Williams 4th in an all-British NBC concert on 21 May 1938.

After only a few seasons, Toscanini began to feel disenchanted with NBC and decided on a temporary leave-of-absence. So, commencing with the 1941-42 season, Stokowski was engaged in his place on a three-year contract. His NBC concerts were as enterprising as ever, and it's possible that he had heard the Boult broadcast of VW4 since he re-programmed the work himself on 13 March 1943. The following day, the *New York Times* wrote: "Fine dynamics, splendid tone, intensely built-up climaxes, with particularly fine use of the brasses, produced a most satisfactory reading of this great symphony." Fortunately, NBC recorded all their broadcasts on lacquer discs and Stokowski's 1943 rendering (the only occasion he ever conducted the work) survived in acceptable enough sound for it to be released on Cala Records (CACD 0528). It was warmly welcomed by David Betts in the RVW Society Journal of June 2001 as "a terrific performance."

More Vaughan Williams appeared in the Stokowski/NBC broadcast of 19 December 1943 when the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* rubbed shoulders with Roy Harris's *Folk Rhythms of Today* and Richard Mohaupt's *Concerto on Russian Army Themes*. Artur Rodzinski again gave a new VW symphony its American première when he presented the 5th with the New York Philharmonic on 30 November 1944. A few years later, the 6th Symphony was snapped up by Serge Koussevitzky, who gave America its first hearing with the Boston Symphony on 7 August 1948. New York heard it for the first time early the following year, when

Stokowski programmed it with the NYPO in three concerts on 27, 28 and 30 January 1949.

Stokowski contributed his own notes to the programme book, and wrote: "The more I study Vaughan Williams's Symphony in E minor, the more I have the impression that this is music that will take its place with the greatest creations of the masters. . . I feel that in this Symphony the world of music has a tonal picture of today, expressing the turmoil, the dark despair, the aspiration of an ideal future. Every listener will find his own meaning in the unique finale of this Symphony – one of the most profound expressions in all music."

A recording of the broadcast on 30 January still survives in the New York Philharmonic's own archives so one lives in hope of a CD release. Olin Downes of the *New York Times* praised the music but not Stokowski's reading: "Speaking of this symphony as such, and not of its performance, it may be designated as one of the most personal and profoundly felt orchestral scores that has appeared in decades." However, Stokowski's timing of the work came to about 25 minutes, and Downes duly noted that "the unpredictable Mr Stokowski ran through this score with the orchestra hitting hard a few of the high spots but missing most of the architectural and emotional significance of the music. His tempi were hurried. He bicycled through it."

Perhaps Stokowski took note of these criticisms, because when he made the work's first recording on 21 February 1949 – beating Sir Adrian Boult to that honour by 48 hours, and also making the only non-British "first recording" of any of VW's symphonies – he moderated his tempos noticeably. Of the original 78rpm set (Columbia M.838), which had the *Greensleeves Fantasia* as the last side filler, the *American Record Guide* wrote: "Stokowski's performance of this music is thoughtful and penetrating. His performance in the concert hall was somewhat faster than in his recorded version. I find the present reading more searching and expressive." The Gramophone Shop Record Supplement reviewed the recording's subsequent release on LP (ML 4214) more enthusiastically: "It is not too much to say that this is Vaughan Williams's most significant composition, as well as one of the truly great works of the century, and that this is one of Stokowski's most vital performances. From the tremendous opening movement to the bleak, lonely finale, Stokowski's conception of this work is one of strength and control." When reissued on CD some years ago (Sony SMK 58933), the total timing of Stokowski's recording clocked in at just under half an hour – still somewhat faster than the fastest of Boult's three recordings, all of which, however, vary in their total timings by several minutes each!

In 1950, RVW gave a broadcast talk on the BBC entitled "*Bach, the Great Bourgeois*" in which he quoted the Royal College of Music's motto 'The Letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth Life,' and added that "if we adhere meticulously and mechanically to the letter of Bach we shall inevitably kill the spirit." The talk was reprinted in *The Listener* of 3 August 1950 and Stokowski – famous (or notorious, depending on your point of view) for his many Bach orchestrations – wrote to RVW on 8 September: "May I offer you my thanks for your most illuminating article on Bach. So often his music is performed in a dry, academic manner so that great numbers of music lovers still do not realize his greatness of heart, as well as mind and creative power. Coming from you, I hope that he will be performed according to the free principles you have so eloquently stated. All of us who love the music of Bach feel that we owe you a debt of gratitude for your plain-spoken and eloquent article."

The *Tallis Fantasia* had remained in Stokowski's repertoire over the years and with the advent of the long-

playing record he decided to commit it to disc. A specially selected band of top New York string players, including violist William Lincer and cellist Leonard Rose, was duly assembled on 3 September 1952. Stokowski himself contributed the notes to the RCA Victor LP (LM 1739): "Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* spans the 16th and 20th centuries . . . those who love beauty, deep emotion, and the unseen mystery of life, will find intense joy in listening to it."

The coupling was Schoenberg's *Transfigured Night* and the intense passion of that work – which Stokowski aligned with "the romantic beauty of a moonlight night, the ecstasy of love" – spilled over into his reading of VW's score with a throbbing, vibrato-laden playing style. The New Records critic was not alone in noting that "Stokowski infuses an almost erotic atmosphere which one is sure neither Tallis nor Vaughan Williams intended; but the effect, for one listener, is little short of superb." Stokowski wrote to the composer to tell him of the new recording and on 24 September 1952, VW wrote back to say "I feel much honoured that you have recorded my *Fantasia*," providing the maestro with a history of the tune as well as a musical sketch of Tallis's original setting.

The White Gates,
Dorking, Surrey.
24th September, 1952.
Telephone: Dorking 3055.

-75 = 23 years

Dear Mr. Stokowski,

I feel much honoured that you have recorded my "*Fantasia*". Here is the history of the tune:

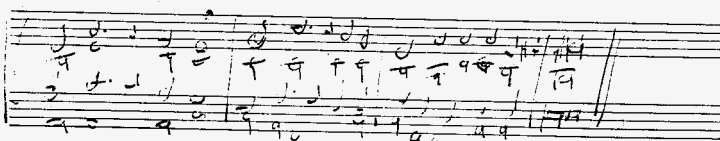
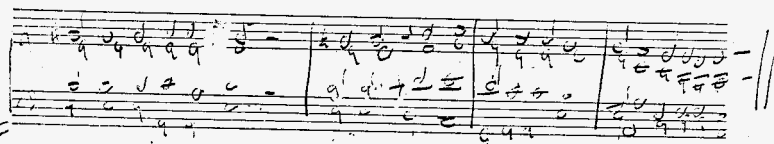
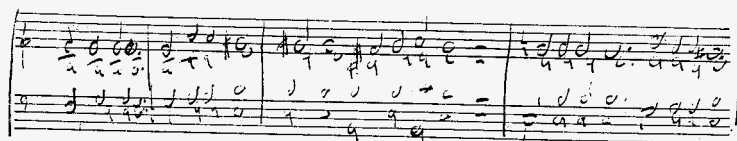
About 1567 a metrical psalter by Archbishop Parker was printed, entitled "The Whole Psalter translated into English metre which containeth 150 Psalms." At the end of the book there are nine tunes in four parts by Thomas Tallis. The first eight tunes are each in one of the Ecclesiastical modes. This tune is the third and it referred to the third mode. (Another 4th Tune - the former Canon)

I enclose a copy of Tallis' original setting. You will see that the melody is in the tenor.

Yours sincerely,

R. Vaughan Williams

(R. Vaughan Williams).



The Second Orchestra consists of 2 First Violin players, 2 Second Violin players, 2 Viola players, 2 Cello players and 1 C-Bass player. These should be taken from the 3rd desk of each group (or in the case of the C-Bass by the 1st player of the 2nd desk), and should, if possible be placed apart from the First Orchestra. If this is not practicable, they should play sitting in their normal places. The Solo parts are to be played by the leader in each group.

Letter from RVW to Stokowski (24 September 1952)

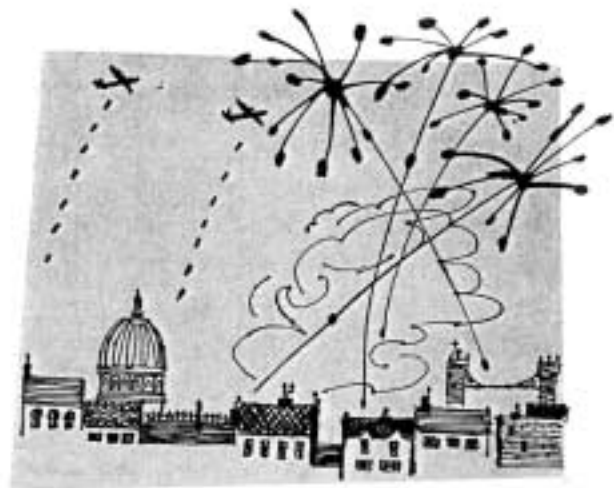
On a Canadian visit in 1954, Stokowski guest-conducted the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in a programme which had Tchaikovsky's 4th Symphony in the first half and RVW's *English Folk Songs Suite* to conclude the second. In May of that year he came to London for three BBC Symphony Orchestra concerts. He particularly wanted to include some British music in his programmes, so VW's *Dives and Lazarus* took its place alongside Malcolm Arnold's *Beckus the Dandipratt*, Alan Rawsthorne's *Symphonic Studies*, and Arnold Bax's *Tintagel*.

Another guest spot, this time with the Cleveland Orchestra on 9 and 11 December 1954, found Stokowski championing Vaughan Williams's newest symphony, the *Sinfonia Antartica*. This had been given its US première by Rafael Kubelik and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on 2 April 1953. The critic of *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* wrote that Stokowski "dispensed that special kind of tonal magic that only this great conductor knows how to evoke. . . He gave us our first hearing of the latest symphony of the dean of English composers, the 82-year-old Vaughan Williams, who recently visited this country. This *Sinfonia Antartica* is tonal painting on a grand scale, suggesting with telling effect the eerie desolation of frozen wastelands, massive glaciers and chilling blizzards. In addition to its unusual colour devices, it must be said that the music speaks eloquently of nobility of spirit, tenderness and heroism."

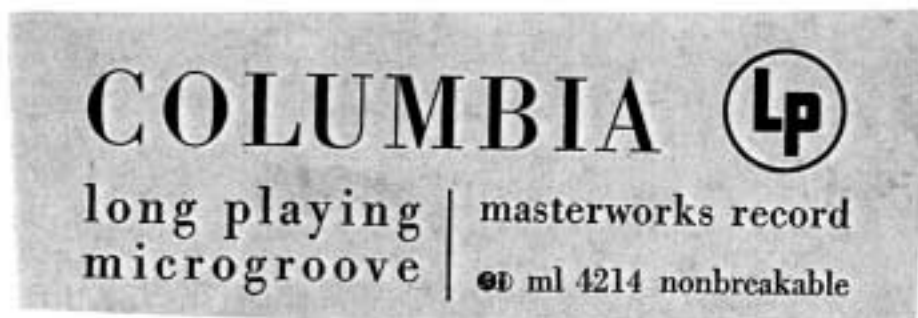
In September 1955, Stokowski conducted four concerts in Santa Barbara with the Pacific Coast Festival Orchestra, and concluded his final programme – which featured Milhaud's *Percussion Concerto*, Ives's *The Unanswered Question*, Bartok's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste*, and Stravinsky's *Mass* – with Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music*. The following year, on 5 October 1956, America heard RVW's 8th Symphony for the first time when the Philadelphia Orchestra performed it under Eugene Ormandy's direction.

On another trip to England in 1957, Stokowski visited Vaughan Williams at his London home, an event happily captured by several celebrated photos. The composer was in the Royal Box at the Festival Hall for Stokowski's LSO concert of 30 June 1957 and was completely bowled over by the maestro's performance of his 8th Symphony. "Vaughan Williams's most recent symphony was presumably new to Mr Stokowski," wrote *The Times*, "but as it is in some sense an epitome of what has gone before in the composer's oeuvre it sounded as though the conductor had always known it: it flowed under his hand and gave the curious but delightful impression that its music was afloat, even in the uproarious finale."

