

Journal of the RVW Society

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EDITOR

Stephen Connock

The Poisoned Kiss to be recorded at last

After years of planning, it is excellent news that *The Poisoned Kiss* is to be recorded for the first time. Richard Hickox will conduct the BBC National Orchestra of Wales with a star-studded cast, largely derived from the successful *Vision of Albion* performance at the Barbican, in London, on 26 October 1997. Chandos plan to record the opera from 2 - 7 January 2003 in Brangwyn Hall, Swansea.

Fund-raising

As always with such projects, raising the necessary funds has been vital. The campaign was spearheaded by The Garland Appeal, but it has been the involvement of RVW Ltd that has finally secured the project. Our heartfelt thanks to Ursula Vaughan Williams, Michael Kennedy and the directors of RVW Ltd, whose help has been of the utmost importance. The RVW Society has been asked to provide the liner notes.

Casting

The projected cast for *The Poisoned Kiss* is as follows:

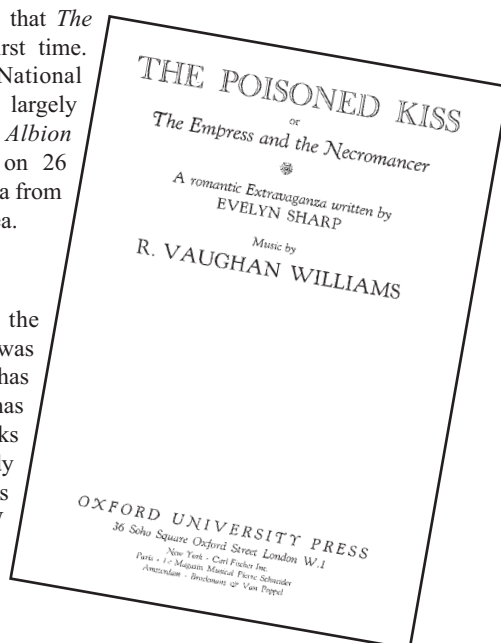
Tormentilla	Janice Watson	(soprano)
Amaryllus	Thomas Randle	(tenor)
Angelica	Pamela Helen Stephen	(mezzo soprano)
Gallanthus	Roderick Williams	(baritone)
Hob	John Graham-Hall	(tenor)
Gob	Richard Stuart	(baritone)
Lob	Mark Richardson	(bass)
1st Medium	Gail Pearson	(soprano)
2nd Medium	Helen Williams	(mezzo soprano)
3rd Medium	Claire Bradshaw	(contralto)
Dipsacus	Neal Davies	(bass)
Empress	Anne Collins	(contralto)

There was a time

This Romantic Extravaganza contains music of remarkable lyricism, including the lovely duet between Amaryllus and Tormentilla *Blue larkspur in a garden* and Tormentilla's Act II song *There was a time*. With many light-hearted interludes, the opera ends with a warm-hearted finale.

Love has conquered!	Hearts united!
Love has conquered!	Wrong is righted!
Love triumphant!	Hearts united!

The February 2003 edition of the Journal will concentrate on 'The Poisoned Kiss'.



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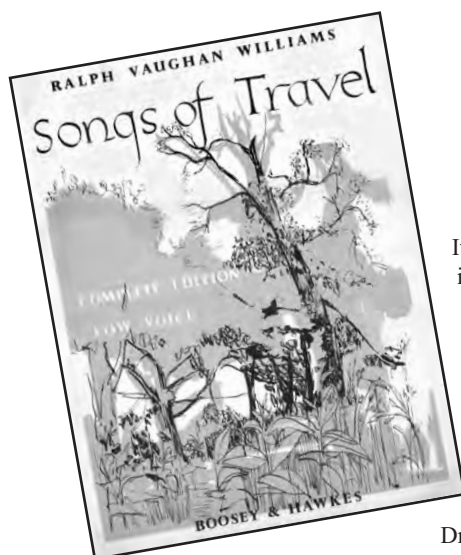
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Personal testimony:

How I was drawn to the Songs of Travel

by William M. Adams, D.M.A.

It was the Fall of 1988. I was in my first semester as a transfer student at California State University, San Bernardino. We were in rehearsal for a production of the musical *The Fantasticks*, in which I was singing the role of El Gallo. My voice teacher, Dr. Loren Filbeck, was giving a faculty recital. I was released from rehearsal just in time to catch the last thirty minutes of the recital. Those thirty minutes have had an enormous impact on the rest of my career.

The work which Loren chose to close his recital was Vaughan Williams *Songs of Travel*. I was completely unfamiliar with the work. My only exposure to the music of Vaughan Williams had been playing his folk song suites or the fantasias in high school band. Even then I remember always being drawn to the music, they were often my favorite pieces on the program, but my exposure ended there.

I can remember sitting enthralled by the sounds of this song cycle. At my next lesson I inquired about the work and nearly demanded I be allowed

to study them. On my Junior Recital I performed *The Vagabond*, *The Roadside Fire* and *Bright is the Ring of Words*. On my Senior Recital, I closed the evening with the entire cycle.

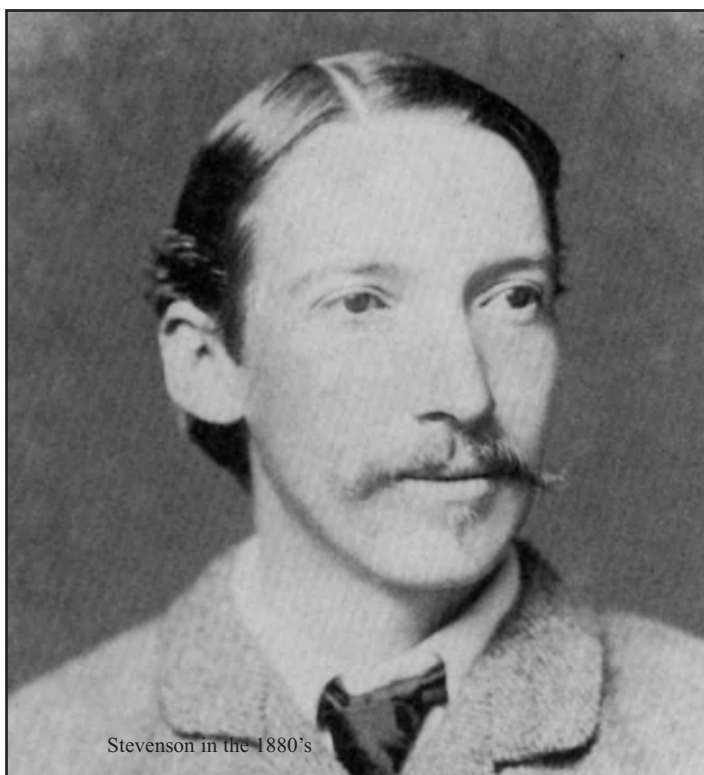
Throughout my career I have returned to these songs time and again. They've become "old friends" to me. I sing them on recitals, in auditions, and I routinely teach them to my students. It was only fitting that as I ended my academic career, as a student, I should return to them again. I was amazed that so little had been devoted to these songs. I fear they have been taken for granted by singers and teachers of singing because of their general accessibility to younger voices. It was my feeling that a work needed to be produced analyzing the songs in more detail and providing both singers and teachers of singing a guidebook in how to approach the songs.

Thus, my doctoral treatise at the University of Texas at Austin was *Ralph Vaughan Williams's Songs of Travel: An Historical, Theoretical, and Performance Practice Investigation and Analysis*. After discussing my work with Stephen Connock, it was decided that the October 2002 issue of the RVW Journal would be devoted to these songs. The articles I have submitted are edited from my treatise. I am very grateful to Mr. Connock for the opportunity to share my work with the readership of the Journal and to have this opportunity to introduce myself to my new friends and colleagues in the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society.

* * * * *

A brief history of the *Songs of Travel*

by William M. Adams, D.M.A.



Stevenson in the 1880's

An analysis of the historical information surrounding the creation of the *Songs of Travel* reveals a complicated and controversial history. This article will begin with a brief historical examination of the genesis of the poetry and conclude with a detailed discussion of the circumstances and events surrounding Vaughan Williams's composition of the song cycle.

Historical Information about the Poetry

*Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,
Say, could that lad be I?
Merry of soul he sailed on a day
Over the sea to Skye.¹*

Perhaps Stevenson's most famous entry in the *Songs of Travel* is the forty-fourth poem in the set, which has become best known as the song *Over the sea to Skye*. This particular poem (based on a Scottish melody which is now considered the *traditional* melody for this text) has seen many varied musical incarnations. The whole collection consists of forty-six poems, written during Stevenson's south sea cruises between 1888 and 1894.

The set of poems was first published in 1895, in the fourteenth volume of the Edinburgh Edition of Stevenson's *Works*. They were later published as a separate volume in September of 1896. Initially, because they were a loose collection of verses, Stevenson suggested to Sidney Colvin, his

publisher, that the poems be called *Underwoods Book III*, after two other collections of poetry which had been published in 1887.² Stevenson coined the term *Songs of Travel* but consistently referred to the poems as *Underwoods III* instead. It was by mutual agreement between Colvin and Fanny Osbourne that the title *Songs of Travel* be used.³

BRITISH SONG IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

It may be argued that, after the death of Henry Purcell in 1695, there was a long “dry” period in England in the field of solo song, and even opera, as regards British composers. While London remained an influential cosmopolitan center, England offered little in the nineteenth century in the solo song. Compared with the outpouring of songs throughout France and Germany from Schumann, Brahms, Wolf, Bizet, Fauré, Duparc, Debussy, and Grieg, the output of English composers of the same era leaves an “overall impression ... of worthlessness.”⁴ It was not until the end of the nineteenth century and the transition into the twentieth century that there began a resurgence and a reassertion by England’s composers. Elgar’s symphonic and choral works are seen as the catalyst to the renaissance of English music.⁵

The “rebirth” of British song is in no small way the direct consequence of commercialism. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the “Royalty Ballad” came into existence. A Royalty Ballad was a song which would be published if well received. The publishing company would pay a fee to the composer and, sometimes only, to the singer who would then present the song in a concert. Naturally, the event would be heavily publicized, especially the availability of the song from the publishing company. Before long, the publishing companies began presenting concerts of only the music in their own catalogs.⁶

These songs were essentially “worthless” compared with the musical output of the major song composers of the late nineteenth century.⁷ While avoiding the pitfall of generalization, it should be mentioned that the basic style of these songs was homogenized, lacking any real individuality from composer to composer. The basic subject matter was generally lighter and more pastoral, although there were instances when the poetry of Tennyson or Shelley would be subjected to the genre.⁸ At approximately the turn of the century this trend began, gradually, to change. “Artistic” songs began to emerge. These songs were routinely set to poetry which demanded more of the listener, or reader. The subjects were weightier, dramatically more intense. They typified a change in the British aesthetic which began to assert itself through declamation.

The magazine *The Vocalist*, which included published songs by British composers between 1902 and 1905, attempted to be the catalyst for a change in the vocal aesthetic. They sought to apply stronger standards to ballads in the hopes of fostering a better breed of songs.⁹ Unfortunately, the songs they published were not any better received despite their stronger artistic value. The editors admitted that the first songs they published, which included Vaughan Williams’s *Linden Lea*, were “almost too high-class to be popular.”¹⁰ Banfield believes that the course of British song was already established and that the efforts of magazines like *The Vocalist* did not actually help any composer and may well have done them harm, at least in the short term.¹¹

British song throughout the twentieth century took many paths. As is true for most twentieth-century forms, there have been many different threads of thought and style that have permeated the genre. From somewhat questionable beginnings in commercial entanglements, however, grew a strong and highly unique culture of music. The continental traditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gave way to nationalistic heroes such as Ralph Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten in the twentieth century. Together with their contemporaries, George Butterworth, Gerald Finzi, Roger Quilter, and Gustav Holst among others, they left a legacy of songs which will continue to have an impact and a place in musical history for centuries to come.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE SONGS

Specific historical information pertaining to the *Songs of Travel* is difficult to obtain. According to Michael Kennedy, in a letter dated April 26, 1998, “documentation for this period of Vaughan Williams’s life is virtually non-existent and he was *not* a man who wrote about his own composition processes.”¹² Of the forty-six poems in Stevenson’s collection, Vaughan Williams selected nine dispersed throughout the first half of the collection. Vaughan Williams remained consistent in his usage of the text with only two exceptions. The first example of this is found in *Youth and Love*. At the beginning of the second stanza of text, Stevenson’s original reads “Thick as **the** stars at night when the moon is down.”¹³ The word “the” is omitted from Vaughan Williams’s setting. The other exception is found in *The Infinite Shining Heavens*. Referring to the second line of the final stanza, Stevenson’s text reads “The stars **stood** over the sea.”¹⁴ Vaughan Williams substituted the word “looked” for stood in his setting. It is unknown if these changes were made intentionally by Vaughan Williams or if the edition of poetry available to him had printed the poems as he used them. At no time does Vaughan Williams further stray from Stevenson’s text. Every poem is used exactly as Stevenson wrote it.

The titles of the songs are primarily taken from the first lines of text or titles given by Stevenson. *The Vagabond* and *Youth and Love II* are the titles given by Stevenson. *The Roadside Fire* is the composer’s title, taken from the last line of the poem. *Whither Must I Wander?* is also the composer’s title, taken from the end of the first line of text. All other titles are taken from the beginnings of the poems.

The first song to be published, *Whither Must I Wander?*, appeared in *The Vocalist* in June, 1902. It was published again in 1912 but did not appear with the other songs of the cycle until the complete edition was produced by Boosey & Hawkes in 1960. The rest of the songs must have been composed in or before 1904, although the specific dates are not known. Presumably, the success of *Whither?* prompted Vaughan Williams to return to that song and build a cycle of songs around it. The first eight songs (in their correct order - as published today) were presented by baritone Walter Creighton and pianist Hamilton Harty on December 2, 1904 at Bechstein Hall, London.¹⁵

Publication of the songs presented another problem for Vaughan Williams. The publishing company, then Boosey & Co., London, did not want to publish all of the songs together and decided, instead, to publish only three of the songs. This first publication included *The Vagabond*, *The Roadside Fire*, and *Bright is the Ring of Words* and was first published in 1905. After realizing some success, Boosey & Co. decided to print four other songs in 1907. This second publication contained *Let Beauty Awake*, *Youth and Love*, *In Dreams*, and *The Infinite Shining Heavens*. Again quoting from Kennedy’s letter of April 26:

I assume that *Whither?* ... was excluded because it had already been published in 1902 by *The Vocalist Co.* and was presumably their copyright. In any case, the risk of publishing songs by a young English composer was so great in 1904 that no publisher would risk issuing a song already in print.¹⁶

The first book was published again in 1907 with an addition to the title page reading: “Part I.” The second book was also published a second time, also in 1907, with the second publication adding “Part II” to the title page. The sets are strikingly different in character. The first book contains songs stronger in character while the second book contains songs that are more ethereal and spiritual in nature. In the complete setting of the cycle there is a cohesion to this contrast. The listener is taken on a journey with the Traveler. Breaking the songs into these books ruined this effect. It is believed that the publisher made the decision regarding which songs would be published in which edition. When asked if Vaughan Williams had any input into the selection of which songs would have been published, Kennedy’s response was “Almost certainly he did not.”¹⁷

Song Title	Stevenson's Poem #	Publication Book/Order
The Vagabond	1	I/1
Let Beauty Awake	9	II/1
The Roadside Fire	11	I/3
Youth and Love II	3	II/2
In Dreams	4	II/3
The Infinite Shining Heavens	6	II/4
Whither Must I Wander?	17	Vocalist 1902, Boosey 1912.
Bright is the Ring of Words	15	I/2
I Have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope	23	Complete Edition 1960.

Table 1: Publication History

The previous table summarizes the selection of poems, their placement in the cycle and in Stevenson's collection, and their original publication history. The Book I songs were orchestrated by Vaughan Williams in 1905 using 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, percussion (side drum and triangle), harp, and strings. Roy Douglas, a close friend and associate of Vaughan Williams, orchestrated the rest of the songs in 1961-2, using only the instrumentation Vaughan Williams used for his orchestrations.¹⁸ There also exists an *a cappella* TTBB arrangement, by the composer, of *The Vagabond* dating from 1952.

The ninth song, *I Have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope*, was discovered among Vaughan Williams's papers after his death. Boosey & Hawkes then released a complete edition of the *Songs of Travel* in 1960, corresponding with Hervey Alan's and Frederick Stone's first performance of the complete cycle on May 21, 1960 on the BBC Home Service, and John Shirley-Quirk's recording of the complete cycle on the Saga label. The specific composition date for *I Have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope* is unknown, although there has been a great deal of speculation on the subject.

The mystery of the ninth song is intriguing. Given the publication and performance history stated above, there are numerous questions regarding the ninth song which present themselves. The first, of course, is when was it written? If it was written with the other songs, by 1904, why was it not performed with the rest of the cycle? Kennedy's own texts seem to offer contradictory accounts. In *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, Kennedy refers to the work as having been "performed as a complete cycle"¹⁹ In fact, if the ninth song were in existence, the cycle was not performed complete. However, in *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, Kennedy refers to the ninth song as having been "withheld" by Vaughan Williams, although he gives no motive for the act.²⁰ Lack of publication shouldn't have been the motive, since at the time the cycle received its premier performance there were no publications in existence of the cycle. Even assuming that Vaughan Williams was aware of the problems which would arise, either through preliminary contacts with the publishing company or based on the publishing history of the company, it did not prevent him from including *Whither?* on that program. As it turned out *Whither?* was not published with the rest of the cycle, in either volume. Based on the events, there is no apparent reason to withhold *I Have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope*. There is a note on the song, presumably Vaughan Williams's, stating "This little epilogue ... should be sung in public only when the whole cycle is performed." This admonition from Vaughan Williams should have served as enough deterrent to the piece being presented out of context, even if published in one of the volumes.

Another possibility is that the song was not composed until late, or at least later, in Vaughan Williams's life, perhaps as an afterthought. In the original printing of Stephen Banfield's text, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical studies of the early twentieth century*, he suggested a composition date of 1952, although he offered no evidence for that date and subsequently removed the date for a new printing.²² Here the primary question must be "Why?" Why write the song after so many years?

One possible, and purely speculative, answer is the song may well have been written in reaction to the death of his first wife Adeline Fisher in 1951. In 1952 Vaughan Williams reached his eightieth birthday. Another possibility is that Vaughan Williams was beginning to sense his own

mortality and chose to compose his own musical epitaph. The poetry of Stevenson is often viewed as idealistic, even naive, relating to a simpler emotional time. Perhaps the allure of such youthful emotions prompted Vaughan Williams's return to the *Songs of Travel*. The Traveler of these songs may have struck something of an emotional chord with Vaughan Williams, or he may have seen returning to so early a work as a means of coming full circle in his life.

Michael Kennedy offers the following possibilities, in his letter of April 26, as to the composition of *I Have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope*:

... there is absolutely no question whatsoever but that *I Have Trod* was written in 1904 or 1903, whenever the whole cycle was written. When Booseys refused to entertain the idea of publishing the whole cycle *as a cycle*, in the correct order, [Vaughan Williams] quite rightly and sensibly withheld the last song either because it did not make much sense (with its quotations) on its own or because he had doubts about it. He was intensely self-critical and probably thought it didn't work. ... speculation about Adeline's death, his own mortality, etc. is wrong because ... he was not that kind of man or composer. He would never have remotely contemplated "writing his own epitaph."²³

Kennedy's analysis certainly fits the character of Vaughan Williams, and it does seem unlikely that he would have returned to so early a work for such emotional reasons. However, as he had returned to the *Songs of Travel* for his TTBB arrangement, the songs may have been on his mind, prompting him to write the epilogue. Kennedy's hypothesis that Vaughan Williams may have withheld the song because of self-doubt is the only explanation which justifies its exclusion from the premiere concert, especially in light of the inclusion of *Whither Must I Wander*. If, however, Kennedy's supposition is incorrect, then it certainly seems logical to conclude that the ninth song may have been written at a later date, perhaps as late as 1952. In any case, there has been, as yet, no physical evidence to prove or disprove any theory relating to the composition date of the ninth song. Without such evidence all theories regarding the composition date remain theories.

NOTES

- 1 Robert Louis Stevenson, "Over the Sea to Skye," in *Robert Louis Stevenson: Collected Poems*, 2nd ed., edited by Janet Adam Smith (London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971), 282.
- 2 Janet Adam Smith, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: Collected Poems*, 2nd ed., (London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971), 500.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 501.
- 4 Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical studies of the early twentieth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 3.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 13.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Michael Kennedy, letter to William Adams, Austin, 26 April 1998.
- 13 Smith, 247.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 248.
- 15 Michael Kennedy, *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 25.
- 16 Kennedy letter to Adams.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 Kennedy, *Catalogue*, 26.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 25.
- 20 Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964, 1980), 80.
- 21 Kennedy, *Catalogue*, 26.
- 22 Banfield, 521.
- 23 Kennedy to Adams.

Robert Louis Stevenson:

A brief examination of the poet behind the *Songs of Travel*

by William M. Adams, D.M.A.

Biographical and Stylistic Information BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on November 13, 1850. In 1867, Stevenson entered Edinburgh University to pursue a career in civil engineering, after his father. In 1871, however, he abandoned his pursuit of civil engineering and turned his attention toward a career in law. He worked with the firm WF Skene & Peacock and was admitted to the Scottish bar in 1875. His true interest lay in writing, however, and he began writing essays and short stories. His first essay, *Roads*, was published in 1873. His first short story, *A Lodging for the Night*, was published in 1877.¹

In 1876, while in Grèz-sur-Loing, France, Stevenson met and fell in love with an American, Fanny Osbourne, whom he married in San Francisco three years later. Throughout his brief life, Stevenson, his wife, and his stepson, Lloyd Osbourne, traveled extensively in Europe, the United States, and the South Pacific, eventually settling in Samoa.²

Stevenson is undoubtedly most remembered for his novels *Treasure Island*, written in 1883, and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, written in 1886. While best known as an author of novels, Stevenson expended much energy in the writing of poetry. His most popular collections are *A Children's Garden of Verses*, composed in 1885, and *Underwoods*, dating from 1887. During his cruises in the South Pacific, toward the end of his life, Stevenson wrote forty-six poems which would later be collected and published as the *Songs of Travel*. Stevenson was involved in the collection of these works, though they were published posthumously.

Robert Louis Stevenson died of apoplexy in 1894 and was buried atop Mount Vaea, in Samoa. He suffered ill health throughout his life, including tuberculosis. It has been suggested at various times that tuberculosis was, in fact, the cause of his death. Frank McLynn, however, believes that the hemorrhage which finally claimed Stevenson was due, instead, to stress and overwork.³

STYLISTIC INFLUENCES

On May 13, 1887, Stevenson wrote an article for *British Weekly* entitled Books "that have Influenced Me".⁴ In this article he attempted to

shed some light on the authors, works, and genres which had the most impact on him personally and as an author. Many of the names are expected: Shakespeare, Goethe, Whitman, Wordsworth, Hardy, and Hugo. Stevenson commented that "the most influential books and the truest in their influence are works of fiction."⁵ Baidon goes on to suggest that Stevenson is really tipping his hat to works of imagination.

Stevenson makes an interesting reference to a specific character and work of fiction which he found particularly engaging: "Perhaps my dearest and best friend outside of Shakespeare is d'Artagnan – the elderly d'Artagnan of the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*. I know not a more human soul, nor, in his way, a finer; I shall be very sorry for the man who is so much of a pedant in morals that he cannot learn from the Captain of Musketeers."⁶ This seems to be of particular interest when examining the character of *The Vagabond*.

It is interesting to note that despite Stevenson's success as an author, he was not widely accepted as a poet. Despite the successes of *Underwoods* and *A Children's Garden of Verses*, he was often considered a second-rate poet. Sidney Colvin wrote of him, "It is one of the curiosities of literature that L[ouis]'s hand, so unerring in prose, should have been so wavering in verse."⁷ Furthering the notion that Stevenson's poetry was not well received was a lecture given by Robert Graves in 1922, printed in *Poetic Unreason* in 1925, which attacks the very nature of *The Vagabond*.

Stevenson has a famous ballad in praise of the Open Road, saying that all he asks is Heaven above and the road before him, and that bread dipped in running water is enough for him to subsist on for ever. One would at first sight, picking up that poem without knowing who Stevenson was, say that a tramp was the only fit person to judge whether that poem was good or bad. But a tramp called in to bear witness would say in his own way that was the most malicious and wicked poem ever written, countenancing with a shoddy idealism the miseries of a life of which Stevenson can have had no experience. He would speak with horror of the condition called Breadsickness: after two or three months of unrelieved bread-diet the stomach revolts and even the smell of a baker's shop is enough to make the man vomit. A cup of hot tea to a tramp after innumerable cups of cold water – the Gospel emblem loses its force here – is the greatest gift that can be given. But the poem is not written for tramps, it is written by an invalid with an overpowering desire for freedom and a hatred of the dietary delicacies that his condition demands, to be read by invalids in a similar case. It is a good poem but with evident limitations.⁸

This seems to be an overly-simplistic analysis of the poem. Few would agree that it is a prerequisite of Art to be realistic. Provided there is a level at which the reader, or listener, can identify with the protagonist, the Art will be effective.

Janet Adam Smith offers an explanation for the nature of these poems, and indeed all of Stevenson's poetry, that may point directly to the appeal these poems may have held for Vaughan Williams and countless other readers.

We enjoy Stevenson's poetry when we are young and full of emotion about situations that we have not yet experienced in real life. Some of his lyrics perfectly catch the gestures and moods of youth – the actual moods and the wished for gestures. The verses of *Youth and Love* chime in with our romantic longings for adventure and noble renunciation. *Blows the wind today* moves us to tears for a lost home and a lost youth when our own childhood is only just round the corner. Under the wide and starry sky satisfies our aspirations for beautiful and heroic death. The witty, the conversational, the narrative pieces are slid over in our search for lines that crystallise our own airy, turbulent moods.

It seems logical that a man so taken with works of imagination and characters such as d'Artagnan would write novels and poetry that also offer up idealistic characters and situations through which we, as readers, find our means of escape. Escapist philosophies in art, either literature or music, or any other art form one can imagine, are nothing new. Works of art which offer a means of escape are rarely viewed as substandard or of a lesser quality to those that demand of their audience a confrontation with the demons of their own lives. The *Songs of Travel* will probably never reach the same elevated status in critical discourse as the works of Goethe or Shakespeare. Still, Stevenson's poetry should not be dismissed out of hand as amateurish simply because of a perceived lack of realism in the situations found within.

NOTE

- 1 H. Bellyse Baidon, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Life Study in Criticism* (New York: A. Wessels Company, 1901), 39-42.
- 2 Alanna Knight and Elizabeth Stuart Warfel, *Robert Louis Stevenson: Bright Ring of Words*, (Nairn, Scotland: Balnain Books, 1994), 219.
- 3 Frank McLynn, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Hutchinson, 1993), 506.
- 4 Baidon, 59.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*, 60.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Janet Adam Smith, ed., *Robert Louis Stevenson: Collected Poems* 2nd ed., (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971), 502.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 23.

Elements of Form and Unity in Songs of Travel

by William M. Adams, D.M.A.

The definition of “Song Cycle” is broad. It is a “composite form of vocal music consisting of a group of individually complete songs” for either solo or groups of voices. Further it “relates a series of events, or a series of impressions, or may simply be ... unified by mood.”¹ Early books written on Vaughan Williams and his music (i.e. before his death in 1958, and in some cases immediately afterward) failed to recognize the *Songs of Travel* as a song cycle for various reasons. First, the lack of a cohesive publication of the songs convinced some, like Dickinson, that they were meant to be sets of songs.² Second, these texts were written prior to the discovery of the ninth song. The ninth song, as will be illustrated later in this text, provides the most obvious source of cohesion and unity in the entire cycle.

Nonetheless, a case can be made that *Songs of Travel* was conceived as a song cycle from the beginning. Accordingly, the intent of this article is to focus on the various elements that unify the nine songs into a cohesive cycle that reveal the cyclical elements of Vaughan Williams’s design. The texts and the story they relate will be addressed first. Then the narrative will focus on motivic and thematic elements which contribute to the overall design of *Songs of Travel*.

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Songs of Travel

new complete edition 1960 for low voice
(original key)

- 1 The Vagabond
- 2 Let Beauty Awake
- 3 The Roadside Fire
- 4 Youth and Love
- 5 In Dreams
- 6 The Infinite Shining Heavens
- 7 Whither must I Wander
- 8 Bright is the Ring of Words
- 9 I Have Trod the Upward and the
Downward Slope (op. Posth.)

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THE STORY

There is, indeed, a story in the *Songs of Travel* created not by Stevenson in his poetry, but by Vaughan Williams in his ordering of the songs. The main character is the Vagabond introduced in the first song. In this poem, the first of the poetic set as well, the Vagabond is ready to begin his journey. This is a young man, full of enthusiasm to leave the nest and strike out on his own. He challenges Nature and Fate to only provide a road and sky and he will be able to make do with whatever else he finds, eating bread he dips in a river for sustenance. There is a profound sense of bravado in the Vagabond’s character. This type of characterization may have appealed to Vaughan Williams in his quest for a national musical identity in pre-war England.

In the second song of the cycle, the Vagabond is already abroad and is reveling in the beauty of nature personified as a young woman. The images of the poem are clear references to a sunrise and sunset. The beauty of nature as it appears in both day and night is enough to move the Vagabond emotionally. There are no complications to his existence; he is able to commune with and appreciate the splendor of the world around him.

By the third song of the cycle, however, there is another character introduced. A young maiden, who will always be addressed and never be the main persona, has appeared in his life and apparently has won his heart. This song begins an episode within the Vagabond’s travels that will be covered in three successive songs. Here, the relationship is new, and plans are made and discussed about the life they can share together. The Vagabond is willing to share the journey with the young maiden, providing for her all she will need from the elements around him.

Youth and Love brings about a change in the relationship. The Vagabond, still young, is unable to commit truly to a relationship and must continue the journey. The “pleasures” of a domesticated life “assail him.” The Vagabond is unable, and unwilling, to continue the relationship. To protect himself, he leaves in an aloof manner, as is witnessed in the words “And but waves a hand as he passes on / Cries but a wayside word to her.” The Vagabond has ended the relationship with the young maiden and has continued his journey.

The final song in this episode is In Dreams. In his dream, the Vagabond manifests his own feelings of loneliness after the separation by imagining the young maiden’s torment and despair. It is an admission of regret on the Vagabond’s part that the life he has chosen does not allow for a substantial relationship with another person. It can also be seen as an admission of regret over the way the relationship ended. “But he that left you with a smile forgets you not” seems to speak directly to the end of *Youth and Love* and the casual manner in which the Vagabond departed.

In a moment of reflection, the Vagabond looks to the stars that have guided him on the journey and have been his constant companion for consolation and solace. He spends many nights wallowing in sorrow and despair, presumably over the lost love and the void it has created in his life. The stars are now represented with mixed language. They showered “sorrow and light,” were “distant as heaven” and were “dumb and shining and dead.” These seemingly contradictory images reveal a growing maturity in the Vagabond as he accepts the true nature of his life and his journey and the sacrifices made. The Vagabond admits that these “idle stars” mean more to him than the bread that sustains him physically. Ultimately, a shooting star signals the end of this grieving process and he is able to move on. Banfield comments that “the effect of the ending is perfectly gauged; it sounds right, even though it is difficult to explain why the music has to go up as the star comes down.”³ The explanation may be simpler than expected. This event, the shooting star, revitalizes and reaffirms the Vagabond. Such sentiments are well suited to the almost fanfare-like quality of an ascending perfect fifth. Vaughan Williams cheats some of that bravado with the sudden decrescendo, however, perhaps again signaling the increased maturity and loss of innocence this episode has brought to the Vagabond.

An older and wiser Vagabond finds someone else to interact with in *Whither Must I Wander?* Here the Vagabond relates stories of his youth, presumably to a younger person, perhaps someone else beginning a similar journey, perhaps only a young person interested in the experiences of the Vagabond. The Vagabond relates warm stories about the innocence of his childhood, the safety and security of home, the

multitude of friends, the songs and stories shared around a fire. As he goes on in his narration, however, we discover more regrets over this nomadic lifestyle. Today the house is empty, the “chimney-stone is cold,” and he has no home to which he can return. Regrets which had been reserved for lost love have now expanded to include all aspects of a stable home environment. He acknowledges with the line “but I go for ever and come again no more” how his fate is sealed. He is consigned to this existence and resigned to accept that whatever joys it brings, it does so with a price. In many respects this song can be viewed as a “mid-life crisis” for the Vagabond.

Bright is the Ring of Words begins with a feeling of bravado not experienced in the cycle since *The Vagabond*. The “mid-life crisis” is over and the older, more mature Vagabond once again revels in his existence. He speaks again of the nobility of his lifestyle comparing his existence with that of musicians, both composers and singers. He begins to speak of his legacy, the impact he has made on those he has encountered along the way. The “sunset embers” are a clear metaphor for the end of life. During this twilight of his life he is able to recall, fondly, the maiden he left behind and envision her reminiscing about him and the songs he sang then and continues to sing now.

The epilogue is clearly the death of the Vagabond. This phase of his journey is about to end. He reflects again on the breadth of his experiences and the richness of his life. He comments on his ability, through it all, to move forward, to close the door. With that statement he closes the door on this existence and moves on to the next.

FORMAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Vagabond

Give to me the life I love,
Let the lave go by me,
Give the jolly heaven above
And the byway nigh me.
Bed in the bush with stars to see,
Bread I dip in the river –
There’s the life for a man like me,
There’s the life for ever.

Let the blow fall soon or late,
Let what will be o’er me;
Give the face of earth around
And the road before me.
Wealth I seek not, hope nor love,
Nor a friend to know me;
All I seek, the heaven above
And the road before me.

Or let autumn fall on me
Where afield I linger,
Silencing the bird on tree,
Biting the blue finger.
White as meal the frosty field –
Warm the fireside haven –
Not to autumn will I yield,
Not to winter even!

Let the blow fall soon or late,
Let what will be o’er me;
Give the face of earth around
And the road before me.
Wealth I ask not, hope nor love,
Nor a friend to know me;
All I ask, the heaven above
And the road before me.⁴

The Vagabond, because of the poetry, has one of the more classic song designs in the cycle. Stevenson’s repeat of the second stanza as the fourth stanza allowed Vaughan Williams to create an AABA format for the song. This recapitulation fosters in the listener a sense of the Vagabond’s continuing journey. Banfield referred to this sentiment as the “endless plod of the traveller.”⁵

Internally, Stevenson’s poetry rarely follows an exact structure syllabically. This forces flexibility from Vaughan Williams in being able to alter, slightly, the rhythmic nature of a melodic line to fit the changing syllabic structure. Kennedy refers to this as the “supreme achievement of the whole cycle: the infallible setting of the words, the gift of correct accentuation so that poem and melody fuse into one.” Stevenson’s rhyme scheme is also slightly inexact. Throughout the majority of the poem an *ababedcd* rhyme scheme is employed. The first and third lines of the second, and thus the fourth, stanzas, however, do not rhyme (“late” and “around”) creating, instead, an *abcdbdede* scheme.

Let Beauty Awake

Let Beauty awake in the morn from beautiful dreams,
Beauty awake from rest!
Let Beauty awake
For Beauty’s sake
In the hour when the birds awake in the brake
And the stars are bright in the west!