The following year, the Contemporary Music Society was planning a symphonic concert at Carnegie Hall to mark Stokowski's 50th year as a



LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI
conducting the
PHILHARMONIC-SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK



LP cover for Stokowski's recording of RVW's Sixth Symphony

conductor. The main work was originally scheduled to be Shostakovich's 11th Symphony, but on hearing of Vaughan Williams's death on 26 August, Stokowski immediately decided to commemorate the composer by giving the US première of VW's last symphony. The programme was duly changed and on 25 September 1958 Stokowski's celebratory concert featured VW9 as the final offering. The critics were somewhat divided over the new symphony: "It will not, I think, be classed among Vaughan Williams's greatest achievements," wrote *Musical America*. "Less acidulous harmonically than a good deal of his previous work, it contains many graceful and even beautiful passages, and it provides some unusual, though not startling, tonal effects . . . The themes are short and mainly diatonic, but at first hearing they seemed to want stature and profundity, and one sensed the deep involvement of the composer in his ideas only intermittently."

In the audience was Percy Grainger, who immediately wrote to the composer's widow: "My wife and I went to hear your husband's 9th Symphony in New York last night, conducted by Stokowski. The performance seemed a perfect one in every way, and the exquisite beauty and cosmic quality of this immortal work struck me as being ideally realised. The sound of the unaccompanied melody on the flugel horn was lovely indeed, and the parts allotted to this instrument and to the saxophones showed what these beautiful instruments can contribute to music of the deepest soulfulness."

Stokowski performed the work again in Houston on 10 and 11 November 1958, and here *The Houston Chronicle* was more enthusiastic than the critic at the New York première: "This new 9th Symphony was the evening's thriller. In a sense it is a skyscraper among symphonies; a

From
Percy Grainger
7 Cranwell Place
White Plains N. Y.
U. S. A.

Sept. 25, 1958

Dear Mrs Vaughan Williams,

My wife & I went to hear your husband's 9th Symphony in New York last night, conducted by Stokowski.

The performance seemed a perfect one in every way & the exquisite beauty & cosmic quality of this immortal work struck me as being ideally realised.

The ^{sound of the} unaccompanied melody on the flugel horn was lovely indeed & the parts allotted to this instrument & to the saxophones showed what these beautiful instruments can contribute to music of the deepest soulfulness.

It seems no time since we enjoyed the most kind hospitality you & your husband so generously extended to us.

I wonder if you have any manuscript of your husband's that you have not already donated to chosen ~~that~~ destinations that you would care to give to my museum in Melbourne. I can think of nothing

more important for music in Australia than any link binding it to what is greatest & noblest in British music. Personally it would be a crowning privilege to me coming at the end of so many kindnesses accorded me at your husband's generous hands if you had something to give me of your husband's. It would be a priceless addition to the many loving memories I have of associations with him around 1910 & later.

Please do not reply if overwhelmed by letters.

Again thanking you for your delightful hospitality in June

Sincerely
Percy Grainger

Letter from Percy Grainger to Ursula Vaughan Williams

creation of mass and majesty. There are moments of shrieking anguish in its first movement and, later, measures throbbing with beauty. Stokowski and the Houston Orchestra gave it a brilliant send off, finding every spark of colour in this vast and striking score."

Now a regular visitor to London during his last years, Stokowski programmed the *Tallis Fantasia* in an all-British concert with the LSO on 17 July 1963 in aid of the Royal College of Music's Building Fund. It also featured John Addison's *Carte Blanche* Ballet Suite and Holst's *The Planets*, but the lack of an overture, concerto or symphony proved fatal at the box office, and a sensational Stokowski concert was played to an almost deserted Royal Albert Hall.

The following week, Stokowski became the first great international conductor to appear at the Proms – this time the Albert Hall was sold out – and for his return visit the following year, William Glock, the BBC's Music Controller, requested a repeat performance of VW's 8th Symphony. "I always like to conduct music of Vaughan Williams, for whom as a composer and man I have the greatest admiration," responded Stokowski, and on 15 September 1964 he duly brought the house down with, in the words of *Daily Express* critic Noel Goodwin, "a programme that gave ample scope for his delight in blending lush orchestral colours." (BBC Radio Classics 15656 91312).

Stokowski had founded the American Symphony Orchestra in New York in 1962 and remained its Music Director for ten years. On 19 October 1970 he commenced a concert of choral music by Bach, Gabrieli and

Panufnik with Vaughan Williams's stirring setting of *The Old 100th*. He became a nonagenarian in 1972 and two years later decided to give up public concerts and concentrate on making records in the time remaining to him. His last concert in the UK took place on 14 May 1974 with the New Philharmonia: the first half sandwiched the *Tallis Fantasia* between Otto Klemperer's *Merry Waltz* and Ravel's *Rapsodie Espagnole*, and a blazing Brahms 4th Symphony rounded off a truly historic event. (BBC Radio Classics BBCRD 9107).

Stokowski returned to the *Tallis Fantasia* in August 1975 when he recorded it again, this time with the strings of the Royal Philharmonic, for the new 'Desmar' label. "I have never heard finer string playing than this," wrote Geoffrey Crankshaw of the LP release in *Records and Recording*, "with the terraced perspectives of Vaughan Williams's masterpiece conveyed to something near perfection." Reissued on CD (EMI Classics 7243 5 6670 2 2) it was the maestro's very last performance of any of RVW's music. Crankshaw added that "Stokowski shows us that this is one of the greatest pieces for strings ever written, calling for virtuosity as well as imaginative integrity." It was also a glowing memorial tribute to a master conductor who, although often controversial, nevertheless remained one of the most exciting occupants of the 20th century's concert hall podiums.

With acknowledgements for their help with American press notices to JoAnne Barry, Archivist of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and Frederick Fellers of Indianapolis.

STOKOWSKI conducts VAUGHAN WILLIAMS's Symphonies

with the Philadelphia Orchestra
19-20 December 1924

Vaughan Williams *A Pastoral Symphony*
Lalo *Cello Concerto* (with Michel Penha)
Saint-Saëns *Danse Macabre*

with the NBC Symphony Orchestra
14 March 1943 (Studio 8H, New York)
Vaughan Williams *Fourth Symphony*
Gould *New China March*; *Red Cavalry March*
Debussy *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune*

with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra
27-28 January 1949 (Carnegie Hall)
Moeran *In the Mountain Country* (US première)
Vaughan Williams *Sixth Symphony*
Gershwin *Piano Concerto* (with Byron Janis)
Liszt *Second Hungarian Rhapsody*

30 January 1949 (Carnegie Hall)
Moeran *In the Mountain Country*
Muradeli *Georgian Dance*
Scott *From the Sacred Harp*
Bloch *Schelomo* (with Leonard Rose, cello)
Debussy *Nuages & Fêtes (Three Nocturnes)*
Vaughan Williams *Sixth Symphony*

with the National Symphony Orchestra
28 February 1951 (Washington, D.C.)
Purcell-Stokowski *Suite*
Vaughan Williams *Sixth Symphony*
Falla *El Amor Brujo*
Debussy-Stokowski *The Engulfed Cathedral*
Tchaikovsky *Romeo and Juliet*

with the Cleveland Orchestra
9-11 December 1954
Purcell-Stokowski *Suite*
Vaughan Williams *Sinfonia Antartica*
Debussy *Three Nocturnes*
Wagner *Prelude and Liebestod*

with the London Symphony Orchestra
30 June 1957 (Royal Festival Hall)
Schubert *Rosamunde Overture*
Vaughan Williams *Eighth Symphony*
(in the presence of the composer)
Schumann *Second Symphony*

with the Houston Symphony Orchestra
11-12 November 1957
Orff *Nänie und Dithyrambe*
Vaughan Williams *Eighth Symphony*
Krenek *Cello Concerto* (with Margaret Aue)
Panufnik *Sinfonia Elegica*

with the Symphony Orchestra of the
Contemporary Music Society
25 September 1958 (Carnegie Hall)
Orrego-Salas *Overtura Festiva*
Creston *Toccata*
Hovhaness *Mysterious Mountain*
Riegger *New Dance*
Vaughan Williams *Ninth Symphony*
(US première)

with the Houston Symphony Orchestra
10-11 November 1958
Creston *Toccata*
Vaughan Williams *Ninth Symphony*
Tchaikovsky *Overture, Entr'acte
and Funeral March*
(Incidental Music to *Hamlet*)
Strauss *Death and Transfiguration*

with the BBC Symphony Orchestra
15 September 1964
(Royal Albert Hall "Prom")
Vaughan Williams *Eighth Symphony*
Falla *El Amor Brujo*
(with Gloria Lane, mezzo-soprano)
Sibelius *Second Symphony*



The Significances of Vaughan Williams's Piano Concerto

by Jeffrey Aldridge

Michael Kennedy once described Vaughan Williams's *Pastoral Symphony* as his war requiem. I think an equally valid case can be made for describing Ravel's *La Valse* as his war requiem. The waltz, after all, was the quintessential expression of nineteenth-century imperial Europe, particularly German-speaking Europe, and in *La Valse*, composed just after the First World War, we hear a huge, fifteen-minute waltz which, like imperial Europe, eventually destroys itself. The destruction is so complete that even the insistent 3/4 time is lost in the welter of sound. It strikes me as a dance to the death even more catastrophic than that in *The Rite of Spring*, since, rather than the death of a young girl, it portrays the death of a civilisation.

What has this to do with Vaughan Williams's *Piano Concerto*? Quite a lot, I believe, but I will leave my explanation until later in this essay, for we should start at the beginning. You will have noted that my title mentions the Significances, rather than Significance, of this piece, and the significance of the waltz should come later, since it appears towards the end of the work and there is quite a lot to discuss before we reach that point.

Significance Number One - Strifeful Aspiration

The First Significance appears at the very beginning of the work. Underneath a clattering 7/8 figure on the piano, the orchestra plays one of those upward-moving themes that characterise certain of VW's works. Similar opening themes appear in the *Sinfonia Antartica* and in the *Ninth Symphony*: they suggest, in Wilfrid Mellers's words, a "strifeful aspiration".



Sinfonia Antartica theme



Ninth Symphony theme

The similar opening to the *Piano Concerto*, written between twenty and thirty years before these two, represents, to my knowledge, the first time such a theme occurs in VW's works and it suggests a new element in his music. An interesting feature of this particular theme is that, on its first appearance, it climbs manfully upwards, only to tumble quickly down again:



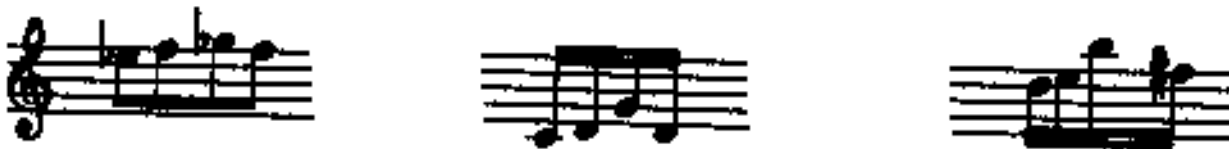
After this powerful opening, a second theme appears, jollier, more folksy. The first time I heard this I was disappointed with it; it seemed out of place, too different in mood. However, there is more to this theme than initially meets the eye (or ear). For instance, it soon changes from this:



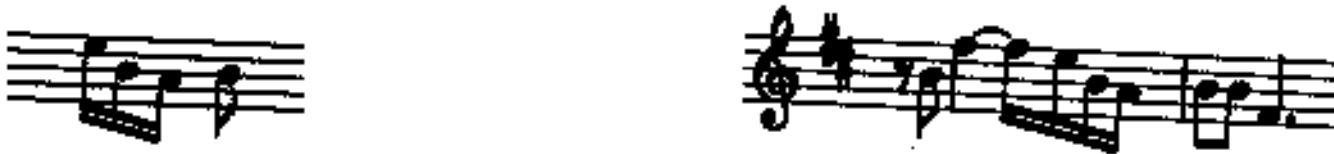
to this:



It can be seen that important elements within all three themes all derive from the same source:



Indeed, it can be seen in reverse in another little figure:



All of these feature largely in the development section of the movement, which is generally powerful and dramatic. Finally, at the end of the movement, the piano hammers out the opening of theme 3 while the orchestra once more plays the opening aspirational theme. The fact that the theme does not tumble down the hill this time might suggest triumph but the inconclusive chord which accompanies it at this point counteracts that, as well as allowing the piano to change direction and lead us into the second movement.