Let Beauty awake in the eve from the slumber of day,
Awake in the crimson eve!
In the day’s dusk end
When the shades ascend,
Let her wake to the kiss of a tender friend
To render again and receive!⁷

Let Beauty Awake is a short and relatively simple poem structurally which allowed Vaughan Williams to create a similarly simple structure for the song. The poem is separated into two stanzas each six lines in length. Again, the syllabic structure of the lines varies. The rhyme scheme is consistent, however, with an *abeccb* structure. The overall form is consistent enough, however, that Vaughan Williams was able to mould the stanzas into two equal halves musically. The result is an AA form with only slight rhythmic variations in the melodic line to accommodate text.

The Roadside Fire

I will make you brooches and toys for your delight
Of bird-song at morning and star-shine at night.
I will make a palace fit for you and me
Of green days in forests and blue days at sea.

I will make my kitchen, and you shall keep your room,
Where white flows the river and bright blows the broom,
And you shall wash your linen and keep your body white
In rainfall at morning and dewfall at night.

And this shall be for music when no one else is near,
The fine song for singing, the rare song to hear!
That only I remember, that only you admire,
Of the broad road that stretches and the roadside fire.⁸

The Roadside Fire begins to show more interpretation from Vaughan Williams structurally. The poem consists of three stanzas each containing four lines. The rhyme scheme is a consistent *aabb*. Vaughan Williams chose, in essence, a bar form (AAB) for the song. Dickinson refers to this song as “a *Bar*, in the broad sense of German minstrelsy.” In fact, at the end of the B section there is a brief revisiting of the A material. The return is harmonic and textural, not melodic.

Youth and Love

To the heart of youth the world is a highwayside.
Passing for ever, he fares; and on either hand,
Deep in the gardens golden pavilions hide,
Nestle in orchard bloom, and far on the level land
Call him with lighted lamp in the eventide.

Thick as [the] stars at night when the moon is down,
Pleasures assail him. He to his nobler fate
Fares; and but waves a hand as he passes on,
Cries but a wayside word to her at the garden gate,
Sings but a boyish stave and his face is gone.¹⁰

Poetically, *Youth and Love* consists of two stanzas each of five lines following a rondo-like rhyme scheme of *ababa*. There is only one syllabic alteration between the two stanzas marring their symmetry. Vaughan Williams, however, chose to create a broad binary form for the song. There are two clear sections, separated by texture, melody, and harmony. At the end, there is a brief restatement of the A section, strikingly similar in design to that employed in *The Roadside Fire*.

In Dreams

In dreams, unhappy, I behold you stand
As heretofore:

The unremembered tokens in your hand
Avail no more.

No more the morning glow, no more the grace,
Enshrines, endears.
Cold beats the light of time upon your face
And shows your tears.

He came and went. Perchance you wept a while
And then forgot.
Ah me! but he that left you with a smile
Forgets you not.¹¹

In Dreams is, in essence, through-composed, according to Dickinson. While this may be technically accurate, the statement itself oversimplifies the formal elements present. The song can be divided into two parts, not necessarily equal in size. There is a clear division between sections at m. 25. The next section begins exactly as the beginning, implying an A' section. After a mere seven measures, however, new material is introduced, similar to the first section only in its chromaticism. Stevenson's poem, consists of three stanzas of four lines each following a consistent *abab* rhyme scheme.

The Infinite Shining Heavens

The infinite shining heavens
Rose and I saw in the night
Uncountable angel stars
Showering sorrow and light.

I saw them distant as heaven,
Dumb and shining and dead,
And the idle stars of the night
Were dearer to me than bread.

Night after night in my sorrow
The stars [stood] over the sea,
Till lo! I looked in the dusk
And a star had come down to me.¹³

The Infinite Shining Heavens is structured similarly to *In Dreams*. A clearly defined break in sections is apparent in m. 32 with what also appears to be a restatement of the opening material. In this case, however, Vaughan Williams introduces new material even earlier, just four measures after the vocal entrance. Again, Stevenson's poem is structured in three stanzas of four lines with an uneven rhyme scheme of *abcb*.

Whither Must I Wander?

Home no more home to me, whither must I wander?
Hunger my driver, I go where I must.
Cold blows the winter wind over hill and heather;
Thick drives the rain, and my roof is in the dust.
Loved of wise men was the shade of my roof-tree.
The true word of welcome was spoken in the door –
Dear days of old, with the faces in the firelight,
Kind folks of old, you come again no more.

Home was home then, my dear, full of kindly faces,
Home was home then, my dear, happy for the child.
Fire and the windows bright glittered on the moorland;
Song, tuneful song, built a palace in the wild.

Now, when day dawns on the brow of the moorland,
Lone stands the house, and the chimney-stone is cold.
Lone let it stand, now the friends are all departed,
The kind hearts, the true hearts, that loved the place of old.

Spring shall come, come again, calling up the moorfowl,
Spring shall bring the sun and rain, bring the bees and flowers;
Red shall the heather bloom over hill and valley,
Soft flow the stream through the even-flowing hours;
Fair the day shine as it shone on my childhood –
Fair shine the day on the house with open door;
Birds come and cry there and twitter in the chimney –
But I go for ever and come again no more.¹⁴

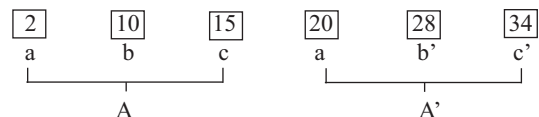
Whither Must I Wander? could be categorized as a "strophic bar." The first two stanzas are set identically while the third is altered in the accompaniment to paint the text. The melody is altered rhythmically to compensate for variations in Stevenson's meter, but is, with one exception, otherwise unchanged. The exception appears in m. 50, with the introduction of an A-natural to melodically accommodate the G minor harmony. There is no clear syllabic pattern in Stevenson's poem. The rhyme scheme of the first stanza is *ababcded*, while the second and third stanzas follow a scheme of *abcbdefe*.

Bright is the Ring of Words

Bright is the ring of words
When the right man rings them,
Fair the fall of songs
When the singer sings them.
Still they are carolled and said –
On wings they are carried –
After the singer is dead
And the maker buried.

Low as the singer lies
In the field of heather,
Songs of his fashion bring
The swains together.
And when the west is red
With the sunset embers,
The lover lingers and sings
And the maid remembers.

Bright is the Ring of Words follows the format of *In Dreams* and *The Infinite Shining Heavens* with a more transparent restatement of the opening material in m. 20. What is particularly interesting in analyzing the structure of this song, however, is the subsequent material. The overall structure of the song, while easily divisible into two major sections, can also be divided into three subsections. The form of the piece becomes:



The difference between the b and b' sections is primarily harmonic. The c' section is an augmentation of the material from m. 15, beginning in the piano accompaniment and mirrored in the vocal line two beats later, and extending through m. 18 (see Ex. 1).



Example 1: "Bright is the Ring of Words" c/c' Form Material.

The poem itself is divided into two stanzas of eight lines each. The rhyme scheme is inconsistent, the first stanza being *abcbdede*, while the second is *abcbdefe*.

I Have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope

I have trod the upward and the downward slope;
I have endured and done in days before;
I have longed for all, and bid farewell to hope;
And I have lived and loved, and closed the door.¹⁶

The final song in the cycle is through-composed. Stevenson's poem consists of one stanza of four lines alternating eleven and ten syllables each. The rhyme scheme is *abab*. In the "Motivic and Thematic Elements" section of this chapter, this song will be discussed in more detail to illuminate the material Vaughan Williams uses to unify the cycle.

MOTIVIC AND THEMATIC ELEMENTS

In addition to dramatic elements and a cohesive story line, Vaughan Williams also employs various themes and motifs to unify the cycle musically. Table 1 depicts each of these themes and motifs.

The themes and motifs are drawn from four of the songs and utilized in two others: *Youth and Love* and *I Have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope*. Each of these songs will be discussed in detail analyzing the appearances of the various thematic and motivic elements. Only *Let Beauty Awake, In Dreams*, and *The Infinite Shining Heaven* have no unifying material within.



"Vagabond" Walking Motif



"Vagabond" Fanfare Motif



"Roadside Fire" Main Theme



"Roadside Fire" Closing Music



"Whither" Introductory Music



"Whither" Main Theme



"Bright is the Ring of Words" Main Theme

Table 1: Motivic and Thematic Material

The two motifs from *The Vagabond* are immediately recognizable in the opening measures of the song. Michael Kennedy refers to the "striding bass accompaniment" as a kind of "leitmotif for the cycle."¹⁷ The walking motif, as it will be referred to in this text, symbolizes by its constant motion the continuing journey of the Vagabond. The fanfare motif, however, symbolizes the aspects of nobility and bravado which were discussed in the article analyzing the story created by Vaughan Williams. Because of the nature of the poem, it may be argued that the themes in *The Roadside Fire* are intended to evoke feelings of new love or the idealism of youth. Also due to the nature of the poetry, it may be argued that the material drawn from *Whither Must I Wander?* is intended to remind the listener of the weariness of the traveler and the more mature, perhaps even jaded, man he becomes.

According to Kennedy, Vaughan Williams was especially drawn to texts which were related to music and musicians and set them with great care and compassion.¹⁸ One of his most famous works supports this notion perhaps better than any other: *Serenade to Music*. There are instances throughout the *Songs of Travel*, however, where this tendency is also seen. One of these is without motivic or thematic support. The final section of *The Roadside Fire*, beginning with the text 'And this shall be for music...' is given a special treatment by Vaughan Williams despite its similar structure poetically with the first two stanzas. The entire text of *Bright is the Ring of Words* also alludes to musicians, both composers and singers, and their legacies. Thus, the opening theme of *Bright is the Ring of Words* may also be seen as a thematic reference to that aspect of the Vagabond.

This theme is commonly thought to have been derived from *Love's last*

gift, which is the final song of the cycle *House of Life*. *House of Life* dates from 1903, immediately prior to *Songs of Travel*. It was, in fact, premiered on the same concert. The tune also found incarnation in the hymn “Sine Nomine”, from the *English Hymnal* edition Vaughan Williams created in 1906, *Toward the Unknown Region* from 1907, and also in “I got me flowers” from the *Five Mystical Songs*, of 1911.²⁰ The tune is:



Example 3: *Sine Nomine*

While the similarity in shape of the tunes is undeniable, there are obvious differences. The theme from *Bright is the Ring of Words* begins on the tonic, descending down the major scale one degree before leaping to the fifth degree and then picking up the remainder of the opening four notes of the “Sine Nomine” tune. The instances in *Toward the Unknown Region* and “Love’s Last Gift” are more direct quotes of the “Sine Nomine” theme, while “I got me flowers” begins its statement of the same phrase identically with *Bright is the Ring of Words*.

Thematic and Motivic Elements in “Youth and Love”

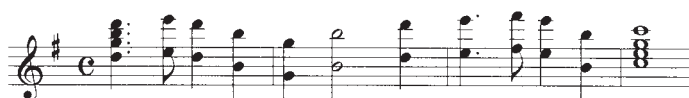
In two separate instances, Vaughan Williams evokes the Vagabond’s Fanfare Motif (see Ex 4).



Example 4: “Vagabond” Fanfare Motif in “Youth and Love”

The first of these, in m. 12, may only be present to symbolize the nature of the Vagabond in the line “Passing for ever, he fares.” The second use of the Fanfare Motif, however, in m. 39, seems to be more directly related to the action of the poem. It could be interpreted as a call to the Vagabond that it is time to move on and continue the journey, thus ending the relationship with the young maiden. Its placement, immediately before the text “He to his nobler fate Fares,” seems to support that contention.

The material from *The Roadside Fire* is also used in *Youth and Love*. Beginning in m. 45, there is what Dickinson refers to as a “vulgarized” treatment of the main theme.²¹



Example 5: “The Roadside Fire” Main Theme in “Youth and Love”

The introduction of this material comes at a moment in the poem when the Vagabond is beginning to depart: “Cries but a wayside word to her at the garden gate.” It is not the expected use of this material based on the nature of *The Roadside Fire*, but may serve a larger purpose in the scope of the cycle. As evidenced in the following songs, the end of this relationship is not an easy thing for the Vagabond. The harsh treatment of this theme may well be a means of exhibiting musically an open emotional wound. What Dickinson refers to as “vulgar” and which he admits was an “uncomfortable sensation” may have been executed by careful design on Vaughan Williams’s part.²²

Vaughan Williams further quotes *The Roadside Fire* with a statement of the closing material. This passage in *The Roadside Fire* seems to be used as a means of settling the mood from the more passionate evocations of the B section. It is used similarly here, calming from the emotional outburst of m. 45 before the final departure.



Example 6: “The Roadside Fire” Closing Material in “Youth and Love”

Thematic and Motivic Elements in “I Have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope”

The epilogue consists of almost no original material. Of the twenty-five measures of music in the epilogue, eighteen can be directly attributed to material from previous songs. The first of these, of course, is the Fanfare Motif used in both the first and third measures of the epilogue. The augmentation of the motif, coupled with the descending bass line, belies the age and perhaps failing health of the Vagabond.



Example 7: “The Vagabond” Fanfare Motif in “I Have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope”

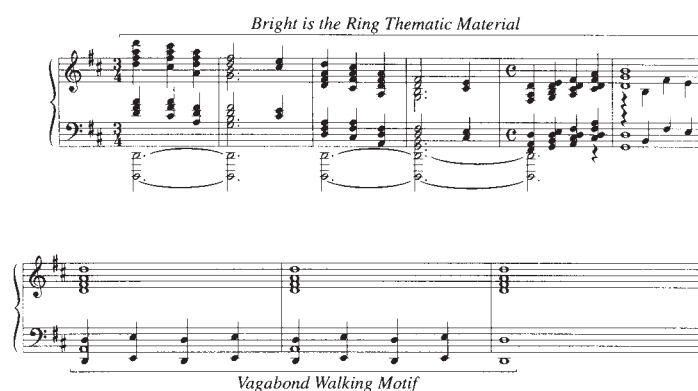
Under the text “And I have lived and loved, and closed the door,” Vaughan Williams sets the thematic material from *Whither Must I Wander?* This setting is particularly interesting because of its transposition to major from its original minor.



Example 8: “Whither Must I Wander?” Themes in “I Have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope”

By setting this material in major, Vaughan Williams seems to be reinforcing the notion that the Vagabond is at peace with himself and with his fate.

As the final note in the vocal line is released, the piano begins a brief postlude which quotes *Bright is the Ring of Words* and the Walking Motif from *The Vagabond*.



Example 9: “Bright is the Ring of Words” and “The Vagabond” Walking Motif Material in “I Have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope”

In discussing the “Sine Nomine” tune, Kennedy states that it is used as a “key-motive for expressing jubilation throughout Vaughan Williams’s life.”²³ It seems appropriate then, that Vaughan Williams would choose this theme, which spoke of the nobility and legacy of the Vagabond through music, and as Kennedy asserts, also of joy, to close the cycle. It seems unlikely that Vaughan Williams in any way intended for this to be a maudlin, unhappy setting. Rather, it is a fitting epitaph to a Vagabond who “lived and loved” (author’s italics). The last thing the listener hears is the walking motif, signifying the final departure of the Vagabond; to where is up to the listener. It can easily be interpreted as the death of the Vagabond, or as Kennedy describes it, as the Vagabond “tramping ... off into the blue.” Perhaps they are one and the same.

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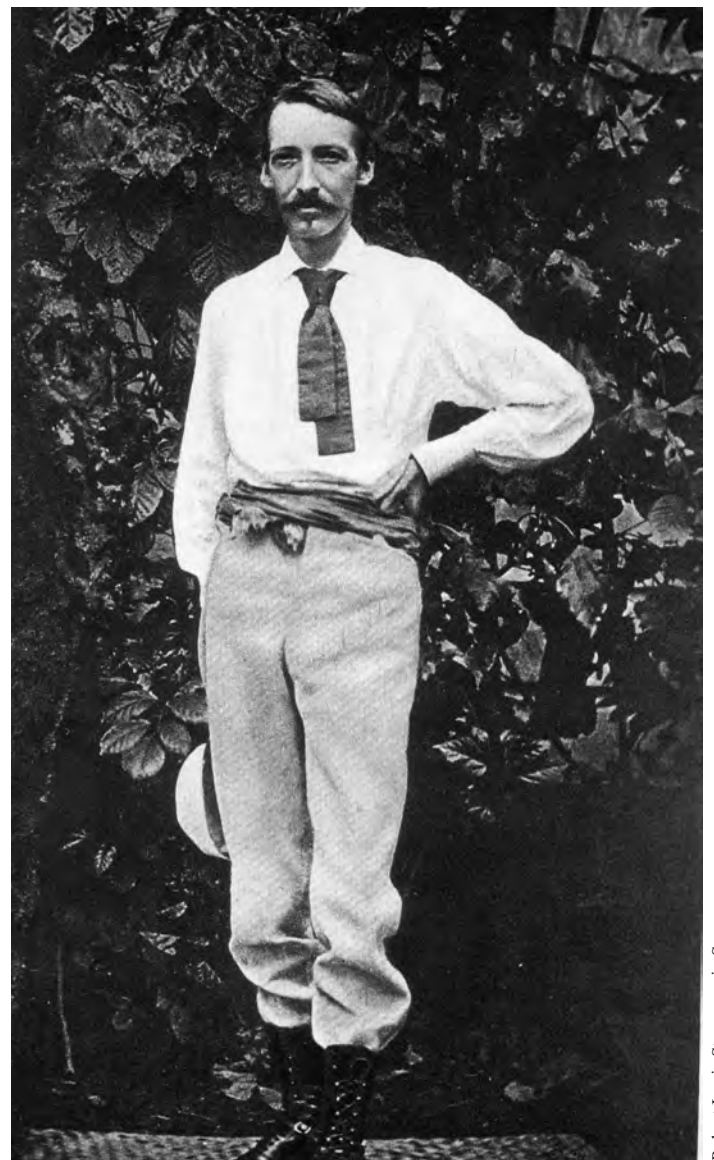
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NOTES

- 1 Luise Eitel Peake, “Song Cycle,” *The New Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Publishers, Ltd.), Vol. 17, 521.
- 2 A. E. F. Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 151.
- 3 Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical studies of the early twentieth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 85.
- 4 Stevenson, 245-6.
- 5 Banfield, 84.
- 6 Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964, 1980), 80.
- 7 Stevenson, 250.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 251.
- 9 Dickinson, 152.
- 10 Stevenson, 247.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 247.
- 12 Dickinson, 152.
- 13 Stevenson, 248.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 256.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 254.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 260.
- 17 Kennedy, *Works* 80.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 81.
- 19 Banfield, 520.
- 20 Kennedy, *Works*, 79, 85, 114, 132.
- 21 Dickinson, 152.
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 Kennedy, *Works*, 85.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 81.



Robert Louis Stevenson in Somoa

The Recordings:

A comparative analysis of the nine extant recordings of the *Songs of Travel*

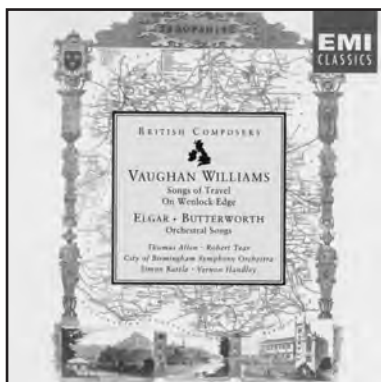
by William M. Adams, D.M.A.

Introduction

There are, at present, nine complete recordings of the *Songs of Travel* in existence. Six of these recordings are by baritones (Bryn Terfel, Thomas Allen, Benjamin Luxon, David Aler, Gerald Finley, and John Shirley-Quirk), two by tenors (Anthony Rolfe Johnson and Robert Tear) and one by a bass (Shura Gehrman). Only Sir Thomas Allen's recording is with orchestra, the rest use piano accompaniment.

Analyzing recordings can be problematic. How does the listener determine the size of the voice? Modern recording techniques make comparison difficult. Every care has been taken to be as objective and fair in the analyses of the singers based on the author's own experience as a performer and teacher of singing.

Thomas Allen - the orchestral recording



Thomas Allen's recording with full orchestra, under the direction of Simon Rattle, is worth inclusion in any serious collection of recordings of the cycle if for no other reason than it is the only recording with orchestra in existence. Allen's performance is intelligent and sensitive to the nuances of the cycle within the limitations of the orchestrated version. The character of the cycle is changed significantly with orchestration;

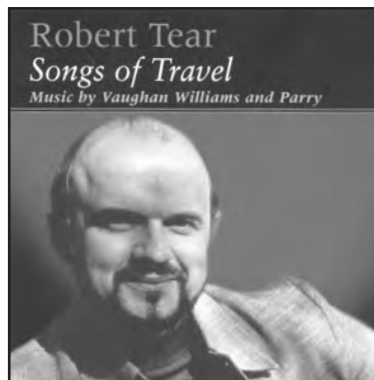
it lacks the intimacy of the original version for piano.

Roy Douglas did, in my opinion, an excellent job imitating Vaughan Williams's mannerisms of orchestration. There isn't an appreciable difference between the six songs orchestrated by Douglas and the original three orchestrations of Vaughan Williams. One important consideration in favor of the orchestral version is that Vaughan Williams had a larger timbral palette with which he could create sonorities. Anyone who has ever listened to Vaughan Williams's orchestral music (especially the fantasias and the *Fifth* and *Ninth Symphonies*) must recognize his superior skill as an orchestrator. Thus, hearing these "new" colors, when you're used to the piano version, is striking. This is particularly of note with the performance of the eighth song *Bright is the Ring of Words*. Allen presents it in the original key of D major, not the more "traditional" published version for piano down a whole tone in C major.

The effect of the higher key is striking. The transition from *Whither Must I Wander?* is not only one of pitch level (whole tone, ascending) but also of mode (minor to major). Only David Aler's recording, which will be discussed later, also presents the original key map.

The Tenors

There are only two recordings of the cycle by tenors. The obvious reason why tenors might avoid this work is a perception, at least, that the cycle should only be performed by baritones in keeping with Vaughan Williams's original concept. The timbre of a baritone instrument is as much a part of the cycle, I think, as any of the harmonies or the texts themselves. Nonetheless, the two recordings by Robert Tear and

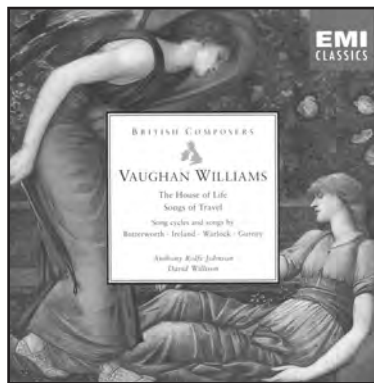


Anthony Rolfe Johnson are noteworthy.

Tear's recording is strong and virile. Operatic stereotypes suggest that tenors should be romantic figures, heroes, while basses should be darker, perhaps evil characters or possessing great wisdom or age. Baritones defy simple classification, it seems. Verdi's Rigoletto and Iago are certainly darker characters, as would be

Mozart's Don Giovanni. Gounod's Valentin, Puccini's Marcello, Rossini's Figaro and many others might be considered more heroic, romantic or even comic characters. For me, this broad quality of the baritone voice is part of the unique character of the *Songs of Travel*. There needs to be virility in the performance as well as lyricism.

If nothing else, Robert Tear certainly provides the virility. His recording is full of strength and vigor while suffering, perhaps a little, in the lyricism (not the easiest of tightropes as the baritone recordings will also reveal). *The Vagabond* is perhaps the most exciting song in his recording.



Anthony Rolfe Johnson lacks the power of Tear but more than makes up for it with an absolutely splendid lyricism that is truly unparalleled in any of the recordings of the cycle. Of particular note are his readings of *Let Beauty Awake*, *Youth and Love* and *The Infinite Shining Heavens*. Except for a slight lack of power on the stronger songs, the only other criticism which might be leveled against Rolfe Johnson's

recording is the diction. Of all the recordings, his seems to be the most contrived, over-emphasizing the rolled "r."

Neither recording really delivers a "complete" picture of the *Songs of Travel*, but for the serious collector, both recordings should be included.

The Lone Bass

Shura Gehrman's recording is, perhaps, the most problematic of the nine. His voice is very dark and thick, lacking the flexibility or subtlety needed for the more lyrical songs and lacking the vibrance of tone necessary for the stronger pieces. His choice of keys is also distracting. All of the songs were transposed down at least a whole tone to accommodate his bass voice. The result is a very dark reading of the cycle. The piano accompaniment in *The Vagabond*, for example, becomes muddled and heavy in B-flat minor and lacks the sparkle normally associated with Vaughan Williams's writings for the instrument.

There also appears to be something of a language barrier in Gehrman's

readings. His French-Russian heritage is apparent in the darker vowels he chooses, but especially in his pronunciation of English consonants. There are numerous examples of “th” being read as “z” and even slight alterations of the text. Specifically, in *The Vagabond*, the single syllable “heav’n” is sometimes replaced with “heavens.”

The Baritones

The five piano-accompanied recordings by baritones (John Shirley-Quirk, David Aler, Benjamin Luxon, Bryn Terfel and Gerald Finley) present a remarkably diverse collection.

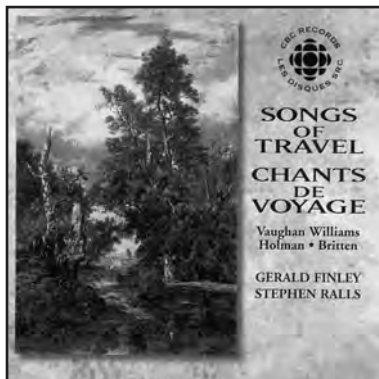
The first of these recordings, and indeed the first full recording ever made of the *Songs of Travel* is John Shirley-Quirk’s landmark recording of 1960. It was recently re-mastered for compact disc and is, thankfully, quite clear. Shirley-Quirk’s reading of the songs is strong and clean without any noteworthy extravagances of characterization. Perhaps the only detractor in his recording, except for his slight lisp, is the limited tone of the recording owing to the technology available in the recording industry in 1960.

David Aler and Benjamin Luxon offer more lyrical recordings of the cycle. As mentioned earlier, Aler’s recording offers the original tonal map of the cycle. The reason for his choice is fairly clear when one listens to his voice. He is a very light, lyric baritone without much extension into the lower register. It is entirely possible that the higher key for *Bright is the Ring of Words* was chosen as much to avoid singing a low A-flat as it was to present the only piano-accompanied recording in all of the original keys. Aler does seem to lack the strength needed to really project *The Vagabond* (one of the more declamatory and lower-pitched songs of the cycle).

Luxon’s recording is also quite lyrical but is not without strength in the more declamatory songs. Luxon’s instrument has proved itself to be quite comfortable on the operatic stage for years and this diversity is evident in his recording. This was the first recording of the cycle to which I was exposed as a student and is still one to which I return when analyzing the interpretations. Luxon’s reading is somewhat more romanticized than Shirley-Quirk’s, but maintains an elegance and simplicity that allows the songs to speak for themselves.

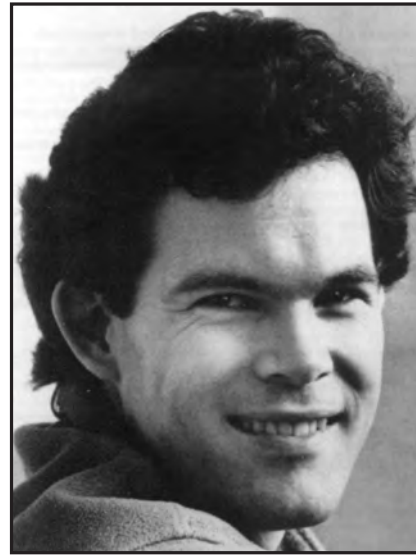


Bryn Terfel’s recording has come under fire from critics for being overly characterized. It is certainly the richest of the nine recordings in its interpretation, but I’m not convinced that this is a weakness – or necessarily a strength. There seems to be a predisposition against romanticism and emotionalism in the reading of British art music. If one considers this stylistic trait to be appropriate, then Terfel’s recording may, indeed, be too rich.



Terfel brings the full weight and color of his instrument to bear on the more virile songs while demonstrating a remarkable agility and flexibility for the more lyrical pieces. Nonetheless, there are moments in the more lyrical pieces where his tone lacks clarity and there are choices that he makes with his timbre which could be considered questionable. Of particular note is his reading of the line “And when the west is red with the sunset embers” in *Bright is the Ring of Words*. As he descends to the low A-flat, he employs a brittle almost harsh straight tone that seems out of character especially against Vaughan Williams’s lush harmonies and piano setting.

Terfel’s recording is arguably the most popular of the nine: no doubt due to his current celebrity in the opera world. While some may disagree with his characterizations, I think it is important to consider this recording if for no other reason than the interpretations. It is my opinion that Terfel has demonstrated the real strength of these songs by showing the breadth of expression possible.



Gerald Fineley’s recording is the real “sleeper” of the group. This recording is, arguably, the strongest all-around recording in existence. He has found an almost perfect balance between the romanticism of Terfel and the near sterility of Aler. His voice is clear and vibrant throughout the broad dynamic range Vaughan Williams asks for and he seems equally comfortable declaiming “All I ask, the heaven above” in *The Vagabond* or mixing the voice at the end of *The Roadside Fire* or

throughout any of the more lyrical, Book II, songs. This recording is an absolute must for anyone enamored of these songs.

Conclusions

The point of this article has been to offer the opinions of one aficionado of the *Songs of Travel*. My opinions are based not only on my artistic sensibilities, but also on my experience as a professional operatic baritone and teacher of singing. Still, rather than couch my observations in negative language, as many critics are wont to do, I would rather end this article with a recommendation as to the strongest of the litter.

I believe Gerald Finley’s recording to be the best all-around recording of the cycle. It possesses both strength and lyricism as well as exceptional vocal clarity and color. Additionally, however, I think that anyone wishing to study these songs (especially as a performer) should compare and contrast the recordings of Terfel, Rolfe Johnson and Aler. While Thomas Allen’s recording may be viewed only as a curiosity as the only orchestral recording, I think it also bears serious examination. Allen’s musicianship and artistry have kept him at the forefront of the classical vocal world and this recording is indicative of his strengths.

The recent interest in these songs (the lion’s share of the recordings have either been recorded or re-mastered and released within the last dozen years) is hopefully indicative of a continuing and even growing interest.

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Symphony No. 9 in E minor

An Introduction and CD Review.

by Robin Barber

*It is the work, not of a tired old man, but a very experienced one. (James Day)*¹

*Vaughan Williams, eschewing sentimentality, for the last time summons up those reserves which, for want of a better word, must be called visionary. (Michael Kennedy)*²

*...at once heroic and contemplative, defiant and wistfully absorbed, and largely visionary in tone. (Hugh Ottaway)*³

Vaughan Williams's *Ninth Symphony* is, in my view, one of his greatest works, a towering masterpiece that has been misunderstood and neglected since its first performance in 1958. Despite this, there are now nine recordings on CD of the symphony, all of which are currently available. In each case the recordings have formed part of a complete symphony cycle project and perhaps some conductors have tended to turn their attention to the *Ninth* at the end of their surveys. To some it must have been unfamiliar territory, and perhaps some interpretations have lacked a full understanding of the profound beauty of this work. To date this activity in the recording studio has not been matched in the concert hall. In over twenty-five years I have been privileged to have attended only three live performances; hopefully this will change. There is undoubtedly a suppressed programme within this symphony. The landscape around Salisbury and Thomas Hardy's tragic novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* clearly had some influence on the genesis of the work, notably the second movement. Alain Frogley's recently published book gives an exhaustive and compellingly argued case for such a programme and I would commend it to anyone who wishes to know more of the origins of the composer's last symphonic essay. Conscious and no doubt irritated by the debate as to the "meanings" of earlier symphonies, particularly the *Fourth* and the other E minor, *Sixth*, the composer, in his detailed commentary for the first performance of the symphony, was at pains to deny any programme. Referring to the second movement, (*Andante Sostenuto*), "it is quite true that this movement started off with a programme, but it got lost on the journey - so now, oh no, we never mention it - and the music must be left to speak for itself - whatever that may mean".

I believe Vaughan Williams was being deliberately coy about the inspiration behind the music and the same problems that for a long time bedeviled comprehension of *A Pastoral Symphony* have surely been echoed in the reception of this seemingly abstract, E minor symphony. For me, this deeply philosophical music explores two contradictory and at times conflicting landscapes that shape all of our lives. Firstly, the neurotic *inner landscape*, that of the psyche, the soul and present consciousness. All of us have uncertainties about our personal lives whether they be religious, social or financial and they preoccupy us daily. Secondly there is a vast, pantheistic outer landscape, the physical world, be it the drama of a landscape, the sea or the cosmos, underpinning. This is what Jung called the *collective human unconscious*. Such experiences are, for most of us in the modern world, elusive and transient, we need help to explore, develop and understand them. This is the purpose, in my view, of all great art and in particular music. Wilfrid Mellers, in his book, eloquently explores his concept of the composer's "doubleness" and puts an excellent case for the *Ninth Symphony's* attempt, particularly in the last movement to resolve these opposing influences not only in the composer's, but I would suggest, all of our lives.

For those new to the symphony and looking for an easier point of reference, imagine the composer walking (as he did) from the wide expanse of Salisbury Plain, pausing to reflect on the ancient temple of Stonehenge, a bleak edifice that points to the stars and at the end reaching the serene calm of Salisbury Cathedral, a spire reaching skywards to the unknown. In between there is music of both great turbulence and nostalgia, the meaning of which is unclear but nevertheless challenges the listener and makes it a great work of art.

It was composed between 1956-7 and requires a large orchestra, with the addition of three saxophones, deep bells and a flugelhorn, which gives the music a unique timbre. To quote the composer Patrick Hadley in a letter to Ursula, after the first performance "Came over marvelously - the saxes and flugel contributed a strange unearthly magic to that wonderful score"

The Symphony is scored in four movements:

I. Moderato maestosa

This movement was originally sub-titled *Wessex Prelude* which perhaps alludes to the original Hardy influence on the symphony, though the composer stated that the opening theme occurred to him as he was playing organ music from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. To this listener, the opening E minor chords conjure up a vast cloud-covered landscape, pierced by shafts of sunlight that are so typical of the uplands of Salisbury Plain, but there the allusion ends. The mysterious, foreboding atmosphere gives way to passages of alternating tenseness and tenderness with a trio of golden-toned saxophones to the fore. Throughout the scoring is dense with frequent modulations of key. The conflict is partially relieved by a quintessentially VW violin solo, reminiscent of *The Lark Ascending*, and the movement ends peacefully with the flugelhorn, followed by the smooth saxes.

II. Andante sostenuto

This is a slow movement of an RVW symphony; surely we can expect calm and serenity? Alas not, and it would not have been appropriate. The words "*Tess*" and "*Stonehenge*" are clearly inscribed on parts of earlier manuscripts of this score, I don't wish to give them the same significance of say, Mahler's often anguished annotations to the scores of his *Ninth* and *Tenth Symphonies*, but they are nonetheless, as Alain Frogley has clearly demonstrated, vital to our understanding of this music. The movement opens with a reflective theme on flugelhorn, taken from a discarded tone-poem, *The Solent*, written way back in the time of the mighty *Sea Symphony*, echoes of which can be heard in the quiet slow movement of that work, *On the beach alone at night*. The temporary calm is shattered by the sudden introduction of an angry, snappy march theme that is not easy on the ear. This grim march was apparently inspired by the legend of the ghostly drummer of Salisbury Plain. There then follows a moment of beautiful repose, deft string writing reminiscent of the cavatina from the *Eighth Symphony*, but it doesn't last. The ugly machine imposes itself again, eventually a deep bell chimes, the flugelhorn returns in duet with a clarinet and the movement closes peacefully. Does this music represent *Tess's* innocent struggle against death and does the bell represent her execution? or is it just a dream, much in the same sense as Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*?