Significance Number Two - Maurice Ravel

The name of Maurice Ravel crops up several times in discussions of the second movement. Vaughan Williams had, of course, been his pupil (many years before) and the two composers obviously respected each other. Indeed the opening of this Romanza - a long piano solo eventually joined by a solo flute - strikingly resembles the famous opening of the equivalent movement in Ravel's *G major Concerto*. Of course, the problem here for crib-searchers is that it seems that VW wrote his slow movement a couple of years before Ravel wrote his; lest anyone think that the Frenchman might have cribbed from his erstwhile pupil, it should be pointed out that VW's concerto was not completed and did not receive its first performance until some two years after the Ravel had its. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note the parallel here. (I don't know to what extent, if any, the two composers maintained contact; certainly their relationship was not like that shared between Vaughan Williams and Holst.) This opening section does not sound like Ravel, however, and a little later there is a magical moment for strings and horns (Fig 16 in the score) that couldn't be anybody but RVW. The Poco piu mosso section that follows a little later could, however, have come from the world of *Mother Goose*:



but this in turn is developed into an extended passage that is full-bodied romantic VW, halfway between the climax of the slow movement of the London Symphony and the 'Alleluia' in the first movement of the Fifth:



A return of the first theme leads us eventually into the Finale. This movement has a long and precise title - Fuga Chromatica con Finale Alla Tedesca. Actually, it is not completely precise since it does not take into account the Coda that Vaughan Williams added in about 1946 (and to which we will devote some attention later).

Significance Three - Fuga Chromatica

Whenever Vaughan Williams gets overly chromatic, we know that we are in for storm and stress, disturbance, unease of some sort. Witness the opening to the first-movement allegro in the *London Symphony*, or for that matter, the opening of the same symphony's fourth movement. There is nothing comfortable or comforting about either section. For a different sort of unease, consider the opening of the slow movement of the *Sixth Symphony*. For extreme chromaticism, of course, there is the *Fourth Symphony*; think of the Fugue in that work's Finale. And it is with this last that the *Piano Concerto* stands most comparison: not only is this section also a fugue but it shares something of its mood of violent energy, even concluding with one of those cascades of notes for full orchestra that we later became familiar with in the Fourth and Sixth Symphonies. The two works stand close to each other chronologically too, of course.

There is nothing strange in associating chromaticism with such emotions, of course. Part of our response to late-Romantic music from Wagner onwards is conditioned by our reactions to such sounds; certainly many people's responses to the music of the Second Viennese School are such that many think they know why operas like *Lulu* or *Wozzeck* (with all their storm and stress, unease and disturbance) can be written in such a style, but not pieces like *Forty-Second Street* or *The Merry Widow*: the stories and the feelings they embody necessitate different modes of expression. I think

Vaughan Williams thought so. This did not stop him writing chromatic music (obviously) but when he did it was, characteristically, when he was writing one of his overtly 'modern' (and disturbed) pieces. So, this fugue shows VW at his most 'progressive'.



After the cascade of notes mentioned above, a huge cadenza leads straight into the Finale Alla Tedesca, the theme of which is derived directly from that of the fugue.

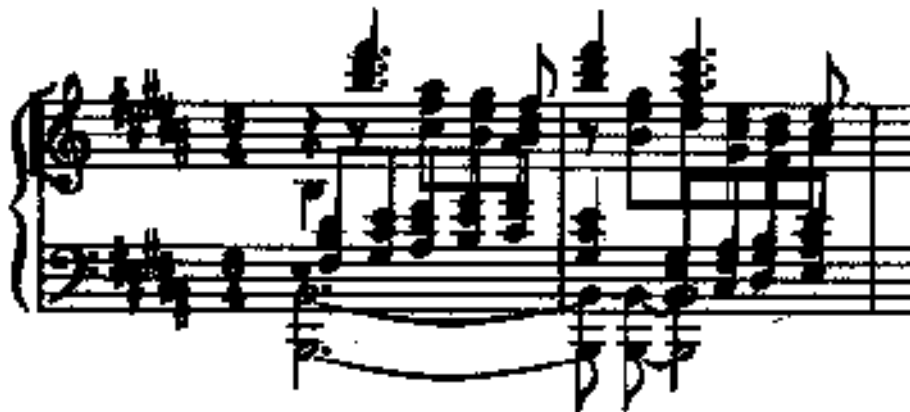


Significance Four - Alla Tedesca

'Alla Tedesca', of course, means 'Waltz'. Strictly translated from the Italian, it means "In the German style". So we have here a highly chromatic piece of "German" music forming the conclusion (as it was originally) of this work. Wilfrid Mellers states that "this genre of music may have been associated by Vaughan Williams with folly". I would agree with that and state my belief that Vaughan Williams had Ravel's great waltz (still a pretty new work at the time) in mind when he was working on his. I find that I am saying pretty well what Mellers says in his book : "It rather generates hysteria, perhaps related - like Ravel's scary parody of a Viennese waltz in the symphonic poem *La Valse* - to Europe's post- and pre-war ravagement." I don't think he was writing anything as cataclysmic as *La Valse* (since Ravel, I contend, is writing, not post or pre-war but about the Great War itself), nor does he quite destroy the 3/4 time in the way that Ravel does, though he does bend it a bit and the tone throughout is ironic and disturbed. So originally we have a concluding section which is not only a waltz, but a chromatic waltz - folly, disturbance, storm and stress, all combined.

Significance Five - The Coda

And there the work ended, or it did at first. However, after the Second World War, Vaughan Williams added a coda which is in a completely different mood.



It is derived from the great romantic theme in the second movement and is in B major (not C, as stated in Mellers's book, at least the first edition from which I am taking my information). After all the high chromaticism of the fugue and the waltz, there is not a single accidental in the last thirty bars or so, except when the pizzicato strings creep in again with the opening of the fugue subject. (This last reminds me of Robert Simpson's perceptive remark about the return of the 'goblins' scherzo in the finale of Beethoven's Fifth: "they are still there". I don't know whether VW wanted us to take the uneasy course - "they are still there" - or to consider them more as the disturbed elements in the slow movement of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto - "stilled at last".) I think that Vaughan Williams's addition of this coda makes a fundamental statement about this concerto and about his role as a composer of English music writing at the time he did.

The Coda is as tonal as it is possible to be (always bearing in mind the tonal-modal dichotomies that Mellers discusses); not one accidental spoils the B major in which it is set. It is the answer to the assault on tonality that has been the finale up to this point. I think Vaughan Williams decided that the concerto, as originally heard, was not yet complete, did not answer the questions about tonality which it itself posed. The Coda is a deliberately 'English' (tonal/modal) conclusion to a 'German' (chromatic) movement. The Concerto is sometimes seen as a work of three disparate parts, despite their linkages into a continuous whole; the Romanza, it is suggested, is an unsatisfactory filling between the two energetic outer movements. Is this because it is seen as an English/French (remember Ravel) idyll in the midst of all this striving energy? This might have been the case with the original form of the work, and could be the argument for saying that the work as a whole is unsatisfactory. The revised ending changes all this, however: not only does it bind the three movements into a more unified whole, it establishes a tonal conclusion to the work. It reinforces the pre-eminence of

tonality for Vaughan Williams. We must remember VW's conscious decision to be an English composer and his worries about 'German' music:

" The great thing which frightens me in the late peaceful invasion of this country by Austria is that it will entirely devour the tender little flower of our English culture....To try and make England, musically, a dependency of Austria could kill all the musical initiative in this country - destroy all that is vital and substitute a mechanical imitation of your great art..."

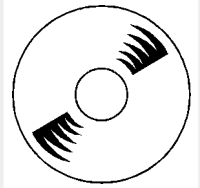
letter to Dr Ferdinand Rauter of the Anglo-Austrian Music Society, August 1942

This is not a 'little Englander' attitude, as is sometimes suggested. Vaughan Williams had a great and abiding love of much German and Austrian music: Bach remained his hero to the end of his life. He also wrote later to Dr Rauter (remember this is at the height of the war), accepting the position of Patron of the Anglo-Austrian Music Society and saying: " I need hardly say that if there is any danger of the tradition which produced Haydn, Mozart & Schubert disappearing we must make every effort to preserve it." He saw himself, however, as the flag-bearer for an English music, and for him that included a respect for tonality/modality. This is no more a petty English nationalism than, say, Bartok's attitude can be seen as petty Hungarian nationalism. Indeed, it has long seemed to me that the European composer with whom Vaughan Williams stands the closest comparison is Bela Bartok. They both valued the folk traditions of their areas and absorbed them into their own music without being slavishly enthralled by them. They both acknowledged the influence of French music. Neither composer let any preconceived notion stop him doing what he knew was right at the time. Both were men of great probity. Both were suspicious of the assaults on tonality prevalent in, on the one hand, Schoenberg and his followers and, on the other, such German composers as Strauss and Pfitzner, though both could assault tonality when they wanted to. Both saw melodic possibilities in the use of different modes as appeared in the different folk musics of their respective areas. I don't know if Bartok knew any other works by VW but it does not surprise me that, as reported by Michael Kennedy, he "much admired" the *Piano Concerto*. I am sorry he never heard the final version since I am sure that a composer of his sensibility (and sensitivity) would have appreciated the rightness of the new conclusion to the work.

So, partly for the reasons that I have outlined above, I think it is time to recognise this *Piano Concerto*, not only as Vaughan Williams's most ambitious and extended work in the concerto form but also as a major work in his output. It introduces new developments in his work, developments which he was to explore in later works, notably the *Fourth*, *Seventh* and *Ninth Symphonies*, but marries these to a further presentation of the more contemplative, 'mystical' aspect of his music given its fullest expression in the *Fifth Symphony*.

P.S. The Piano Concerto, thanks to the splendid recordings made by Howard Shelley, is available for us to hear and judge. Let us hope that more pianists will be persuaded to take it up and give us the joy of a live performance. (The only occasion I heard it live was in the Festival Hall some time in the 1950s: Adrian Boult conducted but I am ashamed to say that I cannot remember who the soloist was. Maybe someone reading this can help?)

Record Review



Mass in G minor etc.

**The Elora Festival Singers/Noel Edison,
with Thomas Fitches, organ.
NAXOS 8.554826**

Lord, Thou hast been our refuge

Prayer to the Father of Heaven

O vos omnes

Mass in G minor

O clap your hands

O taste and see

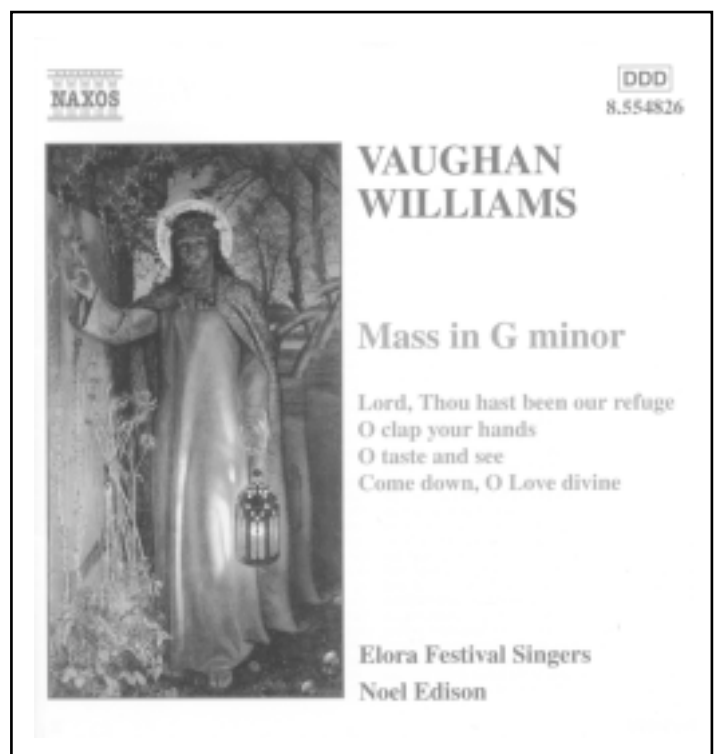
O how amiable

Come down, O love divine

There is already a beautiful Naxos disc by this Canadian group called "The Mystery of Christmas", where they give polished and insightful performances of, amongst other lovely things, Elizabeth Poston's *Jesus Christ the Apple Tree* and Britten's *Hymn to the Virgin*. They now turn to Vaughan Williams, and the result more than merits a place in any collection.