III. Scherzo: Allegro pesante

The saxophones, xylophone and celesta are prominent throughout this menacing and uneasy movement. There are parallels with the corresponding movement of the E minor *Sixth*, but also of Holst's *Planets*. This strange and at times, nightmarish music gives way to brief moments of philosophical detachment. Eventually it is a relief when following the final taps of the side drum, we are taken with a minimal pause into the calm strings and harps that pervade the opening of the last movement

IV. Andante tranquillo

Originally sub-titled *Landscape*, this concluding movement is VW's final testament and in my view a great musical utterance, representing what the composer Robert Simpson called "a drawing together of extremes". It is not a valediction as say the corresponding movement of Mahler's *Ninth* clearly is: this is affirmative rather than death-laden music and with the exception of the *Eighth*, is the only VW symphony to end in a blaze of sound. Alain Frogley reminds us that the original sketches for the

From all I have read and heard about the first performance it is clear that it was not a success. Given the symphony is a great work of art, why was this? Roy Douglas lays the blame entirely on Sargent's poor preparation, understanding and conducting of the score. So listening to a BBC recording of the première was to me a surprise; 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, marked in the score, *niente*. For any successful performance of this most complex of VW's scores the music must be given room to breathe.

There is confusion about the ideal timing of the symphony. Michael Kennedy (*Catalogue*) gives a duration of about 36 minutes, but my OUP score gives 30 minutes and we will never know what the composer may have eventually intended had he lived to revise the work. According to Sir Adrian Boult's autobiography (*My Own Trumpet*), after listening to a recording of the première he told RVW that the ending of the symphony was too abrupt and suggested that thirty to forty bars should be added at the end. The composer agreed to consider this and in the meantime gave Boult permission to play the ending "a good deal slower" when he conducted the first recording. What is striking from this survey is the considerable variation in tempi from conductors with a difference of almost 9 minutes between the fastest and slowest. Each listener will have to make his own mind up: a table of the timings is given in an appendix to this survey.

1958: Everest EVC 9001

1969: EMI Classics CDM 7 64021 2

1971: RCA Victor Gold Seal GD 90508

1990: Chandos CHAN 8941

1991: RCA Victor Red Seal 09026 61196 2

1994: Classics for Pleasure 7243 5 75312 2 1

1995: Teldec 450998463-2

1996: Naxos 8.550738

2000: EMI Classics 7243 5 570862 5

London Philharmonic Orchestra / Bernard Haitink.

It is likely that recordings of this symphony will be enriched in the future as a result of continuing recordings of all of the symphonies by Sir Roger Norrington (Decca) and Richard Hickox (Chandos).

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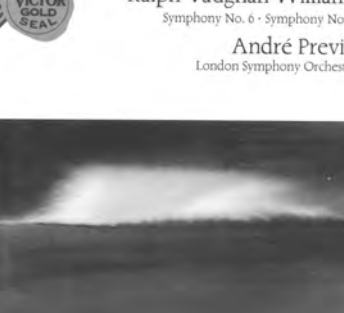
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Ralph Vaughan Williams
Symphony No. 6 • Symphony No. 9

André Previn
London Symphony Orchestra

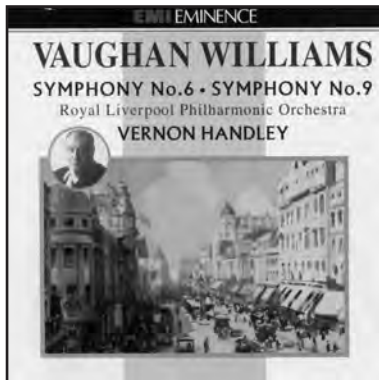


We had to wait nearly twenty years for the next recording, this time as

In late 1969, **Boult** made a second recording, also with the LPO, this time for EMI and he adopted very similar tempi throughout. I have affection for it, because the original LP version introduced me to the work in the early seventies and through repeated listening I grew to admire the symphony deeply. Listening to the CD re-issue it is clear that the conductor had no new insights and it is a less moving

Page 15

part of a Chandos cycle. Bryden Thomson's reading is, I'm afraid, a very rushed affair; it has a harsh, even brutal quality quite the antithesis of Previn, who used the same orchestra. There is no sense of mystery or contemplation. Take for example his tempi in the opening movement which are incredibly quick, resulting in music that just does not breathe or expand. A pity, since the LSO once again play brilliantly, in particular the flugelhorn is very clear and the saxophones wonderfully "demented".



glissandos nicely to the fore. At budget price and coupled with the Sixth, this disc is a very safe bet.



remoteness and mystery. Davis is particularly successful in the two inner movements. By adopting slow tempi (slower even than Previn) in the *andante sostenuto* we can enjoy the passages of sublime string and solo violin writing in sharp contrast to the brutal march theme. Conversely, the *scherzo* is taken briskly, the clear acoustic allowing the saxophones and xylophone to the fore before the movement dissolves away with the drum taps. The *finale* is very well played but ultimately lacks that elusive visionary quality, though the ending is very moving.



movement some 3-4 minutes faster than Previn or Haitink. For me the ending is a washout rather than a glimpse of the cosmos.

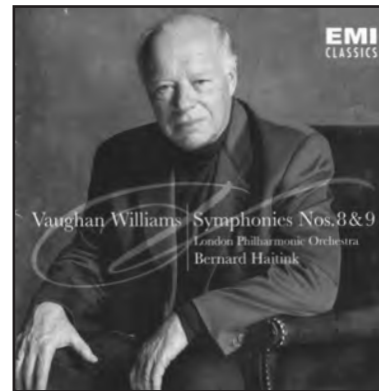
Leonard Slatkin, one of a number of distinguished American conductors who have shown great empathy for VW's music, recorded a widely acclaimed cycle with the Philharmonia. Many would argue that overall, in terms of recording quality, orchestral playing and interpretation it is the finest currently available. The Ninth receives a good but not outstanding performance, the music is played straight, with tempi on the brisk side throughout. I am not convinced he has penetrated the depths of

Vernon Handley's account was originally issued on the EMI Eminence label in 1994 as part of his cycle with the RLPO and I reviewed it in the very first edition of this journal. It has now recently been reissued on the CFP label with, I think, a better sound quality. I have little to add to my previous remarks: this is a deeply committed and powerful performance; the visionary ending is realized to great effect with the harp

Sir Andrew Davis's cycle of the symphonies with BBC Symphony Orchestra on Teldec has had a mixed reception and his interpretations vary in insight, with a terrific Sixth and a very disappointing *Pastoral*. But the Ninth is given is good performance with committed playing though the sound is a bit recessed, so it pays to have the volume up. The flugelhorn is most beautifully played throughout giving an air of

Keith Mitchell highly recommended **Kees Bakels's** Naxos recording with the Bournemouth Orchestra in a review published by this journal, a view that is also supported by Richard Adams. However, I can't find the same enthusiasm for this performance: despite its clarity and undoubted sincerity it is spoiled by fast tempi, quicker even than Sargent or Thompson and crucially he takes the last

this enigmatic music, the hairs on this listener's neck certainly remain unruffled as the final chord dies away. One interesting point, David Mason, the flugelhorn player for the world première is also the soloist in this performance.



I reviewed **Bernard Haitink's** interpretation of the symphony on EMI in the Society's journal last year. Subsequent listening to it has, if anything, deepened my admiration for this superbly recorded and played disc. He brings to the interpretation a numinous quality confirming the opinion of the noted, and perhaps in this repertoire, surprisingly empathetic music critic, Neville Cardus. In a notice for the *Manchester*

Guardian of Sargent's second performance of the symphony at the 1958 Proms, he wrote: "*Vaughan Williams in his latest period puts me in mind of Bruckner....Both are noble without a single self-conscious attitude. And both are occasionally clumsy and hardly 'professional'....Vaughan Williams's great achievement has been to dispense with the current musical coin of the period of his basic culture and maturity and to modulate to the contemporary tone and language without obvious iconoclasm. He is of our period, and yet he is full of harvest –which means to say he is a master.*"

In conclusion, there are three discs that for me stand out from this survey. Boult on Everest, an obviously historical but also very convincing and well recorded account. Previn's superbly dark and foreboding account, whose timbre no other performance matches. Finally Haitink, a magnificent reading, from a conductor of huge international renown, that surely confirms now Michael Kennedy's shrewd prophesy of this score: "a symphony that I believe will one day be ranked among its creator's finest works" ⁴

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Appendix:

Conductors' timings of the *Ninth Symphony*

Conductor	Date	1 st Mvt	2 nd Mvt	3 rd Mvt	4 th Mvt	Time
Sargent *	1958	7:50	7:15	5:34	9:46	30:25
Boult	1958	9:17	8:03	5:33	11:41	34:34
Boult	1969	9:13	7:46	5:40	12:05	34:44
Previn	1971	10:06	8:37	5:58	13:49	38:30
Thomson	1990	7:16	7:04	5:44	10:48	30:52
Slatkin	1991	9:19	7:51	4:51	10:33	32:34
Handley	1994	8:47	7:27	5:26	11:13	32:53
Davis	1995	8:47	8:39	5:18	11:18	34:02
Bakels	1996	7:39	7:07	5:15	9:44	29:45
Haitink	2000	10:06	7:56	5:31	12:56	36:29

* **BBC live recording of the first performance**
2nd April 1958, Royal Festival Hall, London.

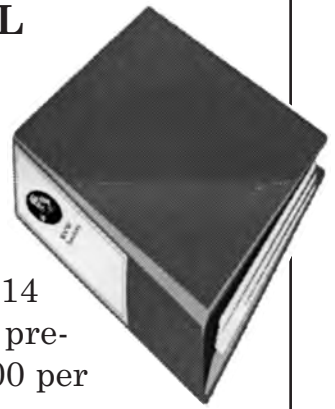
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The Symphonies of Howard Hanson

For many admirers of VW, American music will, with a couple of exceptions, be unexplored territory. Yet the US has produced a wide variety of very fine and frequently underrated composers of highly crafted, beautiful and exciting music.

Amongst the most appealing and approachable of these composers is Howard Hanson (1896-1981). From 1924 to 1964 he was director of one of the US's most prestigious music schools, the Eastman School in Rochester, New York and as administrator and conductor consistently championed the works of his contemporaries and younger composers, even if their styles and ideas differed radically from his own. Hanson wrote in a tonal/modal neo-romantic style, but one that at the same time could only have been written in the 20th century. He composed in almost every medium and his large output includes an opera *Merry Mount* as well as a large amount of expertly written choral and orchestral music.

Central to his output are seven symphonies that span almost his entire composing career. The First, subtitled *Nordic*, was completed in 1922 and as its title suggests pays tribute to Hanson's Swedish ancestry. A somewhat dark, sombre work, it at once establishes a style whose basic elements were to remain familiar through Hanson's composing career. The Second Symphony, *Romantic*, was composed in 1930 for the 50th anniversary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and is Hanson's best known work, epitomising the warm romantic writing and scoring of Hanson's earlier works, a style that was and has been seized upon by many Hollywood composers. It plays for around half an hour and is cyclic in construction. Its most striking idea became Hanson's best known theme and was used for the closing titles of the Sci-Fi film *Alien* in 1979.

The four movement *Third Symphony*, composed 1936-8, caused the composer some difficulty, notably with the finale. It is the most expansive of the set playing at a little over half an hour, and is the most obviously Sibelian in sound, most notably in the writing for woodwind and use of the timpani (especially the 3rd movt) even though Hanson is still his own man.

The *Fourth, Requiem*, was composed in 1943 in memory of his father. It is in my view the finest of the set. Each of the four movements takes its

inspiration from some aspect of the *Requiem Mass*. In this work Hanson's rich contrapuntal writing with its spine-tingling suspensions reaches its apogee. The *Fourth* isn't however without its moments of restlessness and tension with a fiery 3rd movt and powerful and often pungent writing in part of the finale.

Hanson's later works are far more compact and often favour single movement forms. *The Fifth Symphony, Sinfonia Sacra*, is the shortest of the set. Inspired by the events of the first Easter it plays for only 15 mins and is cast in a tautly constructed single movement. The *Sixth Symphony* of 1967 was composed for the 125th anniversary of the New York Philharmonic. It is one of Hanson's most fascinating and varied scores. A one-movement work, it is divided into six contrasting sections all based on a simple three-note idea.

The choral and orchestral *Seventh Symphony, Sea Symphony* of 1977, Hanson's last work in the medium sets, like RVW's *Sea Symphony*, the poetry of Walt Whitman. Hanson was, like RVW, a lifelong admirer of Whitman and set his poetry throughout his career. The three-movement *Seventh* is far less expansive than the VW and lasts only around 18 mins. In it Hanson, summing up his career, harks back to the world of his earlier works even briefly quoting from his *Second Symphony*.

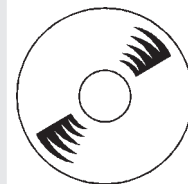
All seven symphonies are available on Delos in excellent performances, by Gerard Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony Orchestra. The composers own performances of the first four symphonies (the *Fourth* is taken much faster than the Delos recording) are I believe still available on the Mercury label.

Malcolm Robertson

Across:
1. *Allegro molto*, 4. *Adieu*, 6. *Ice*, 7. *Guilford*, 10. *Ear*, 12. *Ram*, 13. *Bethlehem*, 15. *Doh*, 16. *Queen*, 17. *Charterhouse*.
Down:
1. *Abinger*, 2. *Oligo*, 3. *Oboe*, 5. *Film*, 8. *Dale*, 9. *Reel*, 10. *Echo*, 11. *Romance*, 14. *Theme*, 15. *Disc*.

Crossword Solutions

Record Review

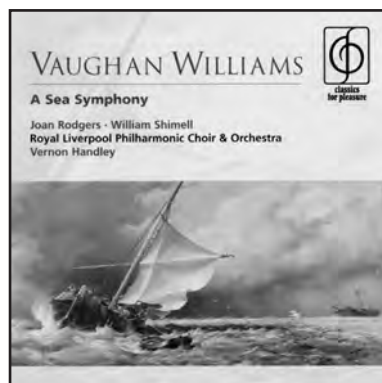


A Sea Symphony

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra

Joan Rodgers, William Shimell, conducted by Vernon Handley

Classics for Pleasure 7423 5 75308 2 8 (budget price)



Handley was a pupil of Boult and is justly renowned for his commitment to the English tradition and repertoire. Of special note is his championing of RVW, Granville Bantock (recently *Thalaba the Destroyer* for Hyperion) and the perhaps less readily approachable Robert Simpson.

I do not know how many different labels have adorned

Handley's 1988 recordings of the VW symphonies over the last 13 years. In the very recent past they were boxed up under the EMI Eminence label; now they are out again as Classics for Pleasure at £4.99 each. Members will no doubt be familiar with them all, but they are worth rehearing and reconsidering from time to time. I suppose that in this day and age we should be glad that they are still continuously available, whatever the packaging, because collectively they are one of the better sets.

That said, there are limitations, and in that *A Sea Symphony* is no exception. At times in this recording the slow passages feel ponderous rather than conveying the almost chilling driven awe which, say, the 1968 Boult performance exudes. The opening *Behold, the sea itself* and *On the beach at night*, alone are cases in point, whereas *O we can wait no longer* does achieve that lift. Secondly, the recording balance is erratic and often does the soloists, particularly William Shimell, no favours. Any percussive edge he may have is sometimes unnecessarily lost in the overall sound. Today, a *rude brief recitative* has the bite one expects, but *A pennant universal* is washed away at times.

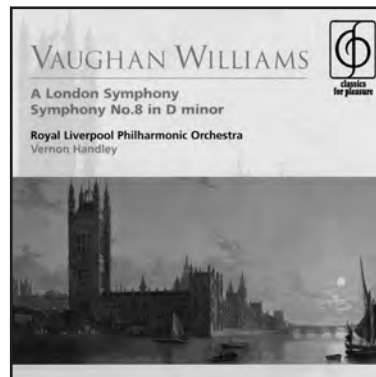
This is a pity because the two finest aspects of the recording are the overall orchestral sound and the sheer enthusiasm of the chorus. The brass and percussion cut through brilliantly in their rhythmic and exposed moments. The choir, trained by Ian Tracey, has a clarity of diction rare in such large forces combined with a restrained lightness, which displays their true skill.

If you wanted to start a VW library of modern recordings on a budget, you could do a lot worse than buy the 8 Handley CDs.

Roger Eastman

Vaughan Williams: A London Symphony, Symphony No. 8 in D minor, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Vernon Handley. EMI Classics for Pleasure 7243 5 75309 2 7 (budget price)

Recorded in 1992 and previously released in 1993 Vernon Handley's interpretations of both the *London Symphony* and the *Symphony No. 8 in D minor* are stirring and absolutely convincing. Now these fine recordings are available on a welcome CD reissued by "Classics for Pleasure". And what a pleasure it is indeed! If there is anybody who still wants to listen to the "old" revised version of the *London Symphony* after



audible to me before. The orchestra also shows consideration for the solo players who really do an excellent job. Only the brass section is less convincing because of the sometimes slightly uninspired and harsh playing. Handley's *tempi* are close to those of Adrian Boult's 1952 recording and even faster indeed, but also full of tension.

The *Eighth Symphony* is a work full of different characters and moods. Again, the orchestral playing is precise and excellent, with quasi-chamber musical performances of the solo players, all of them keeping up the inner tension of the movements. The *Scherzo* has a pomp mocking quality, which is seldom heard in other recordings of this symphony. And listen to the final *Toccata*! It's a real orchestral *tour de force* and a furious finale in the truest sense of the word. Here VW's forces of all the "phones and -spiels known to the composer" come to the service. The percussion section is very busy and yet the sound is superb and the playing is perfect. I recommend this CD especially for the *Toccata*.

A Pastoral Symphony

Symphony No. 4 in F minor

English Folk Song Suite

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Vernon Handley

with Alison Barlow, soprano

Classics for Pleasure 575 310 (budget price)

Symphony No. 4 in F minor

Mass in G minor

Six Choral Songs - to be sung in Time of War

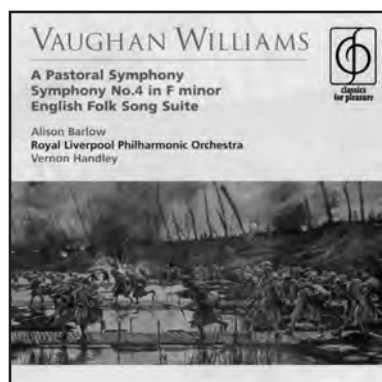
Richard Hickox Singers, London Symphony Chorus,

London Symphony Orchestra/Richard Hickox

Chandos CHAN 9984 (full price)

"With hindsight," writes Andrew Achenbach in the note accompanying Vernon Handley's *Pastoral*, "it beggars belief that so few sensed the massive disquiet and impassioned anguish simmering beneath the contemplative surface." Are we wiser, now, I wonder, than those listeners who, at the beginning of 1922, seem to have heard only the conventionally pastoral in the work? Is it not more likely that we know the music deals with other matters because the composer, in a letter, told us so? "It's really wartime music..." he wrote, "...not...lambkins frisking at all..." But he went on to refer, not to slaughter and loss, but rather to "...a wonderful, Corot-like landscape..." So the composer leaves us guessing, as always, but we can be content to follow Michael Kennedy's example and hear this wonderful work as Vaughan Williams's *War Requiem*. Yet there's no horror here, rather a profound sadness and regret. As powerfully as Britten was to do, Vaughan Williams evokes "the truth untold,/The pity of war..."

Vernon Handley's recordings of the symphonies will be old friends to many members. The ebb and flow of the first movement of the *Pastoral* is beautifully controlled and despite a wide variation of tempo he



fleet-footed coda. Alison Barlow opens the *finale* beautifully and Handley leads us to the movement's climax in a way that seems very much like triumph. The triumph of what, over what? Vaughan Williams's music is rarely pessimistic, and here he seems to be saying that in spite of everything that has gone before good will win in the end. The atmosphere of profound sadness and contemplation is not abandoned for this message though, and this is a kind of miracle. Vernon Handley leaves us wanting, at the end, to continue this contemplation. It is a magnificent performance.

The reading of the *Fourth Symphony* is marvellous too, though perhaps less revelatory. I miss some of the vehemence and anger to be found elsewhere, and the hugely wide-ranging second subject of the first movement seems lacking in passion, with the articulation both of the melody itself and the accompanying chords strangely literal and unconvincing. The slow movement goes better but the *scherzo* and *finale* seem again lacking in force, particularly when compared to performances such as those by Stokowski – who manages to make the second subject of the *finale* both menacing and jaunty at the same time – Bernstein and, inevitably, the composer himself.

Comparing my old pressing on Eminence with this new one I can hear no difference in the sound, which is in any case of superb quality. A lovely performance of the *English Folk Song Suite* in Gordon Jacob's orchestration has been added, making this very inexpensive disc an obvious purchase for anyone who doesn't already have these performances.



the D flat slips down onto a C leaving an octave. The octave passes for little in the new recording, but the composer, at a tempo almost identical to that of Hickox, is scrupulous in leaving enough time for it to make its effect, and by careful phrasing ensures that it works in every subsequent bar as well. At this tempo, too, it is difficult to make sure that the syncopated chords grind against each other as they should. Again, the composer is more successful than Hickox here. But this is to pick over the details of the somewhat startling initial impression this performance makes, and nothing can take away the awesome power of the reading throughout. Hickox is even more successful in the moments of respite. I have never heard the otherworldly first movement coda better done. The extraordinary sonority of divided violas and cellos against a high-lying muted violin line is magnificently well realised by Hickox and his superb orchestra, and the slow movement, too, is very convincing. A pity, though, that the diminuendo on the final flute note of this movement – the note the composer was unsure about for so many years – is so pronounced as to render it almost inaudible. If parts of the *scherzo* seem

manages to persuade us that the whole movement is governed by a unity of pulse in a way that Kees Bakels with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, for example, does not. The solo players in the heartbreaking second movement – the trumpet and horn properly named on the cover, so why not the clarinet? – are inspired. The *scherzo* is excellently done, though Previn achieves an even more

rather muted a glance at the score shows the care with which the conductor respects the difference between *forte* and *fortissimo* markings. Parts of the *finale* might give the same impression, but not the coda, which bursts out with real anger and ends in superbly convincing fashion.

This is a marvellous performance, but I wouldn't want to part with a number of other favourites, not all of which – Bernstein, Berglund – are as faithful to the letter of the score as this new one. Also on the new disc is a most beautiful performance of the Mass in G minor. The conductor's long experience with choirs pays off here: the singers' breathing and the phrasing of the music are utterly at one and the result is one of the most poised and moving performances yet to appear. The soloists acquit themselves beautifully too, and I can't recommend this performance too highly.

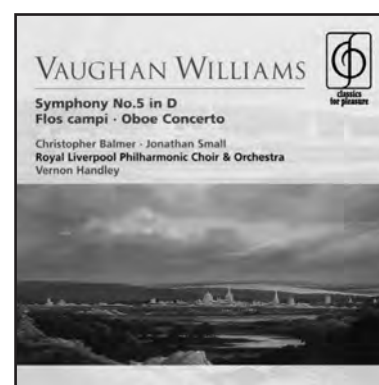
The disc closes with the *Six Choral Songs – to be sung in Time of War*. The piece was commissioned by the BBC for the 1940 Proms but not performed until the end of the year because the season was cancelled. The choir sings in unison to words selected from Shelley by the composer and Ursula Wood. The titles give the flavour of the piece: A Song of Courage; A Song of Liberty; A Song of Healing – sung by women's voices alone: love is the force that "folds over the world its healing wings"; A Song of Victory – but the choice of text shows that Vaughan Williams was working with a wider definition of victory than the conventional one; A Song of Pity, Peace and Love; and A Song of the New Age – "O cease! must hate and death return?...The world is weary of the past..." The performance of these songs is most convincing and moving.

As well as excellent introductory notes by Michael Kennedy, the booklet presents both the London Symphony Chorus and the London Symphony Orchestra, as well as the conductor, of course. But we are left in ignorance of the true identity of the Richard Hickox Singers, who perform the Mass so beautifully.

The terrific performance of the Fourth Symphony makes this a desirable issue, and the Mass adds to its attractions. With the Choral Songs, which seem not to be otherwise recorded, the disc becomes an essential purchase for RVW enthusiasts.

William Hedley
France

Vaughan Williams *Fifth Symphony, Flosi Campi, Oboe Concerto*
Jonathan Small (oboe), RLPO Vernon Handley
Classics for Pleasure (79.22) (budget price)



EMI have, as many will be aware, reissued a series of Classics for Pleasure recordings. Vernon Handley's RVW cycle and several Elgar recordings have now been repackaged and re-coupled. Retailing at around a fiver they represent extraordinary value.

Andrew Achenbach suggests in the liner note that this is one of the greatest performances of the *Fifth Symphony*. It has been around for 13 years and was the first RVW CD I bought. Apart from Boult's miscellany on EMI I still believe it is the best single CD of his works. Now of course it is even better, augmented by Jonathan Small's account of the *Oboe Concerto*.

The Fifth traces a line back to Barbirolli and the Hallé in Houldsworth Hall in 1944. This is an exciting record. Boult on Decca is opaque in sound and performance to my ears. In 1969 the performance was broader, Previn and the RPO similar though a little more lush life resides in the first movement. Kees Bakel on Naxos is smooth, erring towards the bland. Bryden Thomson is the only reading that approaches the rawness of the first recording. This leaves the atmospheric Haitink, Hickox's new

recording and Barbirolli again on CD. Readers will doubtless be aware of Alexander Gibson on HMV which was spoiled by a dry recording and, on tape, disastrous hiss.

One of the problems with a symphony that proceeds, not always but significantly in a mood of serenity, is that it can become diffuse or rambling. The use of modality lies at the root of RVW's plan but it is a campaign realised over the full length of the symphony. We must remember too the spiritual and pastoral roots of the work; *The Pilgrims Progress music*, the English Pageant and the hymnal references. If one compares Handley's *Romanza* with anyone else's, I believe we are closer to the unity of these ideas in relationship with the musical structure. The move to the dominant A major brings the music to a bridge. Handley is particularly effective here, allowing Malcolm Stewart's violin solo to open onto a sublime pianissimo which leads naturally to the 'alleluia' theme that starts the last movement. Again I enjoyed the management of the dynamics, the gradual crescendo leading to the big central cadence. Compared to Barbirolli and Hickox, the horns are not in front of the music (particularly apparent on the 1944 version). In the closing sequence, the texture around the woodwind passages is clear and, to this listener looking out across the Shropshire Hills, brings a sense of mystery to a beautifully realised resolution.

Barbirolli's first movement is nearly a minute faster, the *scherzo* is tellingly 20% quicker. However the *Romanza* loses a minute and is I feel a little laboured.

Overall Handley is balanced. Hugh Ottaway's exploration of modes in the *BBC Guide to the Symphonies of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, the journey from the sixteenth century to the present, is a distinct progression. Barbirolli, and we enjoy it of course, is prepared to take his own route where he wanted to.

The new Hickox recording is something of a luxury item. I believe the sound is superior, it usually is with Chandos, but the interpretation is equally opulent. Handley has in my opinion a better grasp of the symphony.

Flos Campi is a work that has been less frequently recorded. The Primrose/Boult version has a rich viola tone but on the EMI transfer a certain amount of swish. With Primrose it is a concertante work, Christopher Balmer remains part of the whole. I particularly like the start with the oboe and viola separated in a warm acoustic. The string entry allows the soloist to weave into the overall texture. This is true of the initial choral passage. It is within the overall sound space and not perched on top or so recessed that the singers must have been in another studio. In part two the interplay of oboe, flute and viola flows with great transparency allowing the brief horn entry space near the end.

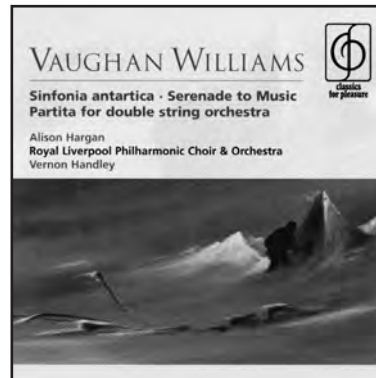
I suggested that the dynamics were beautifully managed in the Symphony. The viola solo then against the chorus, then with the oboe is in the same class. There is always the possibility that *En lectulum Salomonis* will break out from the hush. It can also sound plodding. I enjoyed the build up to the choral crescendo at the start of *Revertere revertere* Sulamatis which I found to be smooth and mysterious. I suppose one misses Primrose's tone but this is a fine reading. The magical gentle diminuendo in the middle of the final section that allows the hushed chorus to enter and the final choral/string harmony were for me high points in a favourite version of *Flos Campi*.

I have also felt that Evelyn Rothwell's playing of the *Oboe Concerto* emphasised the staccato in the solo part. It is in addition, a very slow interpretation, taking around two minutes longer than Small. Even Roger Winfield with the Northern Sinfonia is brisker and this had struck me as sluggish. Much more to my taste is Celia Nicklin with ASMF. This has similarities with Neil Black and the DG recording with Daniel Barenboim. Jonathan Small is also a 'creamy' soloist though at times, and this was not recorded of course until 4 years later, rather in front of the orchestra. The delightful minuet works best for me. The breezy opening of the third movement is light and airy but I felt there was a little too great a distance between orchestra and soloist during the passage of short solo runs over low string figures.

In conclusion it remains only to say that this is a wonderful CD. The fine photograph of 'Tod' Handley reminds us of his legacy to British music. Long may it continue.

Mark Asquith

Vaughan Williams: Sinfonia Antartica / Alison Hargan (soprano), Ian Tracey (organ), Serenade to Music, Partita for double string orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir & Orchestra, Vernon Handley. EMI Classics for Pleasure 7243 5 75313 2 0 (budget price)



When listening to Handley's recording of the *Sinfonia Antartica* I first thought: what a down-to-earth performance. But a second run-through revealed an interesting and thought-out programme of this symphony, highly dramatic like the film *Scott of the Antarctic* itself, whose music was to serve as a basis for VW's *Seventh Symphony*. The *Prelude* opens with noble and at the same

time tragic grandeur foreshadowing the things to come. One does really feel the cold physically, but Alison Hargan's *timbre* is a little bit too cold, slightly harsh and frosty. Maybe it's the way it has to be. Musical tension more and more increases till the climax of the symphony, when the organ has its impressive appearance in the third movement (*Landscape*). The symphony ends with the same dignified grandeur of the opening movement, coming and going like a snowdrift. The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra plays marvellously, keeping up the same range of dynamic extremes as in the *London Symphony*. Again, Vernon Handley is very faithful to the score.

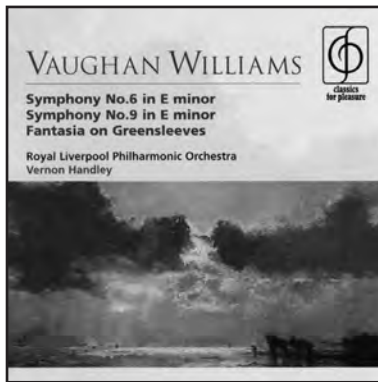
From the musicological point of view the *Partita* for double string orchestra is one of VW's most unusual and yet most interesting works. Its appearance on this CD is very welcome, though it is not the first release of this work on CD as the sleeve notes by Andrew Achenbach will make us believe. There is a recording of the *Partita* by Sir Adrian Boult and the London Philharmonic Orchestra made in 1956 and re-released some years ago on "Double Decca" (together with other orchestral works by RVW). Handley's recording offers beautiful playing from all parts of the string orchestra. Maybe with this re-issue this rather unpopular work will capture the hearts of all who should know their RVW.

This reissue also includes the often recorded *Serenade to Music*. This one offers the choral version. Whether it is really an alternative or not I dare not say. The *Serenade* originally was composed for 16 solo voices and the sound should not be too massive. But unfortunately the members of the Royal Liverpool Choir, well-tuned as they are, do seem too massive and many of the solo passages suffer from uninspired singing with the sopranos losing pitch. Yet it is worthwhile adding it to the growing collection.

Erik Daumann
Germany

Symphony No.6 in E minor/Symphony No. 9 in E minor/ Fantasia on Greensleeves Royal Liverpool PO / Vernon Handley Classics for Pleasure:7243 5 75312 2 1 (Budget price)

Vernon Handley's account of these two dark E minor symphonies was originally issued on the EMI Eminence label in 1994 as part of his cycle with the RLPO and I reviewed it in the very first edition of this journal. It has now been reissued on the CFP label and the sound benefits from a more immediate effect. The *Sixth* receives a powerful and committed performance from this great conductor of English music. The first



movement Previn and Slatkin, both on RCA, are more convincing. The playing of the eerie *finale* is very successful in conveying a sense of purposeless drift into oblivion before the movement eventually fades to *niente*.

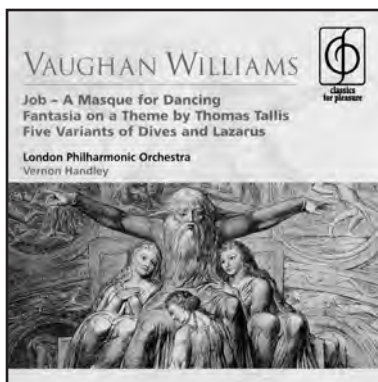
The *Ninth* is reviewed in my article on the symphony in this journal.

By way of a bonus, the CD also includes a charming performance of the ubiquitous *Greensleeves*, a perfect “chill-out” to what has gone before.

At budget price and with over 70 minutes of music this release is a very safe bet, though in my opinion neither of the symphonies would be a first recommendation.

Robin Barber

***Job, Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis, Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus.* London Philharmonic Orchestra, Vernon Handley
Classics for Pleasure 75314 (budget price)**



This is a superb performance of *Job*. The contrasting elements of RVW's style are brilliantly realised. The LPO – especially the woodwind – are on excellent form. My only reservation is David Nolan's performance of the gorgeous 'Elihu's Dance of Youth and Beauty'. This seems rather detached, failing to take wing. Having just heard Michael Davis's melting account at the Proms, with the BBC

Symphony Orchestra, under Andrew Davis, the prosaic quality of this recording is even more noticeable. A pity, as otherwise this is a highly recommended version.

Of the couplings, *Tallis* fares better than *Dives* and *Lazarus*, which fails to replace memories of David Willcocks's sumptuous version on EMI.

Stephen Connock

The Lake in the Mountains, Six Studies in English Folksong, Phantasy Quintet, Violin Sonata & String Quartet No. 2, Hyperion CDA67313 (full price)

A valuable and enterprising collection of VW chamber works, by the Nash Ensemble containing three of his best with one of his most intimate plus one of his few solo piano works.

Few will be disappointed by the standard of performance here, which with just a couple of exceptions is generally very good indeed.

To take the best first, the masterly *Second Quartet*, to my mind VW's finest chamber work. Here the Hyperion disc has stiff opposition from

the Award winning Maggini Quartet's performance on Naxos. The performance on Hyperion by the violinists Marianne Thorsen and Elizabeth Wexler, the viola Lawrence Power and cellist Paul Watkins, is just as good and in a beautifully paced and very moving 2nd movement, even finer. The same can be said of the last movement which the performers pull off most movingly. I would have welcomed more of the anxious, nervous energy that the Music Group of London brings to the 1st movement and the unmuted viola in the 3rd movement is at times too forwardly balanced.

In the *Phantasy Quintet* the above players are joined by viola player Louise Williams and again the disc has stiff competition from the Maggini with Garfield Jackson and the Music Group of London. Generally the Nash Ensemble's performance is, especially in the faster sections crisp and very good indeed, the exception being the *Lento-Alla Sarabanda* section which is played in a slightly cool manner and cannot match the exquisite playing of the Maggini. Overall too for many the Nash's performance will not quite displace the special performance of Music Group of London.