The Elora Festival Singers is an excellent mixed-voice choir. Tuning is first-rate and the sound is well balanced and homogeneous. Critical listening reveals occasional untidiness of attack which I should think results more from time pressures than anything else, and in any case it's minimal and unimportant. Although the actual sound of the choir is different from most English groups, they and their conductor, Noel Edison, have prepared thoroughly idiomatic performances of these works and sing them with a convincing English musical accent. In any case, any differences of timbre or, more rarely, approach, cast the music in another

and equally valid, light, and we should be open to them. The universal appeal of Vaughan Williams's choral music is also underlined.



They sing the *Mass in G minor* with deep understanding of the work's atmosphere. Mood is established from the very first notes and maintained right up until the final sublime chords. The performance has the feel of a unified whole. Tempi are well chosen, the composer's markings carefully respected. Only at the very end would I have wished for the diminuendo to arrive closer to the *ppp* marking indicated, but then very few choirs seem to achieve this. I think certain of the soloists might have appreciated the opportunity of retaking a passage or two: they are not always totally convincing, but this is the only weakness to speak of, and only troublesome when directly compared to other performances. The Corydon Singers under Matthew Best, on a Hyperion disc, field some excellent soloists, for example, and the quieter passages are most beautifully done, but the appeal of that version, recorded almost twenty years ago, is reduced by some rather strident singing in louder passages. This aspect of the work is better managed by the Canadian team.

An excellent performance of the *Mass*, then, and well worth buying even if you already have the piece in your collection, particularly given the interest of the rest of the programme. The long motet *Lord, Thou hast been our refuge*, a setting of *Psalms 90* alongside the hymn *O God our help in ages past*, opens the disc. I love this work, though Michael Kennedy, in his study of the composer's music, was not convinced by it. It receives an excellent performance here, though when the organ enters towards the end of the piece it is much too loud, rather ruining the transitional effect surely intended. The note A is marked in the organ part before the choir begins, yet a footnote states that the organ should not enter until the transition passage already mentioned. The markings are ambiguous, then, but the organist plays that single note and the result is quite effective. In the end this is no more than a curiosity, but the tiny organ introduction to *O taste and see*, also given here, is more than that: it's extremely beautiful and effective despite its brevity and apparent simplicity on the page. Again, a most sensitive performance. Most of these smaller pieces have been marvellously recorded by Paul Spicer and his Finzi Singers on Chandos, although in *Prayer to the Father of Heaven* the sometimes astringent harmonies are more clearly conveyed by the Elora Festival Singers. *O how amiable* was new to me and scarcely gets a mention in Kennedy's book: it's a characteristic but minor piece in which the composer returns to part of *Psalms 90* and once more sets it alongside *O God our help in ages past*.

The disc closes with *Down Ampney*, but listening to it here, with the choir's scrupulous – perhaps too scrupulous – attention to musical and textual punctuation confirms that even the most beautiful hymns only come into their own when one is part of the congregation singing one's heart out.

William Hedley
France

Vaughan Williams: Symphony No. 4, Serenade to Music, Tallis Fantasia, Greensleeves Fantasia, New York Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Leonard Bernstein.
Sony SBK 89779, ADD (budget price)

Previously available as part of Sony's "Royal Edition" Bernstein's 1965 recording of the *Fourth Symphony* makes a welcome reappearance at budget price. Bernstein's performance of the *Fourth Symphony* is impressive and largely uncontroversial. The first movement, taken rather slower than usual (9.10 minutes as opposed to 8.06 on Boult's fine EMI recording) gains in gravitas and sense of looming catastrophe (whether it be the rise of Fascism, The Second World War or VW's stormy temper!) and it does seem to relate more to its time than some other recordings. Curiously enough, Julian Haylock in his interesting notes relates the secondary material of the *Serenade to Music* to the dark times in which it was written (1938) rather than the *Fourth Symphony*.

The NYPO play impressively throughout the symphony and I especially liked the way in which the tension was sustained in the bridging passage between the last two movements.

Bernstein's version, together with the recently released Stokowski recording on Cala and Mitropoulos's classic recording (much admired by the composer) form a distinguished group of fine American performances of this powerful symphony.

The other pieces on the disc are perhaps not so impressive. The ubiquitous *Greensleeves Fantasia* is rather ponderously presented and the forty-year-old recording rather undermines one's appreciation of the *Serenade to Music* (the soloists are rather forwardly balanced.)

The *Tallis Fantasia*, however, is a later recording (1976) and it receives a passionate performance under Bernstein.

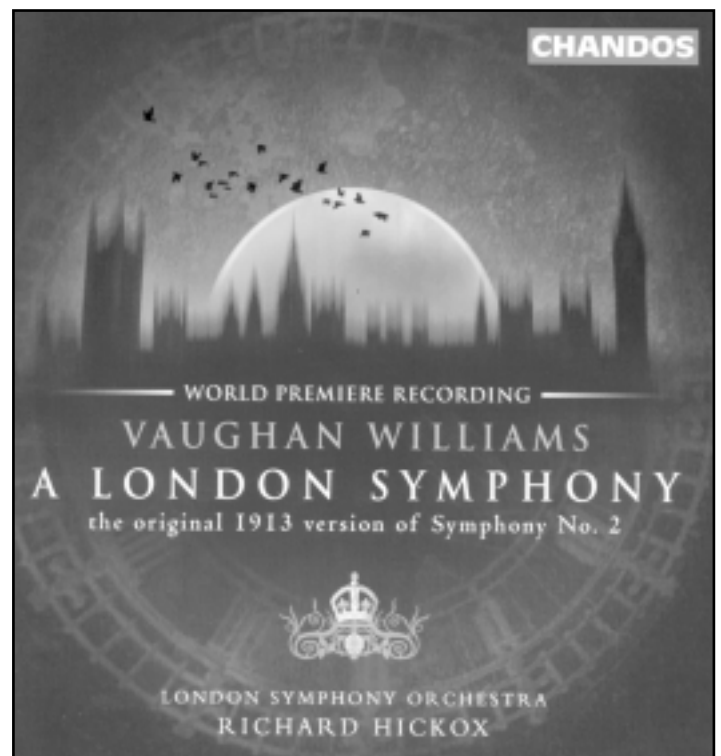
Budget priced CDs often feature inadequate or non-existent sleeve notes but I'm pleased to say that Julian Haylock provides an illuminating and informative essay in this issue (notwithstanding a misprint that implied that Sir Adrian Boult composed the work!) Altogether excellent value at about £5.

Jeffrey Davis

Two recent VW CD releases: A personal view.

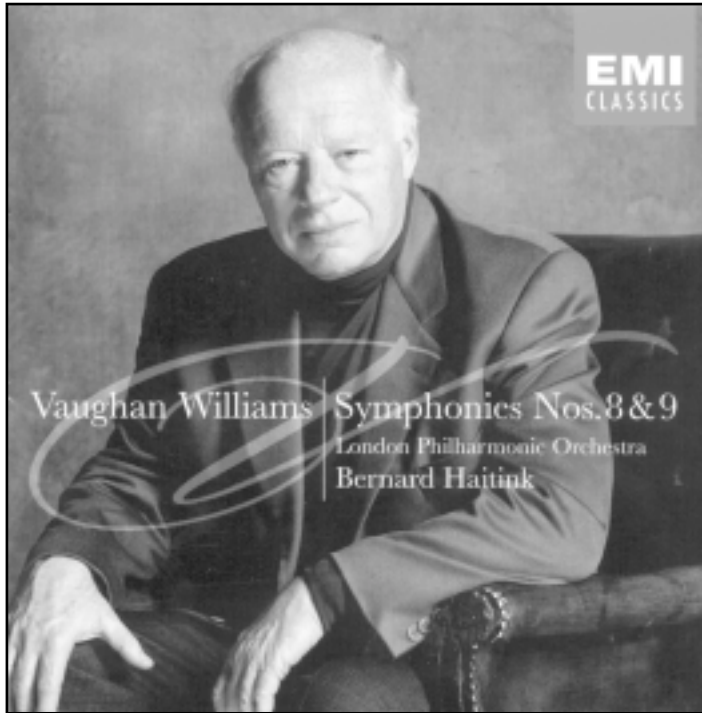
There are now a considerable number of interpretations of VW symphonies on disc. Two recent releases deserve, I think, particular comment.

First and foremost the *London Symphony*. This is probably the most important VW release of recent years. The first movement of course remains unchanged: Hickox shapes its content with considerable assurance; in particular the pace seems perfect; the LSO sounding relaxed and confident throughout. The second movement: what a revelation! The additional material adds immense weight and poignancy, giving the movement a fully rounded feel: no longer does it rapidly diminish following the 'big tune'. A subsequent listening of the revised version sounded to me disconcertingly truncated by comparison.



The third movement also has a weighty presence; the extended version seems as if it has time to breathe as VW takes his time to explore earlier themes during the final section. The mysterious and at times kaleidoscopic presentation of this part of the movement added for me an atmosphere of ethereal mystery, a mood attained by VW in only his greatest works (for example the *Romanza* of *Symphony Four*).

Following the revelations of movements two and three the final movement proves equally as profound. Again the feeling of space made a considerable impression upon me. Some might argue that the hymn-like theme subsequently axed by VW is merely an incongruity that deserved to go. Conversely, I would argue that this episode adds an aura of calm serenity amongst the frenetic activity of the movement's first half. It acts rather like the breathing space provided by Bloomsbury or Russell Square amongst the capital's frenzied activity. The close of this movement adds a fitting epilogue to this truly great symphony. VW for a final time gives the music space as the sounds of London melt into the distance and we are transported effortlessly seawards by the languid timeless Thames.



As with the preceding movements, Hickox and the LSO seem perfectly attuned to the material. Moreover, it appears almost as if they are lifted to a higher plane as if inspired by their first exploration of this stately symphony.

You might therefore gather from what I have said so far that I thoroughly agree with the Symphony's status (awarded by the Gramophone) as the best recorded orchestral work of 2001. Stephen Barber commenting in the Gramophone went further to suggest that the symphony should be allowed to take its place as an 'available' part of the concert repertoire. I must wholeheartedly agree. Some of the Bruckner symphonies - for instance - exist in more than one concert hall edition, but the composer's reputation has suffered no damage because of it. In some cases I agree that an original version of a symphony should not take preference over a final version - for instance in the case of the Sibelius five where there was considerable organic development of the material between the first and final version. VW's 2 cannot be considered in the same light because a) the music was very largely the subject of cuts with little actual revision. And b) the fact that there is little doubt {in my mind at least} that the original version is a fully rounded - and as near as damn it - definitive - account of the symphony. A frequently quoted VW comment concerning the *Fourth Symphony* is: '...it occurred to me like this...it was what I wanted to do at the time.' Surely this reasoning applies equally to the *Second Symphony* and the original version ought to be allowed to sink or swim according to its merits. Judging by the reaction to it so far, it would not only swim, but would prove to be the 'Mark Spitz' of a Symphony - if you see what I mean.

Turning now to the recently released Bernard Haitink version of Symphonies Eight and Nine, I have to admit that I have more reservations - to use a geographical analogy - than the Great Plains of the U.S.A.

I was always brought up to believe that part of the VW ethos was that

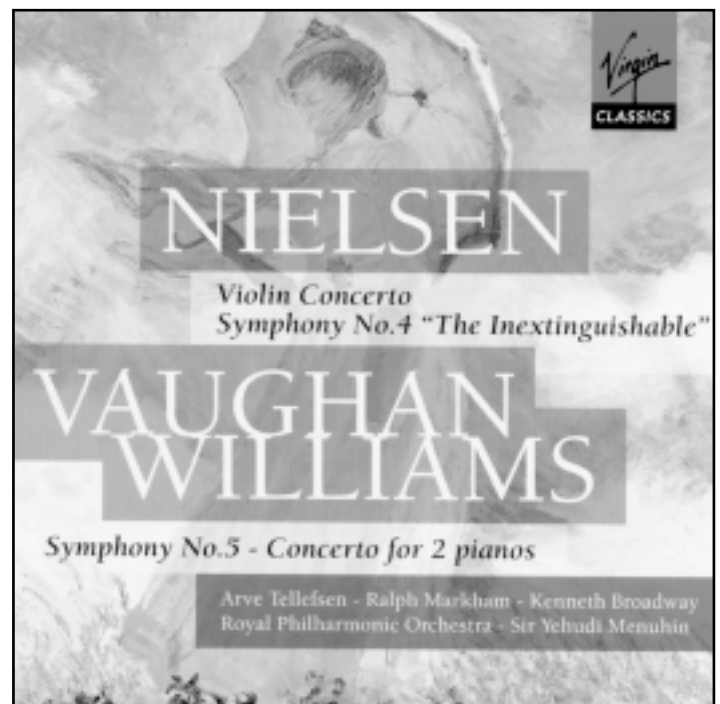
assertion that he was a member of a generation of English composers who turned their back on the prevailing Germanic tradition, and who forged forth creating their own style beyond the confines of the Wagner-Brahms dominated establishment of the time. What I found in the Haitink version of - in particular - the Eighth was a seemingly blatant attempt to mount a counter-invasion and reclaim the symphony as Germanic.

Well, perhaps I'm putting things rather strongly here, but I did find elements of the Haitink Eighth an entirely inappropriate treatment of VW's material. Overall, the impression I had was that Mr Haitink was treating the *Eighth* as a companion to the *Ninth Symphony*. The pace is ponderously slow; there was a lack of lightness which is very much called for in VW's orchestration. In places it seemed that wistfulness is replaced by wooliness especially in the first movement. The cavatina also suffers from a plodding pace. Here Haitink seems to be doing for VW what Bernstein did for Elgar's *Enigma* - in that he seems to be determined to produce the slowest possible version of the music regardless of what the actual material calls for. The last movement seemed to me the most convincing, but lacked any great degree of sparkle.

Symphony Nine by comparison seems much more Haitink's cup of tea. Haitink's style is much more at home here and on the whole I found his reading of the material fairly convincing. But that said it seemed to lack those personal touches added by other interpreters i.e the prominent celeste of Boult, or the wonderfully mysterious atmosphere at the close of Slatkin's first movement.

Haitink's conclusion of this monumental work sent a tingle down my spine; but there is little here that any self-respecting conductor can do to add anything to the great man's final symphonic utterance. That said, one thing has always aroused my curiosity about the final chords of the *Ninth*: in an age of increasing quality of recordings VW must have been well aware that sound mixing technicians might be inclined to 'bring up the presence' of the two harps in the closing passage. Here I must throw myself on the great man's indulgence and profess a curiousness as to what the work would have sounded like with six harps. (Six I hear you exclaim!) After all, Bantock did it and so did Alfvén; but I suppose VW wouldn't have wanted to be accused of over-indulgence in an age when his style of composition was not in 'vogue'. Oh well, I can dream.

Rob Furneaux



Symphony No. 5, Concerto for two pianos: Ralph Markham and Kenneth Broadway (pianos), Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Sir Yehudi Menuhin (coupled with Nielsen Symphony No. 4 and Violin Concerto) (2CD set, bargain price on Virgin Classics 7243561925 2 2)



Joseph Cooper

This recording of the Concerto for two pianos and orchestra was the third to appear, and this is its second re-issue. The arrangement of the Piano Concerto was undertaken by the late, and fondly remembered, Joseph Cooper. The pianist and broadcaster had met RVW at the RCM in the mid 1920s. He had kept in touch and was invited in 1939 by Jean Stewart to take part in a run through of *Epithalamion* for RVW at Cecil Sharp House. After the end of the war, he was

still serving in Germany and was delighted to get the call from Phyllis Sellick and Cyril Smith to make the arrangement of the *Piano Concerto* for two pianos and orchestra. This was for a St. Cecilia's Day Festival concert in 1946.

It had been Sir Adrian Boult and Cyril Smith who had suggested to RVW that the Piano Concerto be re-arranged. Joseph Cooper set to work in Devon and would regularly write to RVW when he got stuck. VW's replies, always beginning 'Dear Cooper' were extremely helpful. As Joseph Cooper said: 'he had a very clear mind on what he wanted musically. 27 new bars of music had to be inserted. VW gave me a draft. This was entirely VW's idea.'

With excellent versions of the Piano Concerto, by Howard Shelley and Piers Lane, for example, the difficulties of the original may now seem over-stated. Indeed, at first Phyllis Sellick and Cyril Smith complained about the difficulties of this re-arrangement. 'Take out some notes', they demanded of Joseph Cooper. 'I did, and VW was perfectly happy about it', added Joseph Cooper.

Ralph Markham and Kenneth Broadway make light work of the denser piano passages, whilst maintaining much joyfulness in the humorous passages. There are moments of wonderful tenderness in this under-rated work which are well realised in this performance. The slow movement is quite lovely. This recording remains my recommended version, even above that of Vronsky and Babin, with Boult, on EMI.

As to Menuhin's account of the *Fifth Symphony*, William Hedley, writing in the Journal in October 2001, found it 'a challenging interpretation, very well played and recorded which everyone ought to hear if they can'. Menuhin's interpretation he described as 'idiosyncratic' with beautifully judged passages alongside periods where the performance was inflated and contrived. Quite so.

Finally, members may want to have Menuhin's account of Carl Nielsen's *The Inextinguishable* and the *Violin Concerto*. Arve Tellefsen does his best to persuade me of the merits of the *Violin Concerto*, but fails. Nielsen's *Fourth Symphony* is much more impressive thematically, with violent, powerful even harsh passages. I learnt this work from the Ole Schmidt recording on Unicorn, and nowadays listen mostly to Herbert Blomstedt's version on Decca (460 988-2DF2), or Bryden Thomson's on Chandos (CHAN 9047). Both have more fire and intensity than this recording by Menuhin.

Recommended for the *Two-Piano Concerto*.

Stephen Connock



Yehudi Menuhin 1956

- Solutions:**
- Across:**
1. *A London Symphony*, 9. Ursula, 10. Wassail, 12. Four, 13. *Plough*
 16. Orpheus, 17. Chaucer, 18. *Bloody (Gardener)*, 19. Pans,
 22. *This Day*, 24. Meadow, 28. The Old Hundredth.
- Down:**
1. *Ah! Sunflower*, 2. Opus, 3. Daily, 4. New, 5. Pots, 6. Yon, 7.
 Macninchy, 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.

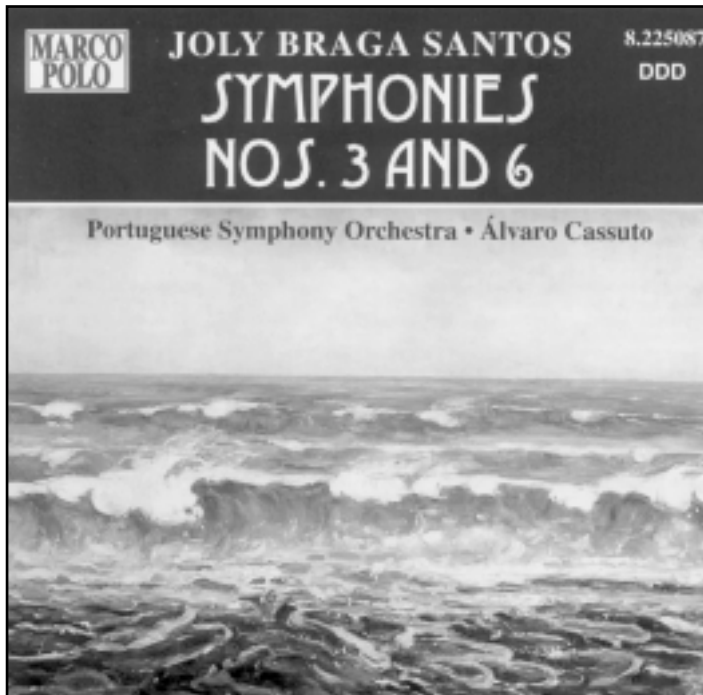
MUSIC YOU MIGHT LIKE

The Music of Joly Braga Santos (1924 - 1988)

Investigating music by less well known composers is one of my favourite hobbies and over the years I have discovered some fascinating figures such as Myaskovsky, Havergal Brian, Tubin, Holmboe, Lilburn, Klaus Egge, Hilding Rosenberg, Janis Ivanovs and Cyril Rootham (whose great *First Symphony* cries out for CD release) to name but a few. Not everyone, of course, shares my enthusiasms (my brother announced, during a speech at my wedding, that my wife was “doomed to years of listening to music by deservedly neglected composers”).

However, once in a while I have come across some truly wonderful music and I would certainly place the *Second* and *Third Symphonies* of Braga Santos, unhesitatingly, into this category.

Joly Braga Santos, born in Lisbon in 1924, was the leading Portuguese symphonist of his day and I suspect that he would be better known had he not been so self-effacing in his refusal to “push” his own music. His friend, the conductor Alvaro Cassuto points out that “....being a most generous and selfless person, (Braga Santos) was not efficient at “selling himself.”



Marco Polo have issued four discs of his orchestral music (listed below) conducted in excellent performances by Alvaro Cassuto and although they are all rewarding I would especially recommend the ones containing the *Second* and *Third Symphonies*.

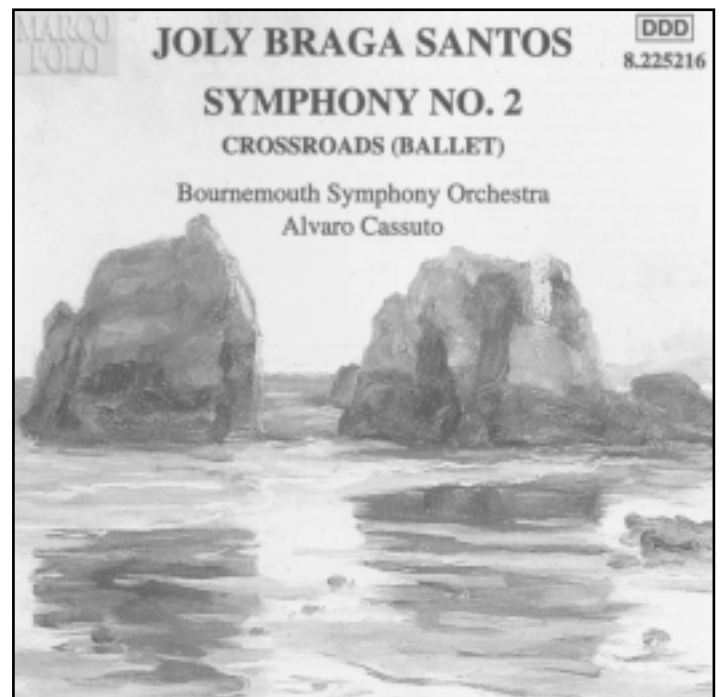
Admirers of Vaughan Williams and Sibelius will find a great deal to enjoy in these life-affirming and warm-hearted works. Braga Santos in his early symphonies writes in a strongly modal idiom and his music conveys a powerful sense of forward movement. It is purposeful, memorable and often moving.