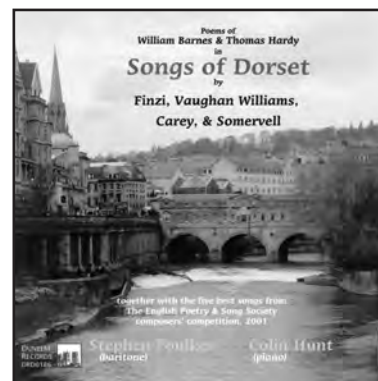
There is a slight problem with the recording quality in the works with piano, with an occasional lack of focus in the mid-range resulting in an overall sound not as crisp and clear as I would have expected from the Hyperion engineers. The *Violin Sonata* of 1954 (not 1952 as stated on the booklet) is one of VW's most fascinating and underrated works and is a particularly difficult one to bring off. The performance here is by Marianne Thorsen and Ian Brown. The *Theme & Variations* last movement is particularly successful here. The 1st movement though is a particularly hard nut to crack and the performers here do pretty well but I still feel that they haven't quite grasped the overall shape of this elusive movement. In the central *Scherzo*, the performers take RVW's *ma non troppo* too much to heart and the performance lacks the energy and bite of the performance of Lydia Mordkovich and Julian Milford on IMP Music Masters although the Hyperion's performance of the outer movements is much better than that on IMP and certainly more so than in the pioneering recording by the Menuhins.

It is good to have the lovely *Six Studies in English Folksongs* in its original form for 'Cello and Piano. The 'cello adds a wonderful poignancy even if the balance with the piano comes over better in the violin and clarinet versions. No complaints about the performance of *Lake in the Mountains* by Ian Brown which atmospherically opens the disc.

Overall a valuable contribution to the VW discography but one probably to add to rather than displace other performances in a collection.

Malcolm Robertson

***Songs of Dorset* Song settings of poems by Barnes and by Hardy, by nine composers including Vaughan Williams. Stephen Foulkes, baritone, and Colin Hunt, piano. Dunelm Records DRD 0186. (47 minutes 43 seconds).**



This review is a voyage of discovery. This CD of song settings of poems of William Barnes and Thomas Hardy is entitled *Songs of Dorset*. It includes the works of 9 composers including Vaughan Williams, Holst and Finzi. Some of the works are new to me, indeed some of the composers are also new to me. Hence a comparative review is not possible. The CD is produced by Dunelm

Records of Glossop which is a record label of which I have had no previous experience.

The CD is excellently packaged with a booklet having a full colour cover showing a winter view along the river in Bath. The texts of all the songs

are given in the comprehensive booklet. There are details of several of the composers but there is no information on the composers of the songs which were “best songs” in the 2001 English Poetry and Song Society Composers competition. The CD itself has an applied picture of the same river scene in Bath on the non playing-surface.

The song performances were recorded at a live concert in Bath, hence the choice of booklet cover. The performance was given by Stephen Foulkes (baritone) accompanied by Colin Hunt on the piano. There are of course, inevitably, some (very few) audience noises as this is a recording of a live performance. The CD is recorded at an unusually high level. The piano is reproduced well throughout but the baritone soloist's voice is reproduced rather roughly on some of the louder passages.

The CD begins with two songs by Holst, *Sergeant's Song* and *Between us now*. This is followed by *The Spring* by Carey in which the words talk of happiness but the melody conveys melancholy. *The Mother's Dream* by Somervell follows and is truly full of melancholy. The next group is a six song set *I said to Love* by Finzi which is amongst the most varied in style on this CD.

The succeeding group of five songs are much more recent settings submitted by Lord, Edgar, Bailey and Daubney to the English Poetry and Song Society composers competition in 2001 and again are varied in style because we are presented with the music of 4 different composers.

The CD ends with four settings of Hardy poems by Vaughan Williams, *In the Spring*, *Blackwore Maidens* (by the Stour), *The Winter's Willow* and *Linden Lea*.

For me the most musically engaging of the songs are those by the better known composers Vaughan Williams, Finzi and Holst.

Ed Bullimore

Westminster The Legacy - Holst: The Planets, Vaughan Williams: Greensleeves and Tallis Fantasia, conducted by Adrian Boult DG471 240-2 (71.11) (mid price)

This recording has had its detractors. It ended up as many readers will recall, on the sort of label you could buy in a small supermarket or a holiday camp shop. Now it emerges at mid-price in a neat blue case with a useful note by Michael Gray. *The old Music on Record* by Peter Gammond (1962) gave it a guarded welcome ‘due to a less than first class effort from the engineers’. Well the sound is reasonable, the playing not always. For RVW lovers this is less of a problem. The brass were not on form for Sir Adrian for there are several errors during *The Planets*, unfortunately when the players are most exposed.

However for the RVW sessions the wind department was banished to the Prater Park and we get two interesting performances. The *Tallis Fantasia* is taken slowly (16.24). The unnamed quartet are very forward in the balance and, at the start, the tremolando strings approach Mantovanian proportions. Nonetheless there is an attractively warm ambience to the performance enabling details often covered in the smooth sheen of the orchestral choir to stand further forward. Crescendos are muted whilst the melodic line is followed lugubriously but so that there is a sense of, slowly, unfolding legato.

Greensleeves is a rougher document. Bernstein in the recent Sony reissue lies down in the glade and waits for Olivia de Havilland. Boult sounds a little like the Municipal Park in October. It is enjoyable enough but one wishes it were the Welsh Marches.

English Music for Brass (Ireland: Downland Suite, The Holy Boy, Comedy Overture, Vaughan Williams: Prelude on Three Welsh Hymn Tunes, Elgar: Severn Suite) The London Brass Virtuosi, David Honeyball Helios CDH 55070 (58.32) (mid price)

This reissue of a 1987 recording is not to be missed at bargain price. Brass Band enthusiasts will find an extra polish and edge to the ensemble when compared to the authentic article - these being orchestral players. This works particularly well in the RVW work which can sound a little rumbling and to use that favourite of the Penguin Guide, rather tubby. In

this splendid recording it takes on a bold, elegiac tone enhanced by fine solo playing.

Whilst enjoying the CD enormously I did miss the curiously rounded sound of Grimethorpe in the *Severn Suite*. The *Downland Suite* has always sounded richer in this, the original version. I found the London Virtuosi a shade too precise but this is probably a Yorkshireman's quibbles.

Mark Asquith

RVW Hymns

Society members may be interested to hear of a couple of recently published CDs, both with RVW associations.

For all the Saints is an American CD of organ music played by John Weaver on the organ of the University Presbyterian Church, Seattle. As well as works by Bach, Brahms, and Cesar Franck, it contains two of Weaver's own compositions.

His *Partita on Kingsfold* is a fairly conventional eight-minute piece, dating from 1997, based on the Vaughan Williams's hymn tune of that name. This, of course, is none other than Vaughan Williams's favourite folk tune ‘Dives and Lazarus’.

The *Variations on Sine Nomine* of 1994 is actually part of a three movement work. Only the one movement is heard here. This is something far removed from the ‘Kingsfold’ piece, and I wonder what RVW would have made of this jazzy treatment of his famous hymn-tune. In it, ‘Sine Nomine’ is given the contrapuntal treatment with the jazz standard ‘When the Saints go marching in’, and Barnby's tune ‘Sarum’ (the original tune for ‘For all the Saints’ - presumably excised by RVW when he did his hatchet job on the English Hymnal). The piece lasts about 4 minutes, is great fun, and a real show-stopper.

Incidentally, if there are any Coronation Street addicts in the RVWS (I know of at least two, including me!), John Weaver is the spitting image of Fred Elliott, the Street's butcher.

The CD's number is Zarex Pro Organo CD 7124, and is marketed over here by Priory Records (£13 inc p&p)

The other record is **The St Mary's Primrose Hill Tradition, Vol 1** and comprises a performance of hymns and ecclesiastical music by the choir of that church.

This is the church where the Rev Percy Dearmer was vicar when he approached Vaughan Williams in 1904 to revise the *English Hymnal*. The hymn-tune writing brothers Geoffrey and Martin Shaw were also both associated with the church, and with assisting Percy Dearmer and Vaughan Williams with the revision of the hymnal. RVW, Dearmer, and Martin Shaw went on to produce the *Oxford Book of Carols* (1928). Some of these carols were given a ‘run through’ before publication by the choir at St Mary's, and I believe the same was true of the new hymns earlier. The recollections of Norman Smith, a former choirboy, of the run through of the carols, appeared in the RVWSJ No 14, of February 1999.

The CD includes hymns by the Shaws, and RVW is represented by *Monk's Gate* and *Sine Nomine*. There is also a beautiful rendition of Holst's Psalm 86 setting, as well as other music in the Anglo-Catholic tradition, all very well performed. I particularly recommend the lady soloist, being prepared in this case to forget my preference for boys' voices in music of this type!

The aforementioned Norman Smith assures me that the rendition of *Sine Nomine* here is the one that appeared in RVW's original manuscript, and which differs slightly from the version usually sung, in the length of notes at the end of the last verse.

The CD number is SMVPH 5, and can be obtained from ‘Blueprint Appeal-CD offer’, St Mary's Church, Elsworth Road, London NW3 3DJ. Price £12 each PLUS £1.50 p&p for up to three CDs.

More information about this church, and its associations with RVW can be found on www.smvph.org.uk

Michael Gainsford

CONCERT REVIEWS

A Fabulous Fifth

On the 18th, 19th and 20th of April 2002 The Philadelphia Orchestra, under the direction of Guest Conductor Sir Andrew Davis, performed Vaughan Williams's *Symphony No. 5 in D major*. This was The Fabulous Philadelphians' first performance of the 5th. It was a long time coming, so anticipating the famous Philadelphia strings lush sound soaring on some of RVW's most glorious melodies was much in mind.

Sir Andrew and the orchestra delivered a wonderful, moving and unforgettable performance, bringing to the surface all of the glowing qualities of the *Fifth Symphony*. From its quiet, serene and pastoral moments to the grandeur of its long sweeping lines leading on to the most powerful and poignant moments and back again, all was well in hand, controlled and with a great feeling for the music. In the end, as it should, we were all transported, serenely ascending and drifting off until the final moment... The audience then responded enthusiastically with a warm and sustained ovation.

We very much look forward to Sir Andrew's return to Philadelphia for a programme including Elgar's *In The South* and Vaughan Williams's *Concerto for Oboe and Strings* on the 3rd, 4th and 7th of January 2003.

Frank James Staneck

Riders to the Sea

Four performances of a triple bill consisting of *Riders to the Sea*, flanked by Stravinsky's *Mavra* (in Russian) and Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* (in Italian), were given by students of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in the New Athenaeum Theatre, Glasgow, on 30 January and 1 February and in the Edinburgh Festival Theatre on 7 and 9 February. This reviewer was present at the performances on 9 February and can report that they were by any standard exceedingly good.

As readers of this journal will know, *Riders to the Sea* is an almost word for word setting by Vaughan Williams of J.M. Synge's gem of a play dealing with the harsh life of fishers in the islands off the west coast of Ireland. The opera is a masterpiece and this performance very nearly reached perfection. The production followed the directions in the score almost to the letter with no extraneous stage business or grotesquerie. The costumes and set were simple and naturalistic, the cottage kitchen being towards the back of the stage so that when the mourning women entered and Bartley's body was brought in, the front of the stage was used to the full. The orchestral playing was outstanding, as was the singing (though with one important reservation to be mentioned). Given the excellence of the acting, the entire performance was thoroughly professional and unbearably moving.

Maurya was sung by Lucy Taylor, Cathleen by Lesley Craigie, Nora by Elizabeth Atherton, Bartley by John Mackenzie, and the unnamed woman by Elizabeth Key. The splendid orchestra was conducted by Timothy Dean and the director was William Relton.

It has to be said, unfortunately, that the singers did not project their words at all distinctly, an honourable exception being John Mackenzie (a masterly Gianni Schicchi later in the evening), thus the full impact of narratives such as Maurya's spine-chilling 'I seen the fearfulest thing' was lost. Surtitles, such as were used in the Stravinsky and the Puccini, would have been a great advantage. It says much for the beauty of the singers' voices and their superb acting (as well as for the helpful synopsis printed in the programme) that the performance was as heartbreakingly successful as it was.

Synge does not mention the sound of the sea in the stage directions of his play, but Vaughan Williams requires a 'sea machine' among the

percussion instruments; its appearances are meticulously specified in the score, as are its dynamics. It is therefore an integral component of the music, not a stage sound effect. Importantly, this is the sound that should bring the opera to an end. Since it overlaps here with the keening of a women's wordless chorus and a solo soprano, this inevitably invites comparison with the almost identical scoring used years later at the end of the *Sinfonia Antartica*. Vaughan Williams insisted that the wind machine used there was entirely appropriate to the music, hence one could assume that these particular vocal colours (and comparable melodic outlines) coupled with 'white noise' had a specific meaning for the composer, one relevant to both the symphony and the opera. It is a pity that in this performance the sea machine was totally inaudible, if not entirely absent.

Only a dyed-in-the-wool Vaughan Williams aficionado, however, would cavil at the absence of a sea machine and this cannot detract one whit from our admiration of, and gratitude to, this superlative team of singers, players and backstage experts.

J.M.Y. Simpson

Promenade Concert on 25 July 2002 Vaughan Williams Symphony No 4 in F minor Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra/ Paul Daniel

Admirers of VW's *Fourth Symphony* are split between those who like the "take no prisoners" approach of the composer's own famous recording and those who prefer a more measured approach. The performance by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra at the Promenade Concert on 25 July was designed to appeal more to the latter.

The Bournemouth Orchestra is not one of the more full-blooded, and its brass and percussion were kept under control by conductor Paul Daniel, and not allowed to have too much of a party in the noisy sections. The opening *Allegro* was disciplined, rather than raucous, while the second was pushed along at a relatively fast pace. The desolate flute solo which concludes this movement was perhaps the highlight of the whole performance, expressively drawn out. The jazzy aspects of the *Scherzo* were then nicely realised, although Paul Daniel's restraint resulted in this movement being less rasping than it can be. The *Finale* was launched with gusto and the contrasting quiet string section was haunting, with an air of nostalgia reminiscent of parts of the *London Symphony*. The fugato epilogue was played with great intensity, leading to the majestic re-entry of the opening of the symphony and the curt, but dramatic, sign-off. All in all a good performance, which emphasised the connections of this symphony with others in the series. It received an enthusiastic ovation. It was good to note that the concert was televised (albeit only on BBC 4) and there was a decent audience, with the Albert Hall about two thirds full. This was not bad, given the uninspired programming with Beethoven's *Third Piano Concerto* and a dreary opening piece by Hans Werner Henze (*Fandango*).

The Proms have now presented the first four VW symphonies over the past two seasons – can we dare hope they will now do the other five?

Martin Murray

A 'Rare Revival', or Job at the Proms 2002

Having enjoyed a history of performance at the *Proms* since being introduced by Sir Adrian Boult in 1947, it was good to see Vaughan Williams's *Job: A Masque for Dancing* reinstated in this year's programme. In fact, I have had to wait since the last performance back in 1987, when on that occasion I had my cheque returned to me because the performance was a sell-out!

At the cost of sounding tedious, what is the problem with the programming of this wonderful showpiece, (not to mention VW's *Piano Concerto*)? Perhaps Andrew Davis will now champion the work and make it more accessible to the concert audience since he has also made a recent recording.

The performance on 1st August with the BBC Symphony Orchestra was well attended and well received, although the topic of most conversations overheard during the interval was of unfamiliarity with the work. In today's age of information overload, this is a tragedy. Any performance of *Job* is an event; the whole of the Albert Hall should have been covered in posters to celebrate the return!

I was glad to see however that the programme (which included Debussy's deliciously languid *Afternoon of a Faun* and Ravel's masterly *Concerto for the Left Hand*), was chosen as 'Prom of the Week' on the BBC Proms' Website, giving those 'technically advanced' the opportunity to experience the occasion first-hand on-line.

What a thrill to hear those. 'Once upon a time' opening bars of the *Introduction* in a live performance, undermined by VW's hint of menace and sense of foreboding.

A measured *Saraband* followed, with elegiac flutes, soulful and full of pain, in contrast to a tight, vociferous *Dance of Triumph*. (I had this played as a radio request for my Father's 70th Birthday – what a totally bizarre but original idea!)

By contrast, the *Minuet* is so simplistic in its Englishness, it could have come from a Thomas Hardy novel, full of heartache and melancholy.

Job's *Dream* proved the most vivid 'scene' of the performance, swirling around, almost frenetic with its off-beat rhythms signifying a nightmare full of plague, pestilence, famine, battle, murder and death.

After the sarcastic and hypocritical comforters, the work reaches its climax with the malevolent and otherworldly organ; totally obscene in its revelation of Satan enthroned. This was made all the more 'weird' because the organ at the RAH is currently being restored and a Rogers digital organ is being used in its place! (What is to happen during Saint-Saëns's *Third Symphony* later this year?)

Elihu's rapturous violin melody, played by Michael Davies, was on a divine scale, and is perhaps one of the most beautiful English melodies ever scored.

Having paved the way for Job's deliverance, the *Galliard* that follows could have been more triumphant, I feel. But after that chord (a 'fourth' or 'fifth' I believe), you recognise that VW is adding momentum with his changing shapes and lyrical patterns, on a path to inevitable conclusion - opening doors into other sound-worlds where the musical stave seems almost irrelevant (yes, that's what I love about VW's music)...

...And yes, Andrew Davis made the most of that final chord; who could have doubted that it transcended everything we know and soared upward onto another plain of existence?

As Michael Kennedy writes; "So ends one of VW's mightiest achievements."

"A wholly characteristic, profoundly English and unflinchingly modern work", as Frank Howes viewed it.

And as Calum MacDonald writes in his programme notes... 'In *Job*, VW had created one of his greatest and most deeply characteristic works'.