The *Third Symphony* of 1949 starts off with a horn solo reminiscent of Vaughan Williams's *A Pastoral Symphony* and, in fact, the whole opening section reminded me of Vaughan Williams's haunting war-time elegy.

The final movement, which contains a powerfully written double fugue is also most impressive, conveying a strong sense (to me at least) of the triumph of the forces of light over those of darkness. As “The Gramophone” critic wrote, this disc is “absolutely not to be missed!”

If you enjoy this try the *Second Symphony*, with its hauntingly beautiful slow movement, it is correctly described as “an expansive and mature masterwork.”

In many ways the *First Symphony*, a movingly sombre and powerful piece dedicated to those who fell in World War Two, is the work which, together with the recently released *Concerto for Strings* (whose eloquent slow movement was played at Braga Santos' funeral in 1988), most brings Vaughan Williams to mind. Portugal is, of course, Britain's oldest historical ally and I suspect that Braga Santos was aware of at least some of VW's symphonies. In places his music also reminded me of Sibelius and Lilburn although I should point out that any such influences are fully integrated and Braga Santos is undoubtedly his own man.



The *Fourth Symphony* has not yet been issued but the *Fifth* and *Sixth Symphonies*, although rewarding works, are written in a more atonal style and may appeal less to Vaughan Williams admirers.

In conclusion, do investigate this fine composer if you have not already discovered him.

**Braga Santos Symphonies 1 and 5 Portuguese Symphony Orchestra
Conducted by Alvaro Cassuto Marco Polo CD 8.223879**

**Braga Santos Symphonies 3 and 6 (as above)
Marco Polo CD 8.225087**

**Braga Santos Symphony No 2 and Crossroads Ballet
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra
Conducted by Alvaro Cassuto Marco Polo CD 8.225216**

**Braga Santos Concerto for Strings, Concerto for Violin,
Cello, Strings and Harp, Sinfonietta for Strings, Variations
Concertantes for Strings and Harp
Marco Polo CD 8.225186**

Jeffrey Davis

Extracts from

THE MUSIC DIARY

of Ruth Newcombe Price

(Later Mrs Moore)

January 22nd 1937. Mr Kirby had warned us that Dr Boulton would be coming to rehearsal this week and what is more bringing Vaughan Williams with him! I recognised Dr VW when he came on to the platform, a big man with untidy grey hair, in fact, rather untidy altogether, with spectacles half way down his nose and piercing eyes which looked us over one by one, it seemed. He sat at the side with Mr Kirby (looking very small and retiring) and young Mr Leslie Woodgate, the BBC Singers' conductor. Dr Boulton conducted. It was a petrifying experience to realise that the composer was present and I couldn't help glancing at him to see his expression. He passed remarks in a low voice to Dr Boulton now and again – that would have to be a lot quicker, words must be more crisp. "It's too sentimental" I heard him say. The piece was *Elinor Rumming* and we must throw manners to the winds. "Never mind the notes, I want the words" he said. "On your head be it, then" said Dr Boulton! Now and again he got up and indicated (always to Dr Boulton, not to us) with a clenched hand and a grimace, the sort of howl or growl that was wanted. I had the feeling all the time, in this number that what he wanted was more vigorous, rugged tone, more in the manner of the Northern choirs. On the whole though, it was remarkable how the difficulties seemed to dwindle under Dr Boulton's guidance, even *Jolly Rutterkin*, which had been our *bête noir*, went quite well, and I heard the composer say that it was the most difficult, so I felt quite heartened. The time seemed to fly and when we had finished he had a few words to say before we went. A great hush fell over us. "It has been a great pleasure to hear such beautiful singing". What a compliment for us! He only wanted to say, with regard to No. 1, that more characterisation was wanted, less genteel effect in describing the personal attributes of *Elinor Rumming*. "You must be vulgar" he said! I could not help feeling warmly towards him; there was something so definitely likeable about his bearing. Unassuming, yet with more than a touch of dignity. I could hardly realise who he was - the greatest living English composer, the doyen.

January 29th 1937 Last Tuesday, the night before the concert, we had to go to the BBC Studio at Maida Vale for our last rehearsal. We were in Studio No. 1 where all the studio operas are broadcast, and didn't this bring my imagination into play! It is a huge place with a gallery at one end and seats for chorus at the other. Brilliantly lit, thickly carpeted floor, tripods with hanging microphones here and there, several pianos in dust sheets, and sofas all round the wall, in which various persons lolled. When I got to my seat, high up, there spread before me was a sea of orchestra! We started – and I seemed to have no voice left at all before the end of No. 1! Hard work? I thought we were used to that at North End Hall, but the acoustics here are just as bad. Something seemed to be muffling the sound; it was awful. But Dr Boulton had warned us of this. What an experience it was! I came face to face with real hard work – work before which all but sheer, solid competence must crumple up, fall to pieces, in the face of the relentlessness of it. I was glad I knew that music so well – and yet the atmosphere is genial. Dr Boulton is most even-tempered and patient, but one feels that behind his suavity and good humour there is the inexorable taskmaster. Nothing escapes him. At the end Vaughan Williams thanked us for a "magnificent rehearsal". We hardly felt it had been, but perhaps it sounded all right.

January 1937 On the night I didn't go home, but sat in an ABC until 7.30 trying to realise that I was to sing in Queen's Hall that night! Part of an ambition fulfilled, only a beginning but there is more responsibility

in singing in a chorus than most people know, I have found that out, and I had as great a task before me as if I were singing alone. I felt excited, but not nervous. It was lovely to go into Door No. 15 (the artists' door) where I had often waited, and felt ridiculously superior! I suppose the worst moment is waiting for your number to be called to go on to the platform – a bit like the French Revolution! We had a little while to sit and feel at home. I spotted Mama and Dada and when the concert started there was a fairly good audience, not a full house by any means. Well, the performance went off quite successfully. Taking the *Five Portraits* separately, the best one was *John Jayberd*; the men sang superbly and I felt really proud. Next best was *Jolly Rutterkin* (some said it went best of all). Funnily enough, this one was the most difficult, had been our *bête noir*, and we were all rather dreading it. The only point about *Elinor Rumming* is that it came first and we hadn't quite warmed up. *Pretty Bess* is only short and went along all right. It is hard to know what to say about Jane Scroop for women's voices, as the contraltos seemed so far away that to my ears it didn't blend too well, and when one is preoccupied in singing, the whole effect escapes one. But Mr Capell* raves over this piece as the finest of the Five, and certainly it is very beautiful. There was quite an ovation at the end and the composer took several calls, not to mention Mr Kirby! It was quite definitely a real success from all points of view. It was a proud mission for us, the first performance in London of a work that promises to be one of the greatest of its kind and one of the most popular. I forgot about the broadcast until near the end, and then it didn't affect me at all. How blasé we are these days!

Mr Kirby had something to say on Thursday about the concert, of course, and he began in his charmingly hesitant manner to say that he really didn't know what to say, in fact he felt proud, well, to be connected with us! Naturally, we owe our presence there to this fact, but apparently he overlooked this! He had interesting letters to read from Vaughan Williams, Sir Adrian and Mr Reed, and the latter said that the next day at the Royal College of Music the sole topic of conversation at lunch between all the professors from Sir Hugh Allen downwards – was the Croydon Phil.! Press cuttings were on view, London and provincial, and one I particularly like was mention of us as "the Society which, of course, is famous for its singing of Elgar's oratorios".

November 14th 1937 I little thought, when I was overwhelmed with joy at being a member of the Croydon Phil., that in three years' time I would be sitting in the front row, taking part in an unaccompanied quartet! This is in one of the sections from Vaughan Williams's *In Windsor Forest – Falstaff and the Fairies*. Dr VW will be there, also "several distinguished musicians" will be there, and the second half (*The Portraits*) is to be broadcast!

December 4th. In the morning I went for an hour to the orchestral rehearsal, and managed to hear *The Portraits* played over. It was revealing to hear the accompaniments without the voice parts. The composer was present, one other man - and myself! That constituted the very distinguished audience! The BBC engineers were putting up the microphones and they happened to be just where Dr VW was sitting – wobbling about on a shaky ladder – and I fully expected them to fall on him any minute – but no such calamity occurred!

The chorus rehearsed in the afternoon and it was hard work, and nerve-

racking. Astra Desmond had sprained her ankle and was hobbling about on a stick (which she bravely discarded at the concert). George Hancock had a fine voice but seemed nervous and unsure of himself at rehearsal – just couldn't get one bit right! There were several carelessnesses on the part of members too, unnecessary, stupid mistakes. However, as usual, we all turned up trumps and I think the concert was a great success. Thanks to George Hancock, *Jolly Rutterkin* was a very, very near shave at the end, and we only just "arrived home" safely. The part I had to sing with a few other sopranos seemed to sound quite well. I thoroughly enjoyed the performance and wasn't a scrap nervous.

Mama said she had met Dr VW in the foyer afterwards, and went very bravely up to him, proffering her programme for him to sign, and I am told that the following conversation took place:

Mama: "May I trouble you?"

VW: (signing) "Don't tell anyone else or they'll come crowding round".

Mama: (daring all, "How did you enjoy the performance?"

VW: "It was the best I've heard". (handing back the programme) "That's the best I can do on that".

During the past couple of months or so, while we've been rehearsing this concert, it has been brought home to me very forcibly that on the whole we are a very ordinary body of singers and the extra-ordinary results we always (I think) obtain are due solely to Mr Kirby.

Many new members joined at the beginning of this season and this may have been the reason for the impression I've had of his remarkable achievement in working up to such a pitch of excellence, such a mass of mediocrity as we were on our first rehearsal. Invariably comes his exasperated cry "But it's terrible, and it's only 10 days to the concert!" and we old hands all know that if it was 10 minutes it would be all right! But we don't relax our efforts on that account. It's only due to his mastery of the art that we come through with flying colours. He knows just when to bully us, when to pounce unmercifully on the slightest error – and when to let it pass; and when the men are singing flat and getting worse and worse – he makes us laugh – and then they're all right! I've watched this art fascinated, and it's a privilege to be able to do so.

*Richard Capell, the expert on Schubert Lieder and, at this date, chief music critic of the Daily Telegraph.

Letters

We are always pleased to receive contributions for this page

Gracious RVW

Dr Betts invited me to include a reminiscence of the time surrounding my receipt of the enclosed letter from Vaughan Williams.

I suppose there isn't much to tell that would be different from the experience of so many others. The end reason was because I had not long before writing to him heard a work of his for the first time: *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. That was about 1952 and I had a curiosity about but no knowledge of classical music. But I did know I was hearing something extraordinary.

Because of that experience I bought a set of recordings of the (then) Complete Symphonies of Vaughan Williams. Certainly you are all familiar with these – conducted by Sir Adrian Boult, issued here on the London label. I had never heard any of them, but after the *Tallis Fantasia* I knew I was going to love them. I listened to the recordings one after another, astonished.

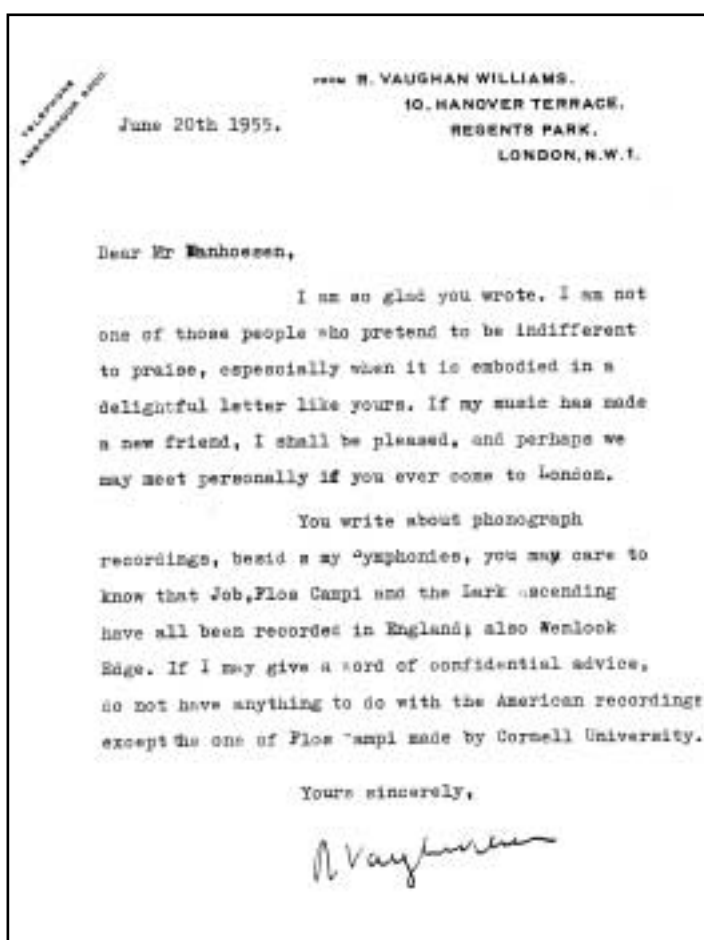
I wrote to Olin Downes, then chief music critic for the New York Times. He had just written a glowing review of the same recordings. I said how moved I had been by the music he had just commented on and asked how to go about writing to the composer. He replied, saying he thought Vaughan Williams would like to hear what I had just told him.

So, I wrote a gushing letter, care of Oxford University Press. The letter enclosed came to me soon after. Over the years I've thought many times how presumptuous it was of me; he must have been working on Symphony Number Eight at the time and this kind of thing must have been a continuous interruption. Yet, imagine, the generosity of saying that if I should ever come to London "we may meet personally." What a kind, gracious person he must have been.

I have always been at a loss to explain my reaction to Vaughan Williams's music, but not long ago I read, in Ralph Vaughan Williams, a Discovery of his Music, by Simona Pakenham:

... music which, for all its unfamiliarity, had a puzzling and elusive echo as of something I had forgotten but had once known intimately... Of course the Vaughan Williams Society has no need of this kind of quotation, but it is a perfect description of what I felt the first time I heard his symphonies and the astonishing thing about it is that Vaughan Williams said it himself, about folk song.

*LeRoy Van Hoesen
Hudson, New York*



An Unmentioned Wartime Work

This is a tardy reaction to the wonderful RVW Journal No. 22 for October 2001, featuring RVW in the Second World War. Among the articles, all of which were valuable, was VW's own, "The Composer in Wartime". In that article he wrote of the need for composers to write for variable ensembles resulting from the conditions of wartime so that such pieces could be placed, "... in a parlour or a dug-out, with a part for anyone who happens to drop in."

This leads me to mention RVW's Household Music: *Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn Tunes* for string quartet, or alternative instruments, and horn ad lib. Michael Kennedy (in his *Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 2nd ed., p. 170) writes "*These Preludes*, composed in 1940-1, were designed principally for string quartet, but the composer envisaged their being played by almost any combination of instruments which may be gathered together". Alternative instruments are then mentioned. From this we see that RVW was practising what he preached.

Household Music is in three movements: I. *Crug-y-bar* (Fantasia); II. *St. Denio* (Scherzo); III. *Aberystwyth* (eight variations). All of these hymn tunes are in the Songs of Praise, (enlarged ed. 1931) The première recording of this work is on Chandos 9392 with the Northern Sinfonia conducted by Richard Hickox which is excellent. Here are three imaginative settings of these wonderful hymn tunes!

John Barr
Bridgewater, VA
USA

Three Choirs Festival

Last year's Three Choirs Festival at Gloucester was a wonderful celebration of English music. Why, then, have there been no reports or reviews in the RVW Journal?

Stephen Friar

(Mr Friar raises an important point. I had reviews on the important Gloucester Three Choirs Festival but in the end - and very reluctantly - decided to omit these from the Journal. The main reason was that full reviews, particularly from Michael Kennedy, had appeared in the UK national press. Space is always limited so it seemed better to publish new material, rather than reviews already covered elsewhere. I'm not sure I was right! Other views of members would be most welcome - Editor)

RVW in 100 Top Favourites

I thought you might like to know that ABC Classic FM (Australia's Classical music station - about halfway in style between its UK namesake and Radio 3 - like the latter, luckily, no commercials) has asked listeners what their favourite music is, and have compiled a list of the 100 top favourites. Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto* came first, but second place went to *The Lark Ascending*. The *Tallis Fantasia* came in at number 25. Elgar scored 4 (*Enigma*, *Cello*

Concerto, *Pomp and Circumstance No. 1* and *Sea Pictures*). The only other English music was *Holst's Planets* and *When I am laid in earth*. 20 of the 100 were from the first half of the 20th century, but none from later. The organisers regretted the lack of Australian music - not even Grainger's superb *Lincolnshire Posy*, not anything by Peter Sculthorpe, the leading Australian composer who still lives here, whose music gets played fairly often. What should we read into the absence of music from the last half century? That listeners have not had time to get used to it? Or is it the intolerance of a generation of Schoenberg inspired teachers for tonal music (tonality is not a matter of opinion, but of acoustical physics) which influenced their pupils in their ways? I am grateful for Arvo Pärt, John Tavener and others who are finding new ways of using tonality, and once more producing intelligible and enjoyable music.

This month, three RVW works are listed for broadcasting - *The Lark Ascending*, *Tallis Fantasia* and *Old King Cole*. On 'mixed bag' programmes, *Greensleeves* and *The Wasps* are sometimes heard, but less than I would wish of the symphonies and choral works.

I have now got four of the CDs in Gordon Pollins English Tenor Repertoire series. I believe the Journal reviewed No. 3 in the series, which included the *Ten Blake Songs* and the Houseman settings with violin. The latter was new to me, and a delightful discovery. I was pleased to have a song of mine included in volume 6 (SOSS CD 316). All of these CDs are obtainable from Audiosonic (Gloucester) Ltd, 6 College Street, Gloucester GL1 2GE. Volume 1 included a good performance of *The Water Mill*.

Tony Noakes
Nedlands, W Australia

The Mayor of Casterbridge

As a new member of the Society, I received a copy of the Chairman's excellent Selective

Discography. There are some obscure works listed which I am keen to hear; however, one piece I have wanted for years to locate is missing. I wonder if any readers can provide information?

Back in the 1950s (I think: I am relying on memories of 50 years ago!), the BBC broadcast on radio a serialised dramatisation of Hardy's novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. I believe that the music used was especially composed by RVW, though I have no recollection of ever hearing it since; nor any reference to the music. It was one of my earliest encounters with Vaughan Williams's music, apart from the *Fantasia on Greensleeves* and the *Overture for The Wasps*. (Incidentally, the latter was also used as introductory music, if memory serves me well, for a radio serialisation of *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The music has always evoked the sea for me as a result of this association at an impressionable age!)

The music for "Casterbridge" was of haunting beauty. If it was not based on already composed music of RVW, has it been published? If so, perhaps there is a possibility of it being recorded: *Death of Tintagiles*, which was recently recorded by Chandos with *A Cotswold Romance*, had a similar genesis.

John Beech
Thame, Oxon. OX9 2AU

Michael Kennedy tells me that the serialisation of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* was broadcast in 10 weekly parts from 7th January 1951 and repeated between July and September 1953. *The Predile on an Old Carol Tune* was founded on the incidental music and was first performed in a broadcast in November 1952. It was played publicly at King's Lynn Festival on 31st July 1953 conducted by RVW. The old carol tune is *On Christmas Night*. There are two recordings, the best is by Richard Hickox on a double CD set - EMI CZS5 73986 2 - editor

Klef

The Kennedy-Karpeles Library of Ethnic Folktrax Recordings

Some of those attending the 2001 meeting during the Three Choirs Festival at Gloucester Cathedral, learned about and subsequently visited KLEF which is managed by Beryl and Peter Kennedy at Heritage House in Gloucester. For the benefit of members of the Society, Peter has written to us about the Centre and how he began his work, encouraged by RVW, recording local traditions of music, speech and custom. Further details of the Library and Archive and the available CDs can be found on the website: folktrax.org.

"Variety leading to unity - this should be our watchword - we all wish for unity but we shall not achieve it by emasculated cosmopolitanism. When the union of nations is complete, we must be prepared to offer to the common fund that which we alone can give, that which comes from our own customs, our own history, our own life".

These were the opening words spoken by RVW introducing the World Festival of Folkmusic in the Basque Country in 1953. This was one of the festivals I recorded for The International Folk Music Council, organised by my aunt, Dr Maud Karpeles, of which RVW was President. At this Festival the remarkable parallels between Basque and British rituals of Morris and Sword dances and music was significant. As well as recording I was one of the two fiddlers for the English team of young macho dancers (Folktrax CD 610).

I started recording traditional singers and musicians in the West Country in 1950. The last shantyman to sail before the mast, Stanley Slade in Bristol, started me on the trail. I had recorded him on my Scopghony-Baird portable reel-to-reel tape machine when he died only a week before he was due to record at Abbey Road Studios. I forsook architecture, in

which I had trained and my RAF job doing photographic aerial interpretation and model-making, and decided to make recording, in particular traditional music-making, my post-war mission.

So, in 1951, I purchased a Morris Cowley van, equipped it with two batteries and a mains converter and sleeping bag, set off for Yugoslavia. I decided I would try and tape traditional music and customs from the most authentic village groups from each of the seven republics as they were then, not so much the slick ensemble groups presented by the intourist regime, but "the real thing" the less showy performers from the most remote villages. (My original recordings have been re-mastered and in addition to Folktrax CDs 601-605 are available on a double CD set released by Rounder Records: 11661-1745-2).

Then, in the following year, I made my first field trip to Northern Ireland and, on my very first night in Belfast, I heard the unique and wonderful Francis McPeake singing "Will you go, lassie, go?" and accompanying himself on the Irish Uilleann (bellows-blown elbow) bagpipes. Well, you could have knocked me over with a tuning fork - singing with bagpipes - I could have been back in Serbia.

On the following day his son, Francis Junior, sang and played while Francis Senior harmonised. Here I thought was the way Irish music could be developing postwar. The Music Dept at BBC in Ormeau Avenue didn't want to know. It was not traditional in Ireland to sing with the pipes, nobody they knew had ever done it before. So I recorded them secretly in a cupboard under the stairs in Springview Street and persuaded a young George Martin at Abbey Road to put them out on our first post-war 10-inch LP for the EMI Education Dept. in 1953. It was called "Folk Song Today" (The McPeake Family of Belfast are on Folktrax CDs 071 & 176 and the fourth generation are still going strong in Belfast).

Besides doing the weekly Sunday morning broadcasts of "As I roved out", I was also being greatly encouraged by that enthusiastic catalyst, Alan Lomax, and, in 1960 we teamed up and made a larger selection of British Ballads for release on Caedmon Records. Then praise for our work came from an unexpected quarter. After listening to some of our field-tapes of traditional balladsingers in Britain and Ireland, Robert Graves wrote:

"This is faithful and authentic recording. Nineteenth century collectors lay under mechanical disadvantage of being unable to perpetuate the voices, accents, grace-notes and tempo of the singers. The folksongs they harvested, and too often bowdlerised, lost most of their poignant magic when regularised as drawing room ballads with piano settings. Here, listening to the tradition itself, nothing is lost or falsified".

Then, most fortunately, another of my idols, Percy Grainger, came to perform in London and I told him how much I treasured the field recordings he had made of Lincolnshire country singers between 1905-08 (see Folktrax CD 135). After an interesting correspondence, I asked him to write a note of introduction to our Caedmon LP set.

"I am glad to see that you do not see folk-song as dying but merely undergoing a vital metamorphosis. It is the understanding and appreciation of the traditional singers with their individual artistry, skill and creative talent that is bringing the present revival into being. Listening to your recordings I have heard expressive harmonies, such as roving triads and fascinating sonorities and two voices with bagpipes. And, contrary to what one might think, a remarkable feature of these recent collections is that they contain ballads of the most archaic type".