This is life and death, joy and despair viewed from another era, as heaven and hell are juxtaposed in some kind of three-dimensional primeval reality, every bit as original, arresting and imaginative as Stravinsky's '*Rite*'.

It is not necessary to have a religious leaning in order to tap into this unique work, nor does one need an understanding or preference for ballet (it is not), or indeed the *Masque* of the title. As with all timeless works, *Job* speaks for itself; a kaleidoscope of ideas inspired by the dance forms from Elizabethan and Jacobean Masque together with a mixture of folk song and folk dance, to the extent that VW suggested Morris-dance figures as models for the choreography.

Let's hope it is not too long before the next live concert, or indeed staged performance. We are fortunate that there is now a growing catalogue of recent recordings and I commend these to you in the meantime.

Karen-Lisa Fletcher
West London



Letters

*We are always pleased to
receive contributions for this page*

A Modest Proposal

It's time for RVW to break into videotape... As far as I can tell (from California) none of his music is available on film. Imagine lavish new productions of *Job*, *Old King Cole*, and *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*, together about 90 minutes long, on sale throughout the civilized world.

Aside from the personal pleasure one would derive from running out and buying such a VHS or DVD, consider what a formidable tool for the dissemination of RVW's music this would be!

Forgive me a few generalisations on local popular culture: the more the visual content of the music video approaches high art, the more derivative and instantly forgettable the music itself seems to become... barely a hook for the dancers. I suspect more people watch music videos for the visual experience these days than as musical occasions.

What I am proposing would provide them with both. A successful staging of these three works on videotape would have crossover appeal, and reward its producers in an enduring way. American audiences would assume that the composer was their contemporary, and had written these works with them in mind.

*George Ihlefeldt
Carmel, CA USA*

(One of our members – Denis McArdle – has sent us a video of 'Let beauty awake' from the *Songs of Travel*. Denis writes:

"I am an Irish baritone singer, and for many years I also worked as a film producer/director in Dublin. I thought it would be exciting to make a professional music video of a classical song. At the time I was rehearsing the *Songs of Travel* cycle and "Let Beauty Awake" struck me as something that I could visualise using dance throughout. I performed the song in this 16mm music video for my own personal gratification, as much to see if it would succeed in its own right. As far as I know, it is the only professional music video of a song by RVW." - ed.)

The Mayor of Casterbridge

I am greatly interested to read John Beech's letter, with footnote from Michael Kennedy, about RVW's music for the BBC's radio dramatisation of Thomas Hardy's novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. I heard this excellent work when it was broadcast, some three or four years ago perhaps, in a Radio 3 archives-type programme. Presumably it still exists, though it appears not to have been published. Can any of your readers recall this recent broadcast more precisely; and can the officers of the Society please press the BBC to locate and share this hidden treasure?

Frank McManus

Three Choirs Festival

In answer to Stephen Friar's letter in the current RVW Journal, I attended the performance of *A Sea Symphony* in Gloucester Cathedral as part of the Three Choirs Festival last year. Unfortunately the acoustic could not cope with the combined forces of choir and orchestra which was slightly disappointing.

However, Catherine Wynn Rogers gave a wonderfully lyrical performance of Elgar's *Sea Pictures*, creating that 'unique' English sound that hangs in the air. I think it would be good to have at least a short overview of these performances. It's always special hearing English music in this setting.

What continues to concern me about the Three Choirs Festival is that 95% of the audience must be well over 60. The majority of RVW Society

members are also older (most of the members at the inaugural AGM thought I was at the wrong meeting!), which is strange as VW's music can be so expansive, aggressive and innovative, weaving threads across time. I often wonder whether I am hearing the same things?! It would be interesting to do a survey to understand how much of the repertoire is enjoyed by all members.

Karen-Lisa Fletcher

Bernard Shore

After reading Michael Kennedy's excellent article in the June edition of the Journal and the paragraph concerning RVW as a conductor himself, I thought members might like to be made aware or reminded of Bernard Shore's tribute to the composer, including his conducting, in the book *The Orchestra Speaks*. (Bernard Shore was the Principal Viola in the BBC Symphony Orchestra from 1930 to 1940 and had 'front line' experience of Vaughan Williams's baton.)

As the book is out of print and the copyright has reverted to the Author's estate, I quote from the chapter on *Modern Music* and here acknowledge the source.

In 1938, Bernard Shore wrote; "The head of all our English music – Vaughan Williams – is a delight to any English orchestra. Something has already been said of a certain humility often seen in a truly great man. Not only is everyone conscious of this in our beloved Vaughan Williams, but he – in this unique in the entire realm of composers – cannot ever take himself at his full worth. The typical composer is naturally inclined to regard his own contribution as the most important work on the programme, and nothing is so rare as to find one who is detached and self-critical at rehearsal. Most are touchy if people are not taking an absorbed interest in them. But Vaughan Williams has been known to mutter of his own work, as he came off the rostrum: Well, if that's modern music – I don't like it!"

Here is another example. A query arose about a certain note and a player asked him if B flat was correct. Vaughan Williams searched the score, blinked at it, and with a rueful smile remarked: "Well, it looks wrong, and it sounds wrong – but it's right!"

As a conductor he is not a great technician, but few composers get such satisfactory performances of their own music. Young composers please note: Vaughan Williams is a fine example of how a conductor should approach an orchestra. Calm and collected, he wastes no time but gets on good terms with the orchestra in about three words. Granted, this is easy for him because of the profound admiration the orchestra has for him both as man and musician. But that is the whole point. He has been years building up his great fame. Being where he is he can convey to the orchestra the sincere conviction he has that he has nothing in the least to be proud of, but that on the other hand, he is exceedingly proud of conducting us. He has the two most precious possessions of any conductor – great and sincere humility and a complete understanding of the minds of the players. His stick is clear enough for his needs, and though he may not give the impression of effortless ease in his movements and gestures, he stands fairly on his two adequate boots, and there is a grand solidarity and structure about any performance he is directing. He can get anything he likes from an orchestra. Delicacy and swiftness are given him for the asking; the orchestra needs no subtle gestures from him. We understand everything he wants, and give it to him, full measure. What an orchestra asks for is a man it can admire, and Vaughan Williams stands for everything English we love."

Bernard Shore also wrote a book entitled *Sixteen Symphonies* (1949), in which he gives a study of some of the greatest symphonic masterpieces and their composers. The works range from Haydn to Walton and include with music examples, *A London Symphony*.

Both books were published by Longmans Green and can sometimes be found in second-hand bookshops. If one can get hold of them, both books are a joy to read from cover to cover.

David Banks-Broome

RVW's *A Pastoral Symphony*

Doubtless every single member of the RVW Society is wearily familiar with the seemingly disparaging comment by Philip Heseltine (aka Peter Warlock) about 'a cow looking over a gate' in relation to Vaughan Williams's *A Pastoral Symphony* (June 2002 RVW Journal, page 6). But how many are aware of the context in which that alleged remark was made? The quotation comes, in fact, from Cecil Gray's '*Peter Warlock: A Memoir of Philip Heseltine*' published in 1934. In full, the relevant passage runs as follows:

.....after a performance of 'V.W.'s Pastoral Symphony he [Heseltine] exclaimed, 'A truly splendid work!' and then, with a smile, 'You know I've only one thing to say against this composer's music: it is all just a little too much like a cow looking over a gate. None the less he is a very great composer and the more I hear the more I admire him'.

Charles Long

Tono Bungay

Michael Kennedy has told how Vaughan Williams, in writing the Epilogue of The London Symphony, had in mind a passage from the last chapter of H.G. Wells's novel *Tono Bungay*, where the narrator, George Ponderevo, travels out of the Thames in his new ship into the open sea and seems to be passing all England in review.

It is interesting that at the end of Chapter 1 of Book III of the same book the narrator and his newly-rich uncle 'looked out of the windows upon a procession of the London unemployed'. The sight moves George to thoughts of 'There, but for the grace of God, go [we]' but his uncle 'made that vision the test of a spirited but inconclusive harangue upon Tariff Reform'. It may not be too fanciful to think that Vaughan Williams had this particular passage and contrast in mind when composing the first part of the fourth movement of the symphony and that, as he wrote of the second movement of the Ninth Symphony, the programme 'got lost on the journey'.

J M Y Simpson

An RVW Discovery

After a gap of 10 years, The Box Hill Festival was revived in April 2001 at the beautifully refurbished Cleveland Lodge at Westhumble near Dorking, now the delightful home of the Royal School of Church Music. One of the events was a presentation by the RSCM Honorary Librarian, Dr. John Henderson, which chronicled the background of the school and its library. Among the treasures of the collection, Dr. Henderson revealed a bound volume of music manuscripts containing works by various composers. Of particular interest to me were some sketches by Elgar for *Pomp and Circumstance* March No.6 and an autograph manuscript of the hymn *My Soul Praise the Lord*, in the hand of Vaughan Williams, for choir (satb) with descant voices and organ accompaniment.

The manuscript, in one of RVW's neater hands, contains 39 bars plus an extra 3 bars for an alternative ending on the third page, with page 4 containing the text for the verses and descant.

Michael Kennedy includes this hymn on pp.152/3 in the latest edition of his catalogue (*A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*. Second ed. OUP. 1996. ISBN 0 19 816584 6) where it is listed as a "Hymn arranged for chorus (satb) and unison singing with descant and organ (or strings and organ)." The original publisher is given as SPCK (Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge) copyright RVW 1935, with a later publication and copyright date by Oxford University Press, 1947.

The MS. cited is a draft (without descant) located in the British Library* (50455), so this discovery looks as if it is the final draft and is perhaps the draft on which the original 1935 publication was based.

This discovery is in no way an earth-shattering event, it just seems to fill in one missing detail in the publication history of a fairly minor RVW composition. However, it is also the work of a major composer and the discovery may be of service to a researcher or student in the future.

*Not seen by the writer before this publication.

Graham Muncy, Dorking.

Private Eye

The following appeared in Private Eye.

How much truth is in this?!

Robert Rush

Music & Musicians

Last week's Classical Brit Awards were the tacky shambles everyone has come to expect as honoured "guests" paid £250 a head to watch not terribly distinguished instrumentalists mime their own records.

A fine new feature this year was to have well known authorities on classical music like, er, Mohamed Fayed, introduce the turns. The Albert Hall erupted into guffaws when Fayed told the audience that Russell Watson was, in his fuggin' opinion, a superior voice to Pavarotti.

But the evening sank to an all-time low with disgraceful humiliating treatment meted out to Ursula Vaughan Williams, widow of the great composer Ralph. Mrs Vaughan Williams is now in her 90s and frail, but she remains an icon of the music world and the administration of the Brit Awards had invited her to come on to the platform to receive the prize for the Best Orchestral Disc, which went to a Chandos recording of her husband's 2nd Symphony.

The disc's conductor, Richard Hickox, was abroad, so Ursula would be accepting it on his behalf; and when the moment came she duly shuffled (with great effort) up onto the stage - only to find herself marooned in front of several thousand people, unacknowledged and ignored, while the awards anchorwomen (who clearly had no idea who Mrs VW was, and probably wasn't too sure about Mr VW either) pressed onto the next item.

It was horribly embarrassing and was aggravated when the stage staff tried to push poor Ursula out of the public eye and down the backstage steps: a manoeuvre her 92-year-old legs could not and would not accomplish.

For the sake of the TV coverage the incident was patched over. But for those who were there and saw it, it was yet another indictment on the Brit Awards charge sheet.

Editor's reply to Robert Rush

Thank you for your letter of 7 June enclosing the article from Private Eye about the Brit Awards. I was grateful to you for sending this to me as I had not seen it. All the details in the article are correct. I know this because it was I who accompanied Ursula up all those steps on to the stage, only to have to turn round and come all the way back again. This was deeply embarrassing for both of us. Ursula was more forgiving than I afterwards, as she was presented with a bunch of flowers by the organisers. The Brit Awards people were suitably apologetic but it was a deeply humiliating experience.

Stephen Connock

A Special Flame: The Music of Elgar and Vaughan Williams

The Elgar Society and the RVW Society are proud to announce a joint two-day International Symposium, at the British Library in London, on 29 March and 30 March 2003. Titled *A Special Flame: The Music of Elgar and Vaughan Williams*, the Symposium will consist of lectures, discussion and recitals, as well as an evening concert of chamber music by Elgar and Vaughan Williams. With well-known speakers from the UK and America, this Symposium will examine Elgar's and Vaughan Williams's music and the social background which shaped their remarkable creativity. It promises to be a memorable weekend of study, discussion and exploration.

The programme is as follows:

Saturday 29th March 2003

- 10.00 Registration and coffee
- 10.25 Welcome by Stephen Connock,
Chairman for Day 1.
- 10.30 Key note address : *Elgar and Vaughan Williams: A 21st Century Celebration* by Michael Kennedy
- 11.15 *'It looks all wrong, but sounds all right': The Social Background to the Life and Music of Elgar and Vaughan Williams* by Andrew Neill
- 12.00 *Dreamers of Dreams: Elgar's and Vaughan Williams's songs* by Clare-Louise Lucas (mezzo-soprano) and Jonathan Darnborough (piano)
- 13.00 Lunch
- 13.45 *Elgar and Vaughan Williams: Their Musical Legacy* by David Owen Norris
- 14.30 *What have we learnt from Elgar?: Vaughan Williams and the ambivalence of inheritance* by Byron Adams
- 15.15 Tea
- 15.30 *Stanford, Elgar and Vaughan Williams* by Michael Pope
- 16.15 *"My Dear Elgar": The Letters of Elgar and Vaughan Williams* by Hugh Cobbe
- 17.00 End of Day One
- 17.30 Refreshments, including wine, served in the Foyer of the British Library
- 18.30 Evening concert in the Auditorium of the British Library.
- Vaughan Williams: *Phantasy Quintet*
Elgar : *String Quartet in E Minor*
Interval (10 minutes)
Vaughan Williams: *On Wenlock Edge*
Elgar: *Piano Quintet*
- Soloists from the Royal College of Music (to be agreed)
Tenor (to be determined)

Sunday 30th March 2003

- 09.30 Coffee
- 09.55 Welcome by Andrew Neill, Chairman for Day 2
- 10.00 *From The Apostles to Pretty Bess: Oratorios and Portraits in the Music of Elgar and Vaughan Williams* by Professor Charles McGuire
- 10.45 *Battle songs and elegies: Elgar, Vaughan Williams and British music 1914-1918* by Lewis Foreman
- 11.30 Coffee
- 11.45 *There was a time: An exploration of Vaughan Williams's opera 'The Poisoned Kiss'* by Stephen Connock
- 12.30 Light lunch in the company of Ursula Vaughan Williams and Evelyn Barbirolli (to be confirmed)
- 13.30 *Immemorial Ind! Elgar's Crown of India* by Professor Robert Anderson
- 14.15 Panel discussion
- 15.15 Chairman's concluding remarks
- 15.30 Symposium ends

The fee for the Symposium will be £70.00, which includes all sessions, teas, coffee, pre-concert wine and buffet and a ticket to the concert itself. Lunch on both days is available at an additional cost in the British Library. Attendance on Saturday only will be £40.00 and Sunday only £35.00. Please note delegates are responsible for arranging their accommodation for the Saturday night.

A booking form is included in the Journal.

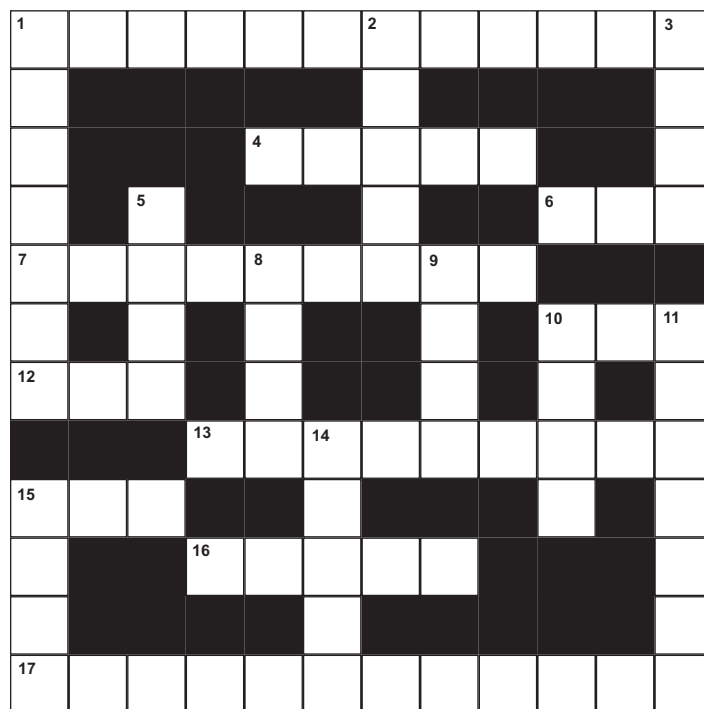
Across

1. Tempo marking of scherzo of Symphony No 4 (7,5)
4. German folk song arranged by RVW in 1903 (5)
6. Plenty of this in *Scott of the Antarctic!* (3)
7. England, Arise! (9)
10. Appendage at the side of the head (3)
12. RVW wrote an overture to this (juvenile) opera (3)
13. Palestinian city that figures in *Winter, of Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* of 1949 (9)
15. First note of sol-fa scale (3)
16. If I were one in 1903 (5)
17. RVW's school (12)

Down

1. RVW wrote music for its pageant (7)
2. Greek prefix indicating 'few' (5)
3. RVW wrote a concerto for this in 1944 (4)
5. Again in 1944, RVW wrote an article on this type of music (4)
8. Over hill and this in Shakespearean song of 1951 (4)
9. An Irish one appears in *The Running Set* (4)
10. Has a lament in unpublished madrigal of 1897 (4)
11. RVW wrote one for harmonica in 1951 (7)
14. Often followed by variations (5)
15. Compact or vinyl, many of mine singularly contain RVW works! (4)

RVW Crossword No.11 by Michael Gainsford



Answers on Page 17

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