Another far-sighted encouragement came from RVW, who was a close friend of my parents, Douglas and Helen, and also, as I found out later, one of the prime supporters for our scheme of field-recording in Britain and Ireland. I often talked to him in the early 1950s about my recording ventures and remember how it involved directing my reports into the ear-trumpet he used those last few years. We sat alongside each other at the Editorial Board meetings of The Folk Music Journal, and again when Ralph joined my parents in attending song and dance gatherings at Cecil Sharp House, but more especially when he was supporting the work of my aunt, Maud Karpeles, with her IFMC annual conferences and bi-annual festivals, the very first of which had begun with a fantastic colourful event in London when the parks, tubes and buses resounded with music and dance in 1935.

I first came to know Ralph as a youngster in wartime. In fact, during the worst of the bombings I remember how he had delved deeper and deeper into my mother's pot of Stilton cheese laced with port wine. We also shared our Morrison shelter with my aunt Maud and Ursula (Wood) and the more the bombs came down, out came Ursula's lipstick and the more she applied, Ursula told us, the more presentable she would be to meet her maker.

After Ralph left us in 1958, the Kennedys and Karpeles decided there should be some kind of permanent memorial to him in London. Cecil Sharp House on the corner of Regents Park Road and Gloucester Avenue in London was erected in the 1930s, as a memorial to Sharp, a place to house his own personal collection of books and manuscripts, but by the 1950s it had doubled in size. The building itself was Sharp's memorial, so we decided the original Memorial Room should be re-named "The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library". Since then, with the help of Ursula and the RVW Trust, the VW Memorial Library has again doubled in size and been able to greatly increase its value to the general public.

In the 1960s I set up a Federation for Clubs and Performers and the first National Folk Festival at Keele University. At the House we installed a Folk Shop and Recording Studio, but these have now unfortunately, with a decline in membership, been relinquished and the building, by day, is being hired out to other organisations. As a place for research into traditions it also suffers from the soaring cost of hotels and parking facilities in the metropolis.

So it was that, after several years as a folk studies lecturer and founder of the Cider House Centre at Dartington Hall, we decided we needed a place out of London, in the West Country but not too far from London where a specialist centre library and archive with resources would be easily accessible to students and researchers with local accommodation facilities nearby. We tried Bristol Docks but eventually, with some encouragement from Robert Opie, moved into Brunswick Square, into a large house in a secluded spa-period square, right in the centre of the city, near to the docks and the cathedral with good parking and space for the expansion of our archive and facilities.

Although in the city we are in the heart of the country, based in the county where RVW was born (in the old vicarage at Down Ampney) and in one of the Cathedral cities in which The Three Choirs has a long established history. All around us in Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester, we are reminded, and Ralph's share in this has been important, of how much we owe to local people, in passing on traditions to the next generation. It gives us a proper sense of heritage, and the resource centre can be an inspiration to musicians and other artists and, at the same time, provide workshops where we can pass on some of the unselfconscious technical skills that are needed for the very best performances of traditional music, speech and drama.

When Maud died in 1976 she left us, not only her library of books, but also her most valuable international record collection, so that we now house an archive of many hundreds of field recordings from all over the world: cylinders, 78s, LPs, tapes, cassettes, digital discs, still photos, films and videos. We are also working in co-operation with both Gloucester City and the County Council, and in co-operation with the TSW Television and Film Archive in Plymouth, who house our films and videos.

The recordings, visual and oral, supplement the written collections left to us by Butterworth, Kidson, Grainger and VW, and also by my aunt Maud, my Scottish great-aunt, Marjorie Kennedy-Fraser, and the many others, we could go on and on, whose collections are housed in London and Gloucester. Now I myself, in my late 70s, am looking to find like-minded and media-minded folk to assist and run the Centre. We therefore invite any members of the VW Society and others who are interested to get in touch with us -

Peter and Beryl Kennedy
KLEF, Heritage House, 16 Brunswick Square,
Gloucester GL1 1UG. Tel: 01452-415110.
peter@folktrax.freemove.co.uk

Quilter and Vaughan Williams

by Valerie Langfield



‘Why don’t you write symphonies, Roger?’ asked Vaughan Williams at a concert, ‘They’re ever so easy!’ The comment amused Quilter, but it was an outlandish suggestion. With considerable independent means, he had no need to compose for a living and could afford to spend plenty of time – often years – working on a song. However, it was as much his constant ill-health as his personality, one which found it impossible to take risks, that prevented him from composing large-scale works.

Though they differed in their scale of composition, Quilter and Vaughan Williams had certain aspects in common: above all they shared a common humanitarianism and at a more mundane level they had a wide, and overlapping, circle of friends and acquaintances. At least two singers had close links with both of them: Gervase Elwes, who championed so many British composers, had given the first performance of Quilter’s song cycle *To Julia* in 1905 and throughout that decade was largely responsible for establishing Quilter’s reputation as a song composer. He also gave the first performance of *On Wenlock Edge* in 1909 and following his untimely death in 1921, the two composers had each written with great feeling to Lady Winefride Elwes, expressing loss both personal and musical. Walter Creighton gave the first performance of the *Songs of Travel* at the Bechstein Hall in 1904; at the time, Quilter lived only a few yards away, in Welbeck Street, and was very likely to have been at that concert. Creighton and Quilter were close friends – they had met in about 1899 (quite possibly earlier) at Frankfurt, where Creighton was suffering the singing tuition of Julius Stockhausen, while Quilter was studying composition with Ivan Knorr. Creighton was the dedicatee of many of Quilter’s songs, notably the first set of *Shakespeare Songs*, Op. 6; he came of a musical family and one of his aunts was Mimi von Glehn, to whom Sir George Grove was devoted.

Quilter never absorbed English folk song into his style. He regarded the ability to do so as a special gift given to few (regarding Percy Grainger as one of those few); he considered his own gifts small and on the whole he thought well, and sometimes highly, of his fellow English composers. In his choice of texts and the care with which he set them, he showed that his love was poetry, almost more than music. His wholehearted dedication to the integrity of what he wrote, and his utter dislike, to the point of revulsion, of pretentiousness in people and music gave him a sympathy with Vaughan Williams.

Quilter and Vaughan Williams shared a mutual respect, but of a sporadic correspondence spread over many years, very little remains. In a letter to Vaughan Williams, surely written to congratulate him on his 70th birthday, Quilter evidently expressed his admiration for his music; that letter has not survived, but its reply (unpublished and in a private archive) has. It is dated October 24, and Quilter, ever thoughtful, annotated it with the year of receipt, 1942; it is so illegible that, having once deciphered it, Quilter wrote a transcript. Vaughan Williams thanked him eloquently for his praise, praise which he regarded highly, since it came from one ‘who [has] the whole craftsmanship of your exquisite art at your fingers ends.’ A generous acknowledgement, indeed.

[*Note: I am most grateful to Professor Stephen Banfield for giving me the details of the symphonic anecdote, which came from his interview with Mark Raphael (Quilter’s main singer after Elwes’s death) in February 1974.*]

RVW Society News

Eighth AGM

Our Eighth AGM will be held at Charterhouse School on Sunday 13th October 2002, commencing at 3.00 pm. We are delighted that our Guest of Honour this year is the celebrated pianist Eric Parkin. He will talk about British music of the 20th century, as well as give us a recital, including piano works by RVW.

More CD reviewers needed

The Editor needs more help with CD reviews. If you are interested, please contact Stephen Connock. CDs will be provided for review purposes.

Oh My Horses! Elgar and The Great War

This 512-page book, edited by Lewis Foreman, is available to RVW Society Members for £22.50, inclusive of postage and packing. The retail price is £24.95. Every member buying a copy will ensure £4.00 is donated to RVW Society's funds. Details from John Norris, 20 High Street, Rickmansworth, Herts WD3 1ER

A Special Flame

the music of Elgar and Vaughan Williams

The Elgar Society and the RVW Society are jointly planning a Symposium to be held on 29th and 30th March 2003, at the British Library in London. The Symposium will consist of lectures, recitals, discussions and on the Saturday evening a concert of the music of Elgar and Vaughan Williams. Full details will be in the October journal. Please make a note of this date in your diary as soon as possible!

The Oxford Experience 2002 offers a series of one-week courses held at Christ Church, Oxford, between 30 June and 10 August. Of particular interest to members of the RVW Society is the following course held between 21st and 27th July:

Vaughan Williams

Along with Elgar and Britten, Vaughan Williams is one of the outstanding British composers of the past century. We will consider the main events of Vaughan Williams's life, the means by which he found his own voice, and the critical reception of his own music. We will discuss his symphonies and other works and smaller-scale pieces. As the course is in Oxford it seems fitting that we should examine his setting of poetry by Matthew Arnold in *An Oxford Elegy*. No prior technical knowledge is needed.

Tutor: Rikky Rooksby is a teacher, writer and musician. He teaches English literature for Lady Margaret Hall and the University of Oxford Department for Continuing Education, and works in music publishing.

For further details of this and other courses, please contact:

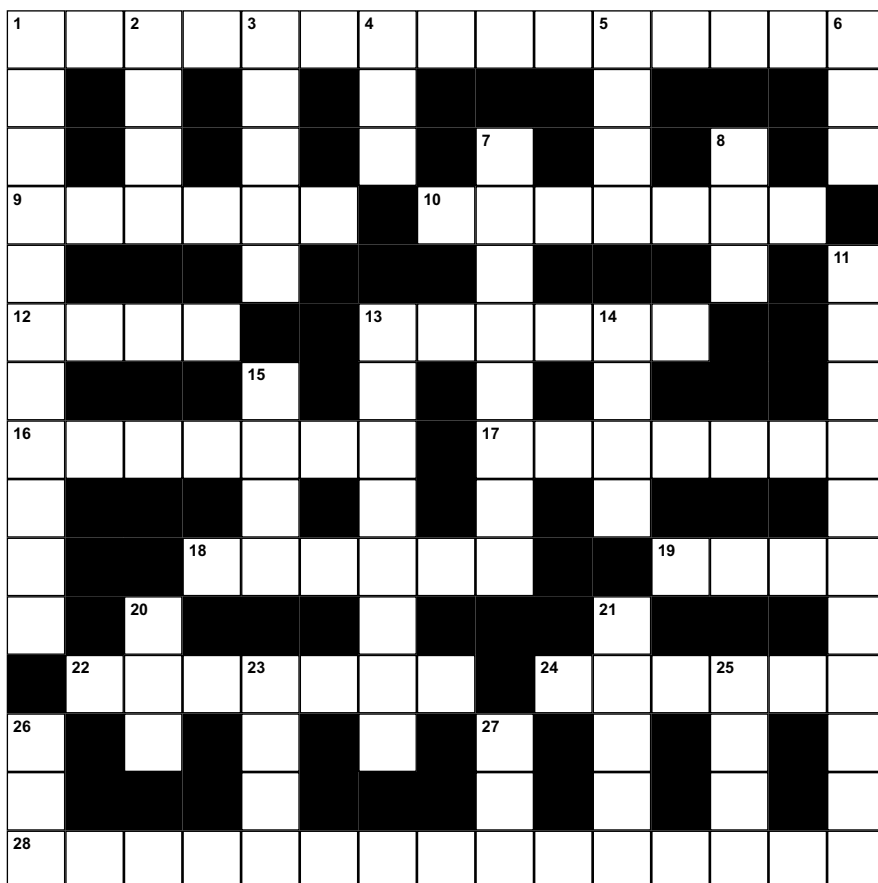
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or visit our Website: <http://www.conted.ox.ac.uk/Divisions/IP>

RVW Limited Press Release MARCH 2002

Mrs Vaughan Williams and the Directors of RVW Limited regret to announce that Bernard Benoliel has retired from the company as Artistic Director in order to devote more time to musical composition.

We wish to thank him for his 16 years of imaginative and highly professional service to the company.

We wish him well in his future endeavours.



Across:

1. O! Yon 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 Lawyer* (6)
28. First performed at the Coronation of the present Queen (3,3,9)

Down:

1. Greetings 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 this 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)

Answers on Page 24

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